Using Spotlight App to Improve Listening Skills for Non-English Majors

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ABSTRACT

Listening to English is very important in daily communication. Listening well helps people fully understand the contents that the speaker wants to express, and from there, listening will help improve other skills. However, Vietnamese students often face problems with their English listening skills. This study aimed to determine whether the Spotlight app should be used to improve the listening ability of first-year non-English majors. The specific objective is to assess the impact of the Spotlight app on students' listening ability and to collect student feedback on their opinions toward the Spotlight app. Questionnaires and tests were used as the main tools for data collection. The study participants included 41 students, of which 20 students were randomly selected into the experimental group (using the Spotlight app), and 21 students were assigned to the control group (not using Spotlight). While all 41 students were required to take pre-test and post-test, only the experimental group students answered questions in relation to their opinions on using Spotlight and suggestions for better using the Spotlight app. The results show that there is a significant improvement in students' performance in listening skills after using this app. In addition, student feedback on the use of the method is generally positive, and suggestions for reducing obstacles to using Spotlight are provided to enhance the widespread and effective use of the application.

Keywords: listening skills, Spotlight app, non-English majors

INTRODUCTION

English has always been one of the top-used languages and the most popular language in the world. The current era of globalization and deep integration in plenty aspects has increased the importance of English - the international language. In the modern society, English plays an essential role as a bridge connecting the community.

When a person begins to learn a language, in addition to skills such as speaking - reading writing, listening is one of the first language skills that one needs to be good at. When students have better listening skill, they will obtain the remaining skills easier when learning English. Poor listening skills can ruin communication. For those reasons, listening is seemed a foundation element of the communication process. However, learning listening skill is not simple. Buck (2001, p.247) states that "Listening is a complex activity that requires listeners to process audio signals and receive data and interpret it based on linguistic and non-verbal knowledge". According to (Hassan, 2000; Liu, 2002) learners have many difficulties in listening skills.

Besides methods to improve listening ability such as deep listening, dictation, repeat, and listening practice software such as Duolingo, Cake, and Tflat, one of the effective software for learning English listening is the Spotlight app. Although Spotlight is relatively simple and easy to use, this application is not widely used by students. A small number of students using Spotlight said they used Spotlight for listening in general, but none of them said that they used this app for specific purposes or applying to specific assignments. Regarding the above origin, the researchers conducted a study entitled "Using Spotlight app to improve listening skills for non-English majors" to enhance the English listening ability of students and apply information technology in teaching and learning English for both teachers and students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening skill

Generally, listening is a vital skill in learning a new language. It is a very receptive skill that we pick up a group of new words from what we have heard. If we are good at listening, we will have good competencies in other skills, speaking and writing. I. S. P. Nation and J. Newton (2009) stated that listening is the natural precursor to speaking. According to Steven Brown (2006), listening is a complex activity, and we can help students comprehend what they hear by activating their prior knowledge. When we listen, we can receive sounds like letters, stress, and rhythm, and we need focus and attention to get information from speakers.

plays a primary role Listening in communication in our daily lives. Mendelsohn (1994) confirms that "of the total time spent on communication, listening accounts for 40 to 50% while speaking is from 25 to 30%, reading is from 11 to 16%, and writing is about 9%" (p.9). Through listening, we can build connections between languages at different levels. Understanding someone's thoughts will also help create friendliness and trust for others. Besides. listening well also helps a lot in speaking performance. Therefore, practicing English listening skills is extremely necessary.

Listening has an important role not only in life but also in the classroom. Anderson and Lynch (2003) state that "we are only aware of what remarkable feats the listening we gain when in an unfamiliar listening environment, such as listening to a language of which we have limited proficiency" (p. 3).

Major problems that learners face with listening comprehension

These are some of the problems that students may find difficulties in the listening comprehension processes, according to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014),

Quality of Recorded Materials. Recorded materials should have a high-quality sound system so that student listening comprehension will be much better.

Cultural Differences. The cultural knowledge of language also has a significant influence on the learners' listening ability. Therefore, teachers should provide cultural materials for an explanation before giving listening activities.

Accent. Goh (1999) expressed that 66% of learners agreed that a speaker's accent affects listener comprehension the most. It happens to both native and non-native speakers in communication. When listeners are familiar with an accent, their listening results will be improved considerably.

