



Investigate English Listening for Understanding Problems of First Year Students Aviation Personnel Development Institute

Suwimon Maliwan

Department of Airline Business, APDI. , Kasem Bundit University, Bangkok, Thailand
Corresponding author, E-mail: suwimon.mal@kbu.ac.th

Abstract

Listening for understanding is an important skill for students to learn and communicate effectively in English. Studies show that listening for understanding is still a big problem for Thai students. The purpose of this study is studying English listening problems that are a problem for first year students in the Aviation Personnel Development Institute, Kasem Bundit University. Data collection using the virtual test of Tactics test 1 for TOEIC® Listening and Reading Test by OXFORD University (Part Listening) was utilized with 120 students from Airline Business major. Data were analyzed using computer [spss] program.

The analysis results show that students have listening problems in finding specific details, the main idea, summarizing importance, inference or comment and predictions from the texts, respectively.

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that in order for students to listen effectively, students must keep practicing listening frequently by using what is around in everyday situations. At the same time, teachers should find a variety of media for students to have the opportunity to listen to frequently until they are familiar and finally can practice in real-life situations.

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified by how the listener processes the input.

Keywords: *Investigation of listening problems, Listening for understanding, The proficiency to listen to English*

1. Introduction

English is an international language that is used as a tool to communicate with foreigners. It's essential in a career. In addition, in this era of information age and technology that requires English language skills as Yudha Rakthai (1999) said "The role and importance of English is a driving force for learners must learn English as a foreign language to communicate, exchange information on knowledge, ideas and technologies with foreigners." In accordance with the fact that Thailand entered the ASEAN community therefore having English language preparation is necessary for students at all levels throughout the course (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2008) as well as in higher education. The goal of English proficiency of Thai undergraduates is set at the same level as those in ASEAN member countries (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2011). In order to comply with the ASEAN Charter, article 34, "The working language of ASEAN shall be English" was recognized.

At present, it is evident that more people are talking about the TOEIC exam. That is because both public and private aviation agencies need to select individuals to work in the agency. They want a person with good English language proficiency. In particular, Thailand is now entering the AEC. No matter which field in the agency, it is necessary to communicate well in English. Therefore, the Aviation Personnel Development Institute, English Department Thai language course have to focus on the TOEIC level test to prepare for job applicants when students graduate and have to search for teaching and learning courses to support and insert relevant content in the TOEIC test into basic English courses for airline businesses (ES 101 and ES 102) for first year students to meet the main objective for students to score TOEIC 550 or higher. Based on the observations of the researcher, it was found that the results of the TOEIC exam passed in the first semester of 2018, as most students had an average score of 200-400 points. Divided into Part Listening, the average score is 85 - 150 points and Part Reading average score is 150 - 200 points. Therefore, this case study aims to investigate listening problems for the students' understanding. In the first



order we must investigate the root cause of the main problem and help solve the problem appropriately and correctly which will be useful for students to learn in the future.

2. Objectives

1. To investigate the problems of listening to English for understanding of first year students, Aviation Personnel Development Institute using virtual tests of Tactics 1 for TOEIC® Listening and Reading Test by OXFORD University (Part: Listening)
2. To analyze listening for understanding problems
3. To propose to be guidelines for problem solving by designing courses and content suitable for Thai students.

2.1 Research Questions

1. What is the proficiency to listen to English for the overall understanding of students?
2. What are the main problems students have in listening for understanding?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Scope of study

These 120 research participants are first-year student of Aviation Personnel Development Institute, Kasem Bundit University, and academic year 1/2018, enrolled in ES 102 courses Fundamental English for Airline Business 2, who the researcher was assigned to teach.

A tool used in this research is a virtual test of Tactics 1 for TOEIC® Listening and Reading Test by OXFORD University (Part Listening) 60 items. By listening to short conversations and questions, and answering the questions was divided into:

- Part 3, Article 41-70 Conversations, there will be problems and answers as well. Students choose the answer from the conversation that has been heard (30 questions).
- Part 4, Article 71-100 Short Talks will have a short speech to listen to. There are problems and answers, and students choose the answer. One of the chapters is used in 3 questions (30 questions) for a total 60 points. The duration of the listening test is 30 minutes.

