Findings of Using Schema-Building Activities to Improve EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

Bui Thi Kim Loan[1*]

[1] Binh Duong University, Vietnam
*Corresponding author's email: btkloan@bdu.edu.vn
* (iD) https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5706-3470
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ABSTRACT

EFL students at a university in Ho Chi Minh City faced some problems in learning listening skills. This study aimed to investigate factors influencing listening learning and whether schema-building activities impact students' listening comprehension at a private university in Vietnam, which then gave some possible suggestions to improve EFL learners' listening teaching and learning. The study was experimental research, so the researcher employed pre-and post-tests, questionnaires, and class observations to collect the data to address two research questions. A total of 123 students participated in the research, and they were classified into the experimental group (60 students) and the control group (63 students). The findings revealed that schema-building activities had an impact on enhancing EFL students' listening comprehension. The study's findings contributed some contributions to teaching and learning Second Language (L2) listening skills using schema-building activities. The findings serve as guidelines for teachers and students to teach and learn listening skills and for school managers with material development.

Introduction

Learners of English receive messages mainly through listening and reading. In Vietnam, the teaching of listening skills has not been highly focused on. Vandergrift (2004, p.3) asserts that "listening is probably the least explicit of the four macro language skills, making it the most difficult skill to learn", and Khanh (2006) maintains that "listening has always been presumed to be the most difficult and boring skill to practice" (p.51). Do's (2007, p.115) research observes, "teachers concentrate on presenting vocabulary and structures so much that they may not have enough time to organize other necessary activities or they cannot recognize the importance of the other ones." Indeed, it is essential to introduce new words to students before they listen to listening texts. However, teachers sometimes neglect the importance of triggering prior knowledge of EFL learners in the process of teaching listening skills.

There have been some controversies about the significance of schema-building activities in improving EFL students' listening comprehension. Brown and Smith (2007) indicate that schema-building activities enhance L2 learners' listening comprehension. On the contrary, Jensen and Hansen (1995) note that schema-building does not improve students' listening learning. Therefore, this study was conducted to verify the impacts schema-building activities have on EFL learners' listening comprehension.

Literature review

Schema

Various researchers define schema. Rumelhart (1980) sees schema as "building blocks of cognition" as well as a "skeleton around which the situation is interpreted" (pp.34-37). Carrell (1983) classifies schema into two categories: content schemata and formal schemata.

Later, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) clarify that content schemata are "background information" on the topic, whereas formal schemata are "knowledge about how discourse is organized with respect to different genres, different topics, or different purposes (e.g., transactional versus interactional), including relevant sociocultural knowledge" (p.102). So, these kinds of schemata are needed for effective listening comprehension.

Benefits of schema-building

Schema and second language acquisition

A great number of researchers have put an emphasis on the relationship between schema and learner's listening comprehension. Nunan (2007) insists that "comprehension relies on listeners' successful activation of their prior knowledge (schemata)" (p.35) and introduces some methods to activate preexisting or stored schemata, including mind mapping, brainstorming, games, guided questions, picture/diagram, prediction, elimination, and skimming. Also, Carlo and Edwards (2005) postulate that "schemas change with the accretion of new knowledge and the tuning and reconstruction of prior schemas" (p.148). Moreover, Nunan (2007) observes that "it is beneficial for listening course teachers to bear in mind that activating students' stored knowledge structure (schemata) to enhance comprehension and creating new schemata are far more important than imparting new knowledge of the language system" (p.33). Also, Phan (2022) suggests that classroom questioning, and discussion make learners more active in their learning. Accordingly, it can be said that there are numerous benefits of activating learners' schemata for their language acquisition in general and listening comprehension in particular.

Schema and Classroom Interaction

Schema-building activities facilitate learners' interaction in class. Brown (2006) suggests that "it is just as important to give the students the opportunity to use what they already know - their prior knowledge - to help them do the task" (p.4). This means learning involves interaction and participation from the students. In order to acquire L2 listening in particular and acquire second languages generally, Sullivan and McIntosh (1996) suggest that students' roles must be altered from "passive observers to active participants" (p.2). If teachers employ the aforementioned scheme-building exercises more frequently, students will engage in more constructive and active listening in both pair and group settings.

Schema and Motivation

Motivation plays a role in successful listening learning, which is most often attained through schema-building. A listener will be successful with the proper motivation (Brown, 2000).

Learners can use their background knowledge to learn new knowledge in class. Besides, Rajaei (2015) indicates that background knowledge enhances students' motivation in listening comprehension. Tran (2022) also finds that pre-listening activities influence learners' listening learning. Salameh (2017) clarifies the significance of schema activation activities and the change in learners' attitudes toward listening comprehension. Hence, both the teacher and the listeners must provide stimulation and encouragement for learning.

Schema-building and listening comprehension

Some studies have examined the rapport between schema-building activities and listening comprehension. According to Rost (2002), listeners have access to various information sources, facilitating listening comprehension. Additionally, an individual's mental or stored memory information affects their ability to listen, so activating appropriate schemata and possessing schematic knowledge is explicitly advantageous to listening comprehension (Carrel, 1988). It can be said that schema-building has an impact on learners' listening comprehension.

O'Malley and Chamot (1989) state that "listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic resources to fulfill the task requirement" (p.420). Fang (2008) contends that "listening comprehension is regarded theoretically as an active process in which individuals concentrate on selected aspects of aural input, form meaning from passages, and associate what they hear with existing knowledge" (p.22). Therefore, listeners need to be active in the process of listening comprehension.