Unfamiliar Vocabulary. Understanding the meaning of words when listening can arouse students' interest and motivation. And thus, give students a positive impact on their listening comprehension ability.

Length and Speed of Listening. It depends on the level of students to listen to long parts and keep all information in their mind. For lowerlevel students, listening to a more than threeminute text and then completing the listening tasks are difficult. According to Underwood (1989), speed can be a challenge for students in listening lessons. If the speakers speak too fast, students are not able to follow the talk and this can cause critical problems with listening comprehension.

Some other researchers have similar opinions to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014) about problems with listening comprehension in terms of restricted vocabulary, (Graham (2006), Buck (2001)), listening materials (Seferoglu and Uzakgoren (2004), familiar accents (Bloomfield et al. (2010), Buck (2001)), and fast speech rate (Buck (2001)). Poor grammar is indicated by Graham (2006), and weak pronunciation is stated by Bloomfield et al. (2010) and Walker (2014) are also serious problems of listening comprehension.

These are very important factors of listening comprehension that teachers should be aware of and adjust their teaching so that students can learn listening with the best conditions.

Learning Apps

Today, in the era of technology 4.0, with the support of technology, it brings numerous benefits to foreign language learners. Movies, music, mp3, and the internet provide a wealth of materials and resources which allow English learners to improve their listening skills right at home. The reason smartphones have so many benefits is mainly due to the apps. There are hundreds of great apps that can help you learn English, but some of them provide learners with authentic materials for listening. Here are some apps to learn English listening skills: BBC Learning English, Luke's English Podcast, and English Two-Minute Software.

Spotlight is also one of the apps that helps learners improve their listening skills significantly. It includes topics related to hot topics around the world and daily activities. And in particular, people using Spotlight say that using the Specialized English method – fewer words, slower reading, shorter sentences will help you quickly grasp the content of the listening lesson and learn new words more easily.

Spotlight (Spotlight Radio) is rated as one of the most popular English listening training software in 2019. It uses the Specialized English method - fewer words, slower reading, and shorter sentences, which will help learners quickly grasp the content of the listening lesson and learn new words. Spotlight English is designed with extended audio and video clips consisting of 10–15minute listening sessions on various topics, suitable for beginners. Spotlight - a listening tool that reveals the following benefits:

- All Spotlight listening radio is free.
- There are thousands of topics to choose from.
- Spotlight can be downloaded automatically for frequent listening.
- Spotlight is presented at a slow pace, suitable for beginners.
- People can use it online or offline.
- This application provides transcripts under each listening so that learners can compare and practice speaking or dictating after each listening.
- Easy for people to use.

Besides, Spotlight also has its limitations:

- Simple to use may develop laziness for some users and learners.
- Requires high concentration.
- Practice listening and speaking, but not good communication skills.
- Possible technical problems: Network problems, errors, or file corruption.

Based on the above discussion, there are plenty of benefits of implementing the Spotlight application in learning English. Meanwhile, the drawbacks of implementing Spotlight for learners can be foreseen by teachers.

Related studies

In Vietnam, the research team built a study on the function and necessity of open-source software incorporating in teaching English to university students by Luu Le Phuong Thanh et al. (2021). They were relatively pleased with the outcomes. The use of software to help students hone their speaking abilities is like a breath of fresh air in the classroom, as research has demonstrated the usefulness of those programs with many advantages and unique features that these applications bring.

Vo Van Loc, Nguyen Ngoc Vu, and Vo Thuy Linh (2021) implemented a study titled "EFL Students' Attitudes Towards the Ease of Use Mobile Technology to Learn English at a University in Vietnam". The findings reveal that EFL students have a positive attitude toward the ease of use of mobile devices with wifi connected in the classroom. Students can learn the language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and English knowledge, such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary by using portable devices. Therefore, teachers should incorporate mobile devices into English learning with a wifi connection because of their convenience and use.

In the world, a research was done by Huang and Sun (2010) on the use of mobile technology for English listening skills. Students can improve their English listening abilities by using practice exercises in applications at a greater degree. According to Ozuorcun and Tabak (2012), learning on mobile devices makes it simple for students to assess materials wherever they are, and whenever they need.

Setyobudi D. M. S., and Jannah I. M. (2022) conducted a study on the effectiveness of Spotify application to teaching listening through English songs to the tenth graders of SMAN 1 Mojokerto. The results show that Spotify application can increase students' understanding and concentration on listening lessons. Spotify application can make students more interested and motivated to learn listening skills because they can listen to any song they want. It is concluded that using the Spotify application for learning listening can improve students' listening skills.