Each section can be classified into 5 skills as follows

- listening for the main idea (article 44/48/53/59/62/69/72/75/77/81/85/95/98)
- listening for specific details (article 41/42/46/47/50/54/67/70/76/79/84/88/90/97/99/100)
- inferences or comments (article 45/52/57/64/73/74/89/96)
- predictions (article 49/51/55/60/61/65/68/71/82/87/93/94)
- summary (Article 43/56/58/63/66/78/80/83/86/91/92)

(National Capital Language Resource Center, 2004)

3.2 Research Methodology

This study was designed as a survey research to conduct the study of listening problems for understanding of first-year students of Aviation Personnel Development Institute, Kasem Bundit University, and Academic Year 2/2018. Tools used for data collection are virtual tests of Tactics test 1 for TOEIC® Listening and Reading Test by OXFORD University (Part: listening) 60 items. This will collect points for analysis via computer program using descriptive statistics.

The researcher collected data by using virtual tests of Tactics test 1 for TOEIC® Listening and Reading Test by OXFORD University (Part: listening) to collect data from 120 samples. At the beginning, the researchers clarified the objectives, benefits and methods of doing tests. Students took a 30-minute test. The researcher let the sample group listen to the audio recording once. After listening to each question and letting the sample choose only one answer that is considered the best from the given options. Once the data was collected completely, the answers were checked and analyzed according to statistical methods



4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Description of the test

Tactics for the TOEIC Listening and Reading Test Student Book is authorized by Educational Testing Service (ETS), and contains official TOEIC test items. This book will help students develop the necessary skills to do well on the test. It focuses on building the range and understanding of language to use and on developing awareness of key testing strategies needed to get a high score.

Features

- A variety of practical test tips, language building activities, and tactics are reinforced with immediate practice to help students succeed on the test.
- A mini-test in each unit to review and reinforce test tactics and vocabulary and helps develop time management skills.
- A comprehensive word list with vocabulary review quizzes organized by unit to assist lesson preparation and for easy review.
- Communicative activities help to reinforce vocabulary and understanding of language use.

4.2 Test description

This test is designed to meet the following objectives:

- listening for the main ideas (article 44/48/53/59/62/69/72/75/77/81/85/95/98) aimed to test students about identifying key ideas from conversations and information received
- listening for specific information (article 41/42/46/47/50/54/67/70/76/79/84/88/90/97/99/100) with the purpose to test students about knowing details from conversations and information received
- drawing inferences (article 45/52/57/64/73/74/89/96) aimed to test students about inferring concepts from situations, conversations and related information
- predicting (article 49/51/55/60/61/65/68/71/82/87/93/94) aimed to test students about the predictions from the upcoming conversation situation in the next step
- summarizing (Article 43/56/58/63/66/78/80/83/86/91/92) aimed to test students about summary of conversations and information received

4.3 The overall English listening proficiency

Research Question 1: What is the overall listening proficiency of Thai students in this study?

Table 1 English listening as proficiency whole

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
120	12	33	18.75	3.81780

The table shows the English listening proficiency of students by using descriptive statistics to analyze data. The results are indicated from the total score of 60 points. In testing, the average score from this group of students was 18.75 with a maximum score of 33 points and a minimum score of 12 points and a standard deviation of 3.81780.

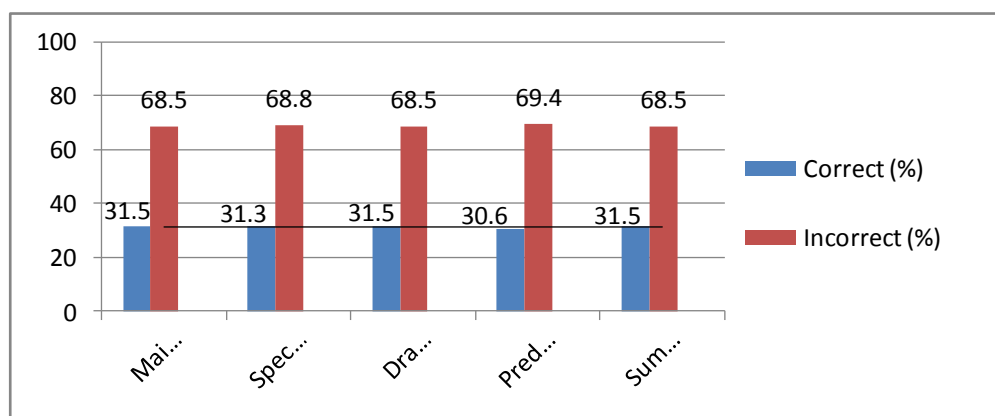
4.4 The problem in listening comprehension

Research question 2: What are the main problems that Thai students fail to listen to?