However, some researchers investigate the significance of schema-building and listening comprehension. Jensen and Hasen (1995) also highlight the impacts of past knowledge on learners' listening comprehension. They postulate that pupils' past knowledge could skew test results. They came to the conclusion that more research would be required to determine whether schematic knowledge actually helps with listening comprehension after analyzing the data of 128 university-level L2 learners. They also find that previous knowledge does not significantly contribute to L2 listening comprehension. Clemet (2008) states that "prior knowledge may serve as a starting template for constructing a more complex idea", which can so "save the time involved in reconstructing that piece of an idea" and make contributions to the efficiency of learning" (p.419). It can be said that activating learners' schemata is beneficial for listening comprehension.

However, some teachers have not paid much attention to activating learner's schemata in listening classes. McMahon et al. (2005), "Teachers were attempting to teach them only the pertinent information that they would need to pass a test" (p.180). Do (2007) also observes that "it seems that the teachers only tried to cover the listening tasks in the textbook with a focus on linguistic content, and the students pretended to listen by 'picking up' as many answers from teachers as possible" (p.124). However, Long (1987) observes that pre- and post-listening activities are very important in helping EFL learners learn how to listen because they give them many opportunities to apply their prior knowledge, or schemata, to learn new information and construct new schemata. Furthermore, Hoang (2006) states that learners would be unbalanced in listening properly if they do not practice top-down or bottom-up processing. It is important to activate learners' schemata for their better listening comprehension.

Research Questions

The study addressed two research questions below:

1. What factors influence EFL students' listening comprehension at a university?
2. What impacts do schema-building activities have on EFL learners' listening comprehension?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study involved 296 students from several faculties at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, of which 123 were first-year students. Every student had to take English as a required course, following their completion of the identical pretest and the questionnaire throughout the first two weeks of class. Since the students in Class A (60 students) and Class B (63 students) from six classes had almost identical backgrounds and listening competence levels, they were chosen as the control group and experimental group, respectively. There were 58 students in the control group and 60 students in the experimental group who completed the questionnaires since some students were not present in class when it was given out.

Table 1

Students' profile

Learners' background information	Control group (58 students)	Experimental group (60 students)
1. Age		
- 18	45 (77.6%)	50 (88.3%)
- 19	10 (17.2%)	10 (16.7%)
- 20	3 (5.2%)	0 (0.0%)
2. Gender		
- Male	21 (36.2%)	22 (36.7%)
- Female	37 (63.8%)	38 (63.3%)
3. Place of entering high school		
- In a city	29 (50%)	31 (51.7%)
- In the countryside,	29 (50%)	29 (48.3%)
4. English learning duration		
- 3 years	2 (3.4%)	0 (0.0%)
- More than 3 years up to 7 years	29 (50%)	41 (68.3%)
- More than 7 years	27 (46.6%)	19 (31.7%)
5. Studying at a foreign language center		
- Yes	12 (20.7%)	9 (15.0)
- No	46 (79.3%)	51 (85.0)

Table 1 shows certain commonalities between the experimental and control groups. To determine their level of entrance listening skills, students in both the experimental and control groups performed the same pretest. The experimental group had 5.07 mean pretest scores, while the control group received 5.04 mean scores. It was concluded that the pupils' English listening skills were almost identical in both sessions.

Table 2

Group statistics for pretest mean scores

Group Statistics

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
scores of pretest	Control group	53	5.04	1.881	.258
	Experimental group	55	5.07	1.476	.199

Table 3

Independent samples t-test analysis of the pretest listening scores

	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
Equal variances assumed	3.636	.059	-.108	106	.914	-. 03	.325
Equal variances not assumed			- .107	98.612	.915	-. 03	.326

According to Table 1's data, certain parallels existed between the experimental and control groups. The pretest used to determine the students' entrance listening skill level was administered to both the experimental and control groups. The control group's pretest mean scores were 5.04, whereas the experimental group's were 5.07. It was assumed that the pupils in the two classrooms were almost equally proficient in listening to English.

Design of the Study

Instruments

This study aims to examine the variables that affect listening comprehension and how schema-building exercises affect EFL students' listening comprehension. To accomplish these research goals, three tools were employed in the study: tests, observations, and questionnaires.

Questionnaire

The researcher designed a questionnaire for this study based on the literature review. This research used the questionnaire to find the answers to the two research questions. The first instrument - the questionnaire - was delivered to 296 students in the six classes at this university during the first two weeks of the course, which was essential to collect the data for the present study. The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese to ensure students' understanding. The questionnaire was piloted among 30 EFL students to test its validity and reliability two weeks before it was officially delivered to the subjects.

Tests

The pretest administered at the start of the course sought to determine whether the English listening proficiency levels of the control and experimental groups were comparable, while the posttests given at the end of the course sought to ascertain whether the students' test scores differed between the experimental and control groups following a 15-week period of experimental period instruction.

The pre-tests and post-tests were taken from the book Developing Tactics for Listening (Richards, 2003) and formatted to be identical. This book has been widely used in many universities in Vietnam, and the contents of this book contain tasks related to schema-building activities. These tests comprised picture selection, True/False, and multiple-choice questions. In order to mitigate any potential bias on the part of the researcher and ensure the impartiality of the post-test results, the researcher enlisted the assistance of her colleagues to grade the post-tests taken by the students in both groups. The results were then returned to the researcher.