It can be seen that, both in Vietnam and abroad, there is plenty of research that has made significant contributions, helping English learners improve their skills easily using applications, including listening skills. However, research on using Spotlight to enhance students' listening skills is limited. Therefore, learning through Spotlight is one of the topics that need to be explored and examined its effectiveness.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Research design

The present study used an experimental study design, consisting of an experimental group and a control group, to assess the impact of using the Spotlight app on listening practice. A survey was then conducted to find out students' feedback on their attitudes towards Spotlight, showing its benefits, difficulties, and possible suggestions to improve its effectiveness.

Participants

A class of 41 non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education (TNUE) was invited to take part in the study. They were studying English 1 which is one of the three compulsory English modules. They are required to pass the B1 level of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to graduate. 20 of them were assigned to the experimental group (using Spotlight) while 21 others were assigned to the control group (not using Spotlight). All of these students were required to take a pre-test and post-test, but only the experimental group did the survey questionnaire on the feedback of using Spotlight as a listening practice app and recommendations for better organization of the activities.

Data collection instruments

Test: Pre-test: Before participating in the experiment, the participants (from both experimental and control groups) were given a listening test that was prepared by researchers. Post-test: After 9 weeks of treatment, students did a post-test which had the same format as the pre-test to check the results using the Spotlight app.

Both pre-test and post-test were designed for the same level A2 in The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level.

Questionnaires:

The researchers gathered the necessary information from students about their listening ability, opinions and views on the better use of the Spotlight application in teaching and learning listening skill.

Using Spotlight app process

The experiment took place in the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023. 41 non-English majors in class K57B at Thai Nguyen University of Education, Vietnam took part in the study, in which 20 of them were asked to use Spotlight as a tool to improve English listening. The listening sections in the Spotlight were selected related to the topics of daily life and had a preintermediate level of vocabulary. These listening sections were chosen by the researchers to make sure that they were at right level of the students.

The procedure is as follows:

Week	Activity	Purposes
1	- Students did the pre-test.	- To get the students' level of listening before treatment.
2	- The researchers gave an overview of the Spotlight application to the students and guided them to use the Spotlight.	- To be ready to use the app.
3-8	- Students were asked to listen to the Spotlight sections that the researchers assigned. After that, they had to complete the exercises given by the researchers, and then submitted them on google classroom.	- To practice listening using the Spotlight app.
9	 Students did the post-test. Students gave answers to the questionnaires. 	 To get the students' level of listening after treatment. To receive their opinions on the benefits of Spotlight and recommendation for better use in teaching and learning.

RESULT and DISCUSSION

Data analysis from the experimental group and the control group The Pre-test

 Table 1: Descriptive statistic of students' pre-test

Indep	Independent Samples Test							
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means						
	F Sig.			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error difference
Pre- test	Equal variances assumed	.374	.545	.379	.39	.000	.1819	.4800
	Equal variances not assumed			.376	33.754	.000	.1819	.4842

As seen in table 1, the experimental and control groups' participant mean scores differed significantly, from one another. Because the Sig. (or p-value) is higher than 0.05 (Sig. =.545), the researcher may verify that the two groups are similar in terms of qualifications and competencies. The standard deviations of the two groups are not significantly different (less than 0.011), demonstrating that the experimental group and the control group have comparable qualifications.

Cambridge Assessment English provides a guide to converting practice test scores to

Cambridge English Scale scores, as shown in the table below:

Practice test score	Cambridge English Scale score	CEFR level
23	140	Level B1
17	120	Level A2
11	100	Level A1
6	82*	57

The results of the students' pre-test were calculated and converted into CEFR level as follows: ("-" means *not at any level*)

Table 2.	The results	of the students	' pre-test

Student	Experimental group (per 25 points)	CEFR level equivalence	Control group (per 25 points)	CEFR level equivalence
1	11	Level A1	9	-
2	9	-	12	Level A1
3	7	-	9	-
4	8	-	12	Level A1
5	20	Level A2	6	-
6	8	-	12	Level A1

7	10	Level A1	6	-
8	5	-	5	-
9	9	-	5	-
10	13	Level A1	6	-
11	11	Level A1	6	-
12	5	-	12	Level A1
13	5	-	9	-
14	3	-	5	-
15	3	-	6	-
16	19	Level A2	8	-
17	10	Level A1	8	-
18	7	-	11	-
19	7	-	17	Level A2
20	9	-	14	Level A1
21			13	Level A1

The table shows the scores of the pre-test between the two groups, the experimental group and the control group. It is clear from the table that the number of students from both groups who got levels A1 and A2 for the listening test is small, only seven students from each group. The rest students were not scaled at any level. Interestingly, merely 2 students gained level A2 in the experimental group while only one student in the control group got the same listening competency. That means not many students can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases in relation to themselves, their family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly. (Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)).