**Table 2** The main problem in listening comprehension

Part	Items		Correct		Incorrect		Average scores
	No.	Max.	f	%	f	%	
1. Main idea	13	8	37.8	31.5	82.2	68.5	1.86
2. Specific information	16	9	37.5	31.3	82.5	68.8	1.69
3. Drawing inferences	8	5	37.7	31.5	82.3	68.5	1.05
4. Predicting	12	7	36.7	30.6	83.3	69.4*	1.50
5. Summarizing	11	7	37.8	31.5	82.9	68.5	1.75

From Table 2, it was found that the skills that the first-year students of Aviation Personnel Development Institute scored the most were Listening for summary (37.8%, compared to 11 points) and listening to understand the main idea (37.8%, compared to 13 points); followed by Drawing inferences (37.7%, compared to 8 points), Listening for specific details (37.5% compared to 16 points) and predicting (36.7% compared to Full score 12 points).

**Figure 1** Average score of English listening proficiency for students' understanding separated by topic

From Figure 1, it shows that students have problems in all parts of the test. Considering the percentage of incorrect answers the number of incorrect answers is high in all listening skills.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the study

From studying the concepts of language learning theory language scholars confirm that listening skills play an important role in language learning. 'Second language acquisition cannot occur without the learners' contact with comprehensible language' (Rost, 1994) which corresponds with Hunsaker (1990) and concludes that more than 80% of human learning transpires through listening and is considered the most necessary language skills. However, according to Krashen, Terrell, Ehrman, and Herzog (1984) and Hamouda (2013) acquisition happens when learners have sufficient comprehensible input. Rost (1994) stated that listening is significant in language learning because it provides input for learners and it plays an important role in the development of learners' language. English for Thai students is still a problem for a long time, even though the Thai Ministry of Education will develop the curriculum accordingly to help students improve their English skills. But most Thai students do not have sufficient ability to use English skills. Especially listening skills, therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the problems of English listening of first-year students. The sample groups used in this study were 120 students enrolled in ES 102 in the semester 2/2018. To answer research questions using virtual tests of Tactics test 1 for TOEIC® Listening and Reading Test by OXFORD University (Part Listening), all data were collected and analyzed as percentage, average and standard deviation.



5.2 Summary and Discussions of the Findings

The discussions of the main findings of this study were presented to correspond with the research questions asked

5.2.1 Research Question 1: What is the proficiency to listen to English for the overall understanding of students?

According to the findings, the students cannot understand the message that they heard. The result indicated that they had problem in listening for summarizing, listening for main ideas, drawing inferences, listening for specific details and predictions. Reflecting the incomprehensibility of the story being heard in the test which may be due to various reasons such as having problems listening to the accent and the speed of the English being spoken of native speakers which for students who are not familiar with this situation, it is difficult to understand while listening. In addition to the general daily life of students, there are no opportunities to practice listening to English as well. This result is consistent with Yagang (1993) studying about listening problems and solutions and found that a message was one of the sources that made listening difficult for the students because many students found it more difficult to listen to a CD message than to read the same message on a piece of paper.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: What are the main problems students have in listening for understanding?

The results showed that all parts of the English listening test were listening problems; results in Table 1 revealed that the mean and standard deviation can be explained that students often have problems using listening skills. They cannot summarize, understand the importance, comment, find specific details or predict what they are hearing in accordance with Sittler (1975), pointing out that even though EFL has been learned for a long time, students with knowledge of English grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing and speaking still have problems listening to native speakers.

EFL listening skill is regarded as a problematic language skill especially in a foreign language context where real practice chances are narrow (Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian & Nimehchisalem, 2015). Teaching students listening skills may be difficult for teachers and namely difficult for students to learn as well. For instance, even the students who are adequate in speaking and reading might confront problems with listening skills when confronted with a quick conversation (Ghaderpanahi, 2012).