Observation

In order to enhance the triangulation of the research, classroom observation was used as the third instrument. The observation aimed to discern students' interaction and motivation in the listening class when they participated in schema-building activities. The observation instrument was based on Luu's (2000) format. Luu (2000) suggested some criteria for collecting the data from the class observations. These collected data were significant in proving the effectiveness of schema-building activities in listening classes. Through class observation, the teacher collected the records of students' participation and motivation during the listening class, during which the teacher employed schema-building activities.

Experimental teaching

The university ran the experimental teaching program for fifteen weeks. The listening course book utilized by the experimental group and control group was titled "Developing Tactics for Listening." While students in the experimental group learned listening with schema-building activities exercises, those in the control group learned listening without any such activities.

The goal of the experimental teaching was to compare, after 15 weeks, the performance of the students in the experimental group (which included schema-building exercises) with the control group (which did not).

Data collection & analysis

The pretest was delivered to 296 students of 6 classes from different faculties during the first two weeks of the course in 2010. The pre-test and questionnaire identified the two classes of nearly the same proficiency level and background, which were classified into the control and experimental groups. The researcher delivered the questionnaire to each class during the first two class meetings, who explained the requirements for filling out the questionnaire to avoid some mistakes and misconceptions from the students. The participants were required to leave the questionnaire anonymous in order that they could answer the questions honestly and completely. They spent less than 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Following that, two classes were chosen, the control group and the experimental group, based on their similar listening competence levels and backgrounds. The purpose of the posttest, which was given to the students in both classes in the fourteenth week, was to assess the improvement in the listening competence between the students in the experimental group – who had been taught schema-building activities and the control group, who had not received such instruction. Throughout the experiment, observation was done to track changes in the student's

motivation and interactions within the experimental group.

Collected data from the three instruments were then analyzed using the SPSS software and Microsoft Office Excel 2003.

Results/Findings

Research question 1: What are the factors that influence listening comprehension?

The first dimension of influential factors of listening learning encompasses five questions concerned with the listening teaching method.

Question 1: Do your teachers teach listening by asking you to look at listening parts in the book and to listen to the tape?

Figure 1.

Looking at listening parts in the book and listening to the tape
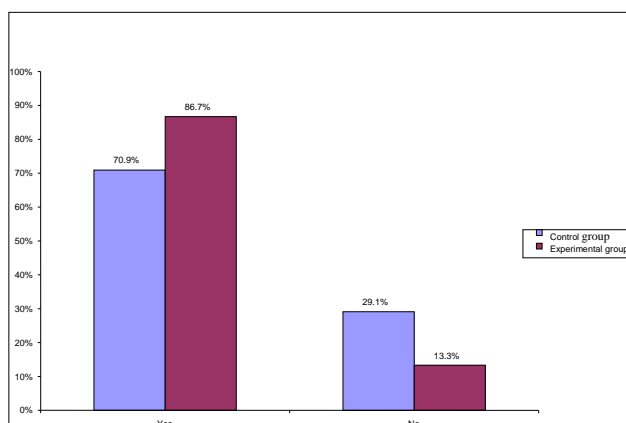
As displayed in Figure 1, the responses to Question 1 from the two groups showed that teachers instructed listening by requiring students to look at listening parts in the book and listen to the tape. 70.9% of the learners in the control group and 86.7% of the students in the experimental group did not have a chance to participate in pre-listening activities, which help activate students' schema.

Question 2: Do your teachers pre-teach some new words that will occur in the listening text?

Figure 2

Pre-teaching some new words
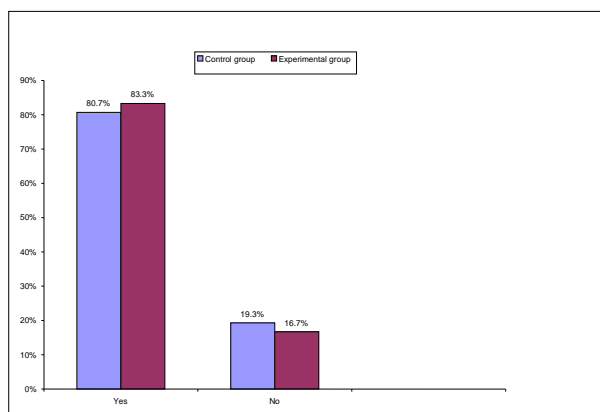
Most students in both classes admitted that they were taught new words that would occur in the listening text. Over three-fourths of the learners (83.3%) in the experimental group and 80.7% of the learners in the control group chose the 'Yes' option, while the 'No' option was selected by 19.3% and 16.7% of the participants in the control group and experimental respectively.

Question 3: Do your teachers introduce the topic of the incoming listening text you are going to listen to?

Figure 3

Introducing the topic of the incoming listening text
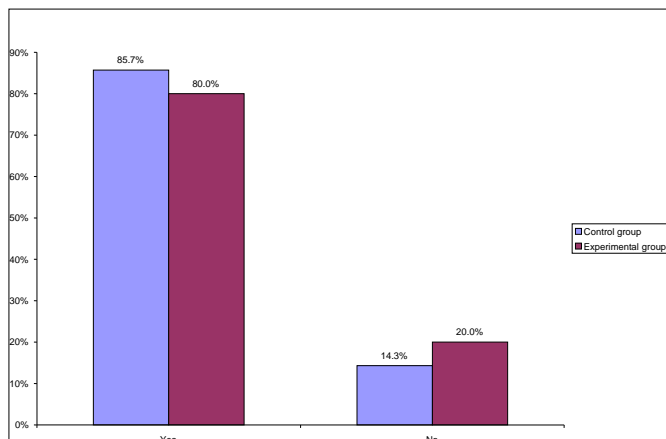
85.7% of the learners in the control group were introduced to the text topic they were going to listen to. However, in the experimental group, the percentage was just 80.0%. 14.3% of the learners in the control group and 20.0% of those in the experimental group gave a negative response that their teachers did not introduce the topic before listening.