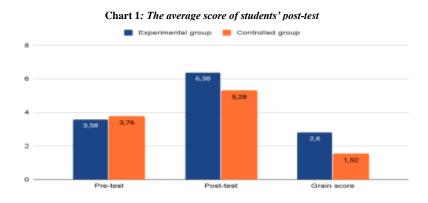
The Post-test

The results of the students' post-test were calculated and converted into CEFR level as follows: ("-" means *not at any level*)

Table 3. The results of the students' post-test

Student	Experimental group	CEFR level equivalence	Control group	CEFR level equivalence
	(per 25 points)		(per 25 points)	
1	18	Level A2	14	Level A1
2	16	Level A1	14	Level A1
3	14	Level A1	11	Level A1
4	15	Level A1	13	Level A1
5	22	Level A2	10	-
6	14	Level A1	14	Level A1
7	16	Level A1	11	Level A1
8	14	Level A1	10	-
9	16	Level A1	10	-
10	20	Level A2	10	-
11	18	Level A2	12	Level A1
12	15	Level A1	14	Level A1
13	14	Level A1	14	Level A1
14	10	-	15	Level A1
15	11	Level A1	11	Level A1
16	23	Level B1	15	Level A1
17	17	Level A2	12	Level A1
18	17	Level A2	14	Level A1
19	16	Level A1	20	Level A2
20	13	Level A1	18	Level A2
21			15	Level A1

The table compares the results of the posttest of both groups. It is clear from the table that after more than 2 months of practicing listening, almost students of the two groups improved their listening skills. 6 students could get level A2 for the experimental group, while only 2 students in the control group gained the same level. One student in the experimental group reached level B1, but none for the control group. There were more students who could not get the lowest level (A1) in the control group (4 students) while there was only one student in the same level in the experimental group. It can be explained that more students in the experimental group can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance, for example, very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment. They can also catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements according to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).



While the average pre-test score of both groups is relatively low, 3.58 and 3.76, the mean score has a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group, which is 6.38 and 5.28, respectively as shown in the bar chart.

Moreover, the experimental group gained higher mean scores than the control group (1.28 points higher). The scores demonstrate that the participants who used the Spotlight app to listen to English improved their listening skills.

 Table 4: Descriptive statistic of students' post -test

Indepen	dent Samples Test								
		Levene's	evene's Test for Equality of Variances T-Test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error difference	
PPost- test	Equal variances assumed	.209	.650	2.990	.39	.000	1.1038	.3031	
	Equal variances not assumed			2.976	36.817	.000	1.1038	.3032	

From the above statistical analysis table, the researchers made a comparison table between the two groups for the following test:

 Table 5: The comparison of the post-test results of both groups

	Experimental group	Control group
Mean	6.38	5.28
Std. Deviation	1.2944	1.0630
Sig. (2-tailed) (or p-value)	.000	.000
Mean Difference	1.1038	

The evidence presented demonstrates that the groups' post-test results two were comparable. It is clear that there is a very significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group after examining. The Sig. (2tailed) is less than 0.05 (p=.000<.05). There was a difference in the results, particularly for the average posttest score, indicating that the therapy is working and the experimental groups' listening ability has greatly improved.

The scores presented previously demonstrated that the participants who used the Spotlight app to listen to English improved their listening considerably compared to the students who did not use the app. It would be concluded that the use of the Spotlight app has an impact on the improvement of students' listening.

Students' opinions on benefits, difficulties, and suggestions to using Spotlight in teaching and learning English

After the experiment, the researchers conducted a survey questionnaire about students' feedback on their opinions after using Spotlight, shortcomings of using the app, and suggestions for using Spotlight more effectively.