Many students find that the English pronunciation they heard earlier is different from the pronunciation that they are used to say or have heard before making them difficult when listening to English by the native speaker's accent

5.3 Recommendation

The information revealed that students have problems listening to English for understanding. Listening comprehension is an immensely integrative skill and it plays a vital role in the process of language learning, promoting the rise of other language skills. As a result, consciousness and formation of proper listening comprehension strategies can aid learners to benefit from the language input they are receiving as Vandergrift (1999) clearly mentions. It is a fact that listening is highly necessary in language learning in that it supplies the learner with the required input and learners can't acquire anything without the comprehension of the specific input (Hamouda, 2013). In accordance to what Al-Thiyabi (2014) puts forward, some frequent problems of learners as well as reasons for blocking their listening comprehension skills such as hasty speaking, unknown words, and weird pronunciation, adding that such problems are severe and ought to be overcome to enhance learner's listening competency level. Students' prior knowledge of the second or foreign language, motivation and learning strategies, the teachers' teaching methods, classroom environment, classroom facilities all form the most crucial parts of the students' views about the origins of their low listening comprehension performance according to what Bennui (2007) states. According to Tyagi (2013), listening skill contains some essential elements such as:



- Discriminating between sounds
- Recognizing words and understanding their meaning
- Identifying grammatical groupings of words
- Identifying expressions and sets of utterances that act to create meaning
- Connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues
- Using background knowledge to predict and to confirm meaning
- Recalling important words and ideas

The National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC). (n.d.) suggest ways to solve problems that teachers can do to help students. This is a useful concept.

5.4 Listening Strategies

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified by how the listener processes the input. *Top-down strategies* are listener-based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include the following:

- Listening for the main idea
- Predicting
- Drawing inferences
- Summarizing

Bottom-up strategies are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include the following:

- Listening for specific details
- Recognizing cognates
- Recognizing word-order patterns

Strategic listeners also use *met cognitive strategies* to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening. To implement met cognitive strategies, listeners do the following:

- They plan by deciding which listening strategies will serve best in a particular situation.
- They monitor their comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected strategies.
- They evaluate by determining whether they have achieved their listening comprehension goals and whether the combination of listening strategies selected was an effective one.

5.5 Listening for Meaning

To extract meaning from a listening text, students need to follow four basic steps:

1. Figure out the purpose for listening. Activate background knowledge of the topic in order to predict or anticipate content and identify appropriate listening strategies.
2. Attend to the parts of the listening input that are relevant to the identified purpose and ignore the rest. This selectivity enables students to focus on specific items in the input and reduces the amount of information they have to hold in short-term memory in order to recognize it.
3. Select top-down and bottom-up strategies that are appropriate to the listening task and use them flexibly and interactively. Students' comprehension improves and their confidence increases when they use top-down and bottom-up strategies simultaneously to construct meaning.
4. Check comprehension while listening and when the listening task is over. Monitoring comprehension helps students detect inconsistencies and comprehension failures, directing students to use alternate strategies.



5.6 Using Textbook Listening Activities

Integrating Listening Strategies with Textbook Audio and Video

Students can use this outline for both in-class and out-of-class listening/viewing activities. Model and practice the use of the outline at least once in class before you ask students to use it independently.

1. Plan for listening/viewing:
 - Review the vocabulary list, if you have one
 - Review the worksheet, if you have one
 - Review any information you have about the content of the tape/video
2. Preview the tape/video:
 - (tape) Use fast forward to play segments of the tape, or (video) view the video without sound
 - Identify the kind of program (news, documentary, interview, drama)
 - Make a list of predictions about the content
 - Decide how to divide the tape/video into sections for intensive listening/viewing
3. Listen/view intensively section by section. For each section:
 - Jot down key words you understand
 - Answer the worksheet questions pertaining to the section
 - If you don't have a worksheet, write a short summary of the section
4. Monitor your comprehension:
 - Does it fit with the predictions you made?
 - Does your summary for each section make sense in relation to the other sections?
5. Evaluate your listening comprehension progress.

Here are some solutions for NCLRC (2009) that are recommended for teachers. Moreover you can use post-listening activities to check comprehension, evaluate listening skills and use of listening strategies, and extend the knowledge gained to other contexts. A post-listening activity may relate to a pre-listening activity, such as predicting; may expand on the topic or the language of the listening text; or may transfer what has been learned to reading, speaking, or writing activities.

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