Question 4: Do your teachers involve you in the group discussion on the topic you are going to listen to?

The results from Figure 4.4 showed that the teachers' involvement in the group discussion on the topic they will listen to was dominant. In the control group, 53.6% of the respondents were involved, and 46.4% of the students were not. Similarly, in the experimental group, 54.5% of the participants were immersed in the group discussion, and 45.5% of the students were not.

Figure 4

Involving students in group discussion on the topic
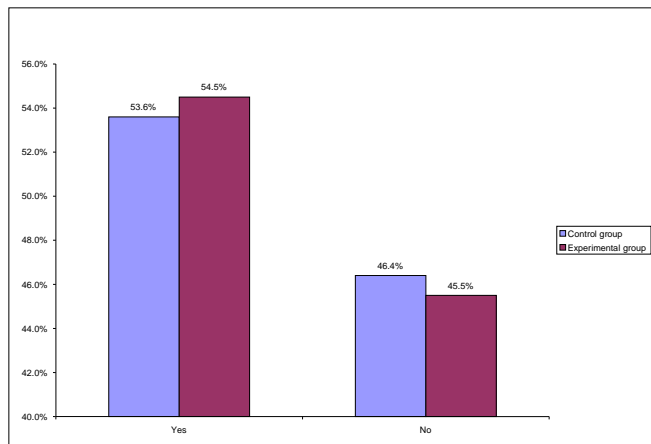
Question 5: Do your teachers offer other activities to lead you to the listening text?

When asked whether the teachers offered other activities to lead them to the listening text, in the control group, games were chosen by 28 students (48.3%), crosswords by 15 students (25.9%), songs by seven students (12.1%); and other activities by six students (10.3%). In the experimental group, 17 students (28.3%) placed their tick on games, 14 students (23.3%) on crosswords, five students (8.3%) on songs, and nine students (15.0%) on other activities.

Figure 5

Offering other activities to lead students to the listening text
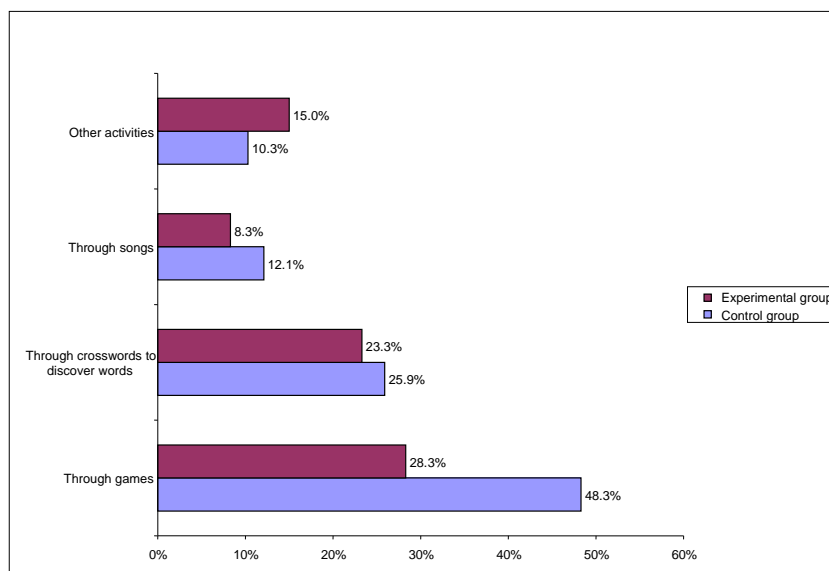
Besides, in the control group, the learners informed their instructors offered other activities to lead to the listening text that they were going to listen to, such as asking questions about the topic (one student 1.7%), pre-teaching vocabulary (one student 1.7%), telling a story (one student 1.7%), describing pictures (one student 1.7%) and even no activities (two students 3.4%). In contrast, in the experimental group, students answered that the teachers gave other activities to lead to the listening text, such as writing for asking friends questions in English (one student 1.7%), discussing with friends (one student, 1.7%); group discussion (one student 1.7%); having few chances to listen (one student 1.7%), pre-teaching new vocabulary (one student 1.7%); talking about the content of the listening text (one student 1.7%); teacher's asking questions about the listening text (one student 1.7%); and even writing that their teachers offered no activities (two students 3.4%).

The second dimension of influential factors behind listening learning is concerned with EFL learners' favorite ways to learn listening.

Question 6: How do you want to improve your English listening?