Opinions on the benefits of Spotlight

The table below shows students' opinions after using Spotlight as a listening practice app after a nine-week experiment. The results show that they were relatively satisfied with this application. Most students agree that Spotlight can help them improve their vocabulary, and pronunciation as they speak slowly enough, and the app is easy to use. However, half of the students think that the contents of the listening sections are easy to understand, and they can easily talk about life topics after listening to Spotlight. These ideas reveal that Spotlight is suitable to lower level students who are studying general English.

Table 3. Opinions on the bene	fits of Spotlight
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Opinions on the benefits of Spotlight	Agree	Disagree
1. I love using Spotlight because they speak slowly	90%	10%
2. I find it easy to search for a topic I like on Spotlight	90%	10%
3. I can learn more vocabulary through Spotlight	100%	0%
4. I can improve my listening skill through Spotlight	90%	10%
5. I can improve my pronunciation through Spotlight	80%	20%
6. The content of the listening is very easy to understand	50%	50%
7. I can talk about different topics easier after listening to them on Spotlight	50%	50%
8. I can learn more life skills through Spotlight	90%	10%

Difficulties and suggestions on using Spotlight more effectively

After using Spotlight as a listening practice application, questionnaires about the difficulties students encountered during the experiment were sent to the experimental group students to answer, and suggestions for improvement to use Spotlight more efficiently were submitted for better use of the app.

 Table 4. Opinions on the difficulties when using the Spotlight

Difficulties	Agree	Disagree
1. I think the length of the listening is too long.	70%	30%
2. I can't access Spotlight because of technical problems.	0%	100%
3. I couldn't find the right topic for me.	10%	90%
4. Spotlight is too easy for me.	10%	90%
5. I don't have time to listen.	20%	80%
6. I can't keep up with the speed of the listening.	10%	90%
7. I find it difficult to understand the listening on Spotlight because there are too many new words for me.	50%	50%
8. The assigned exercises are too difficult.	90%	10%
9. The assigned exercises are too long.	90%	10%

The table shows that most students did not have difficulty in technical issues to assess the app. Although they had time for practice listening, they still struggled with the speed of the listening files because half of them stated that there were too many new words for them to understand. Furthermore, they thought that the exercises after listening were too long and too hard to do. These difficulties could be a recommendation for the researchers to adjust the contents of the exercises more suitable and relevant to the level of the students.

The following table shows the students' suggestions to better usage of the Spotlight.

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Suggestions	Agree	Disagree
1. Teachers should add more points to the subject mark for those who participate in listening practice on apps.	90%	10%
2. Teachers should create more exercises for students to practice after each listening on Spotlight.	90%	10%
3. Teachers should propagate Spotlight application widely in schools.	70%	30%
4. Teachers should ask students to speak about the topic that they have listened to improve their speaking skills.	80%	20%
5. Students should note down some words/phrases that are new to them from the listening.	100%	0%
6. Students should listen to it many times to understand and grasp the main idea of the lesson.	90%	10%
7. Students should choose listening content appropriate to their level.	100%	0%

To find ways to use Spotlight more effectively, the researchers asked for some advice on how to use Spotlight more wisely before designing the survey questionnaire. As can be seen from the result, one of the popular methods for instructors to increase the use of the app effectively is to add points to the final mark of the English subject for students who practice listening using the app. That would be a good idea for any class students with assessing participation assessment. Moreover, many students said that teachers should create more exercises for students to practice listening and ask them to talk about the topic they have just practiced. This advice insists that the students like the app and are willing to work with it more often. In terms of the advice for students, all of them agreed that they should learn vocabulary by listening and choosing the content suitable to their level and preference. If students follow this guide and teachers adjust their teaching activities as suggested, enhance they will their listening comprehension and vocabulary shortly.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, using the Spotlight app improves students' English listening ability, as determined by students from the first year of non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education.

Through the research, we can see that the listening level of non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education was low, in which most of the students got level A1 and below. After more than two months of using the app, some of the students in the experimental groups showed an improvement in listening performance from level A1 to B1. Most of them gained at least one level. This result illustrates the effectiveness of using the Spotlight app in teaching and learning listening skills.

The opinions of students on using Spotlight are very positive. They show their preference for using it and provide meaningful suggestions for better use of Spotlight in teaching and learning English. Teachers and students should use Spotlight more frequently to increase students' listening ability with its helpful characteristics for students with low levels of listening.

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