Figure 6 below divulges that most of the learners in the two groups preferred learning listening by participating in some activities before listening. Merely six students (10.3%) in the control group and 7 learners (11.7%) in the experimental group liked listening to the tape immediately without doing any activities before listening to the listening text. 89.7% of the learners in the control group and 88.3% of students in the experimental group answered that they preferred learning listening by taking part in some activities prior to listening to learning listening by listening to the tape instantly.
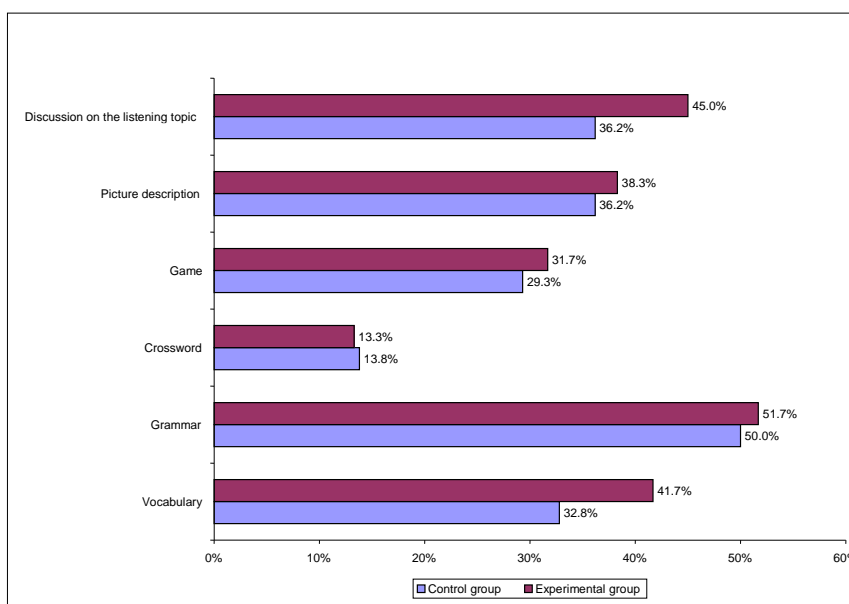
Figure 6

Preferred ways of English listening learning
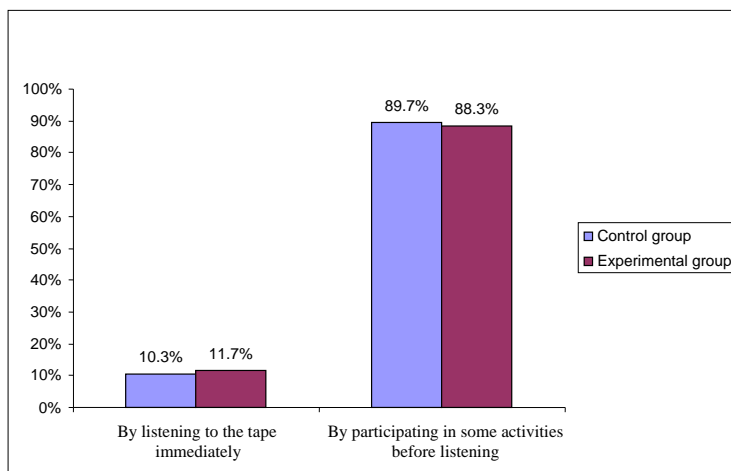
Question 7: If you participate in some activities before listening to the listening text, which activities do you prefer?

Figure 7

Some preferred activities before listening to the listening text

The results from Figure 7 denoted that in the control group, three out of 6 activities before listening to the listening text that the students preferred were grammar activity chosen by 29 students (50.0%), picture description by 21 students (36.2%) and discussion on the listening topic by 21 students (36.2%). Conversely, in the experimental group, the students preferred such schema-building activities as grammar, chosen by 31 students (51.7%), discussion on the listening topic by 27 students (45.0%), and vocabulary activity by 25 students (41.7%).

Question 8: Do you participate in any activities after listening?

Figure 8

Students' participation in some activities after listening
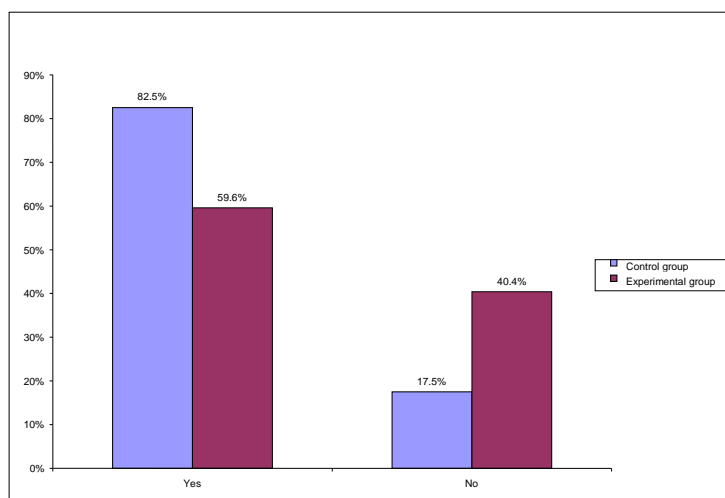
The percentage of the students (82.5%) participating in the activities after listening to the text in the control group outnumbered that (59.6%) in the experimental group. Nearly half of the learners (40.4%) in the experimental group admitted not participating in any activities after listening to the text.

Question 9: If yes, what activities do you use to present your opinions on the listened text?

Figure 9

Activities used by students to present their own opinions on the listened text
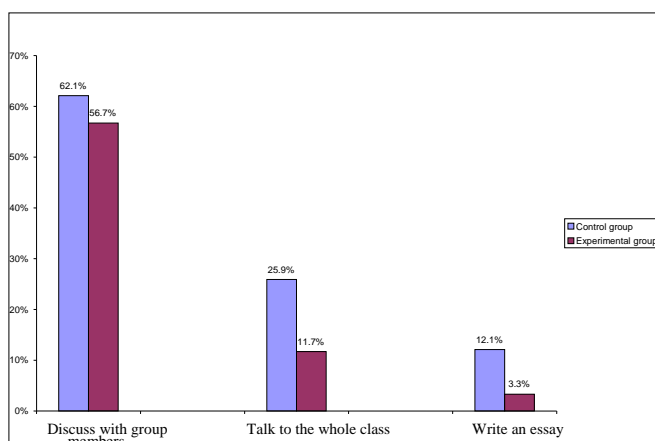

As Figure 9 on the activities used after listening to the listened text shows, over half of the learners in the control group (62.1%) and in the experimental group (56.7%) liked the discussion with group members to present their own opinions on the listened text. 7 students (12.1%) in the control group and only two learners (3.3%) in the experimental group preferred writing an essay, and 15 students (25.9%) and 7 students (11.7%) in the control group and experimental group respectively preferred talking to the whole class.

The third dimension of the influential factors behind listening learning is related to listening materials.

Question 10: Do your school materials for listening contain pre-listening activities?

Figure 10

School materials for listening contain pre-listening activities
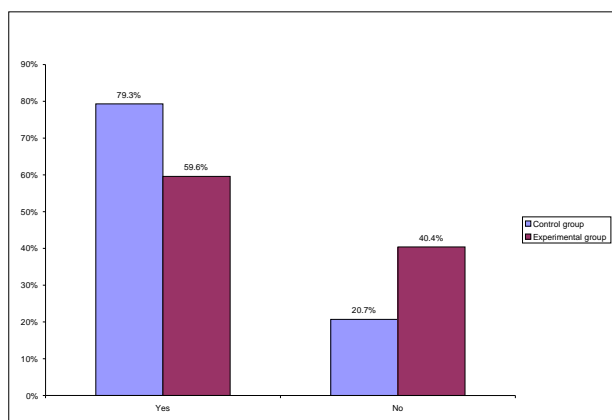
As Figure 10 reveals, the percentage of the learners (79.3%) in the control group that said "yes" outnumbered that (59.6%) in the experimental group when they were asked whether school materials for listening contained pre-listening activities. Approximately half of the learners (40.4%) in the experimental group found that there were no pre-listening activities in school listening materials, although in the control group, the percentage was as low as 20.7%.

Question 11: If yes, these pre-listening activities are …

Figure 11
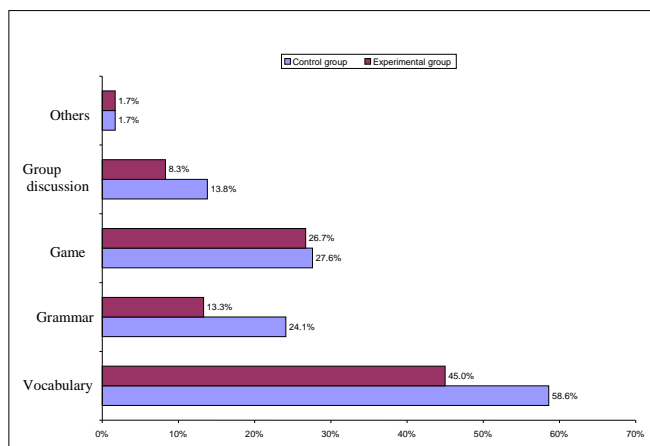
Pre-listening activities

Figure 11 shows that the majority of the students in both classes claimed that pre-listening activities in school materials consist of vocabulary the most, followed by games, grammar, and lastly, group discussion the least. Only 8 students (13.8%) in the control group and 5 students (8.3%) in the experimental group selected group discussion.

Question 12: Are listening topics relevant to your present or future life?

Figure 12

Listening topics are relevant to students' life
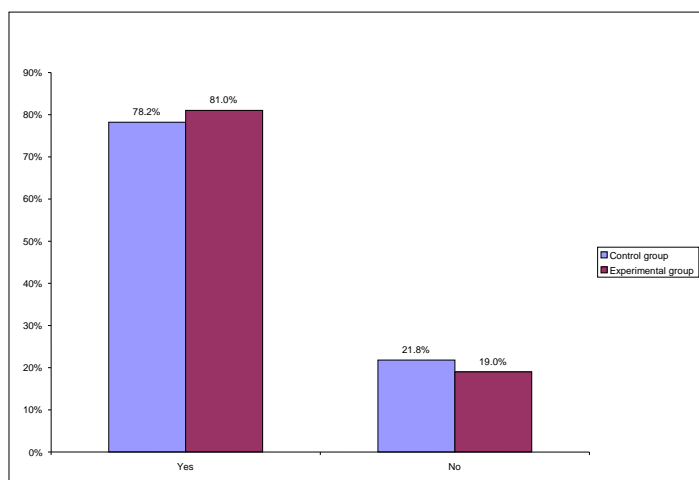
The findings collected from the students' responses on whether listening topics were relevant to their life were noticeable. Up to 78.2% of the learners in the control group and 81.0% of the learners in the experimental group chose the 'Yes' option, while only 21.8% of the students and 19.0% of the learners in the control group and experimental group, respectively said 'No.'

Question 13: Are listening to texts in your English materials too difficult for you?

**Figure 13**

Listening to texts in materials is difficult
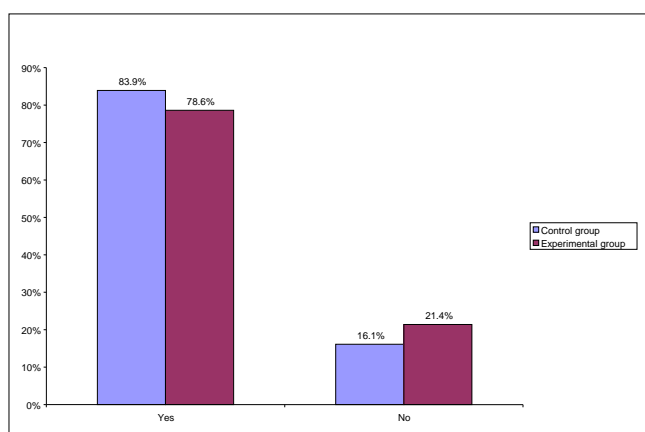
Over three-fourths of the students in both classes contended that listening to text in their materials was too difficult for them, and the percentages were 83.9% of the learners in the control group and 78.6% of the students in the experimental group. Figure 13 shows that most of the learners found listening texts difficult for them, whereas only 16.1% of the students in the control group and 21.4% in the experimental group thought listening texts in their materials were not at a high level of difficulty.

Question 14: If yes, what are the reasons?

Figure 14

Reasons for difficult listening texts
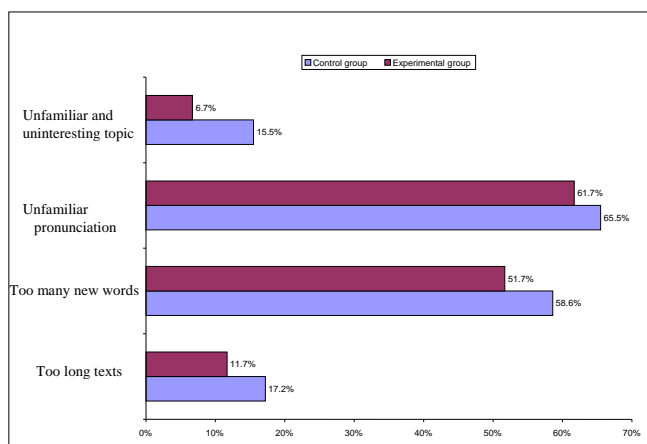
Question 14 was intended to find out the reasons behind the difficulty of listening to texts. Thirty-eight students (65.5%) in the control group and 37 students (61.7%) in the experimental group claimed that unfamiliar pronunciation made the listening text difficult. In the same vein, 34 students (58.6%) and 31 students (51.7%) in the control group and experimental group, respectively, thought that their listening texts were not easy because they contained myriads of new words.

Research question 2: What impacts do schema-building activities have on EFL learners' listening comprehension?

Listening test scores

Tests were used to determine whether schema-building exercises had an effect on EFL learners' listening comprehension. Following a 15-week instructional period during which the experimental group's students participated in listening sessions utilizing schema-building activities – an approach not used by the control group - they took the identical posttest. The posttest results were utilized to compare how differently the two classes' listening comprehension progressed.

As was previously indicated, the experimental group consisted of 66 pupils, while the control group consisted of 63 individuals. Only 53 students in the control group and 55 students in the experimental group took the post-test, though a small number of students in both groups did not take it because they were not present on the day the tests were given.

The output produced by the independent t-test analysis of the post-test listening scores is presented in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4

Group statistics for post-test mean scores

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Scores of posttest	Control group	53	5.70	1.588	.218
	Experimental group	55	6.82	1.806	.244

Table 5
Independent samples t-test analysis of the post-test listening scores

| | 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
Equal variances assumed	1.931	.168	-3.417	106	.001	-1.12	.328
Equal variances not assumed			-3.426	105.133	.001	-1.12	.327

The following is an analysis of both classes' pretest and posttest scores in detail.

Figure 15
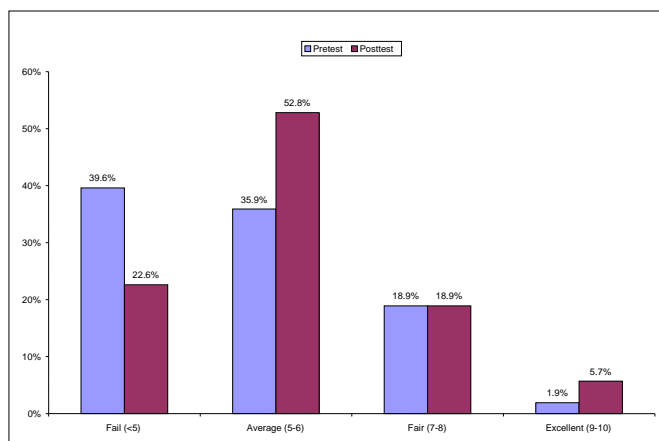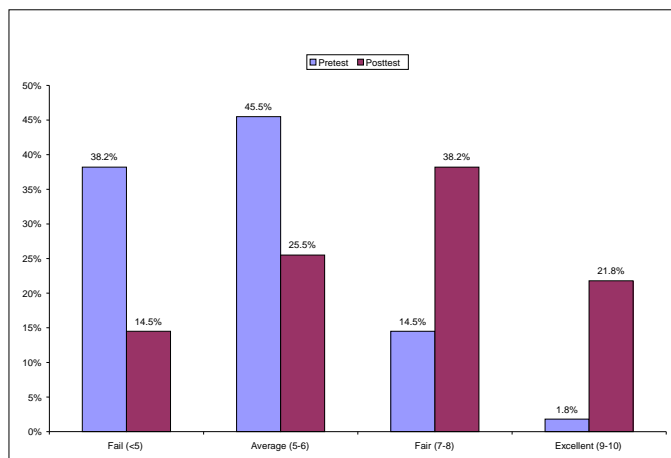Pretest and posttest score classification in the control group

Figure 16
Pretest and posttest score classification in the experimental group

As the charts in Figure 15 and Figure 16 show, the fail grade in the control group decreased by 17.0% from 39.6% to 22.6%, but the decrease in the fail grade in the experimental group was higher—23.7% from 38.2 to 14.5. Finally, in the control group, the excellent score slightly increased by 3.8% from 1.9% to 5.7% in comparison with the significant increase of 20.0% from 1.8% to 21.8% in the experimental group.

Findings from class observation

Apart from the tests, the classroom observation was also used to address the research question 2. The interaction and learning motivation were observed in the experimental group. The findings from observation revealed changes in students' interaction and motivation through five observations. The findings from the two last observations (Meeting ten and Meeting 12) differ from those from the first observation. In the last two observations, the teacher nominated the students less, and the number of students who volunteered to answer or raise questions about vocabulary or the listening topic was increasing and greater than that of the first observation.

Moreover, there was a marked level of peer interaction among the students in the two last observations (Meeting ten and Meeting 12) in comparison with the first observation. In addition, their motivation changed noticeably. The students looked interested when they took part in the schema-building activities individually, in pairs, or in groups. Furthermore, the findings from the observation denoted that the interaction and motivation of students in the experimental group underwent a lucid transformation through 12 class meetings in which the schema-building activities were applied to teaching listening skills.

Discussion

Following are discussions of the findings mentioned above in the context of relevant research.

Firstly, the findings from the questionnaire addressed the first research question. The factors that influence the listening comprehension of EFL learners at this university are pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. The findings were consistent with previous research. The findings from Nguyen's (2006) research indicated that phonological knowledge, such as weak form, stress, linking, and intonation, influences listening, learning, and comprehension. Besides, he highlighted that introducing vocabulary and grammar at the pre-listening stage lessened difficulties in listening comprehension. Therefore, it was concluded that pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar played an important role in increasing EFL learners' listening, learning, and comprehension.

Besides, the findings from the questionnaire survey revealed that teachers tended to ask students to listen to the tape with few or even without warm-up listening activities at all. The teachers used a few activities: 'introducing listening topic' and 'pre-teaching new words that would occur in the listening text'. That means the teachers acted as class controllers, and the learners were passive followers because they just received what their teachers instructed them. The findings demonstrated the students in both classes admitted that their teachers seldom involved them in a group discussion on the listening topic, but they used activities like games and crosswords to lead the students to the listening text. The findings of group discussions in listening class differed from those of some previous researchers.

Moreover, the results from the dimension of the questionnaire on learners' favorite ways to learn to listen indicated that learners preferred participating in some activities before listening to the tape immediately. The most preferred activities were grammar, discussion on listening topics, picture description, and vocabulary; the least preferred were games and crosswords. Teachers

used games and crosswords the most, while learners preferred the least. Learners also showed that the post-listening activity they liked the most was "discuss with group members." The findings of teaching vocabulary before listening as a schema-building activity were similar to Do's (2007).

Furthermore, the findings from the questionnaire survey revealed that listening materials contained pre-listening activities. These activities focused primarily on vocabulary but apparently ignored group discussion. Learners agreed listening topics were relevant to their lives, but they thought listening texts were too difficult for them because of unfamiliar pronunciation, many new words, long texts, and unfamiliar and uninteresting listening topics.

The findings from the test scores and observation answered the second research question. That means that schema-building activities have impacts on EFL learners' listening comprehension. The disparity in post-test scores two groups proved that students instructed with the schema-building activities made more progress in listening learning than students taught without these activities. The findings from the observation reflected that learner became active, autonomous, and interested in participating in pre-listening schema-building activities by using what they knew in order to interact with their peers and teachers to build new schemata. These findings were the same as those of Sullivan and McIntosh (1996).

It was also noticeable that the more interesting, familiar, and relevant the listening topics were, the more motivated the learners were to learn listening. This was consistent with Khanh's (2006, p. 52) view that "learners could study, practice and use what they are so familiar with since the final purpose of language learning is to be a good part of the real world."

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the influential factors affecting listening learning are related to teaching methods, learning methods, and listening materials. In this study, the schema-building activities were effective and beneficial to the learners' listening learning, as proved by the positive change in the scores of the learners in the experimental group. Schema-building activities also encouraged learners to participate actively in class listening activities and interact with their peers cooperatively. Additionally, the learners find schema-building activities interesting, and their interest and motivation are aroused when pre-listening and post-listening activities rustle their schemata.

Some implications are drawn from the findings discussed in the previous sections. First of all, EFL learners have different schemata, which are helpful when learning a second language. Teachers can use different activities before listening, such as questioning, group discussion, making a list of words, phrases, or structures, semantic mapping, and picture description. Secondly, suppose the activities are employed to trigger learners' schemata. In that case, learners will take responsibility and become autonomous in their learning, and teachers also have to hold different roles, such as instructor, facilitator, and observer. Thirdly, unfamiliar grammatical and phonological patterns must be introduced to learners based on their existing grammatical and phonological knowledge before listening to the tape. Hence, the knowledge of grammar and phonology can help learners recognize acoustical signals and comprehend the texts they are listening to better. Additionally, some characteristics of spoken language, such as weak form, reduced form, schwa, linking, intrusion, assimilation, stress, intonation, and prominence, should be introduced in advance to learners. Lastly, learners still have limited prior knowledge of culture, which prevents them from comprehending listening texts related to the cultures of countries. Hence, teachers need to prepare some extra reading materials or other visual activities

related to the cultures so learners can better listen to the texts.

As with any study, this one also had some weaknesses. The students in this research were freshmen at one university in HCMC, Vietnam, and the number of subjects was small. Therefore, the generalizations and recommendations can be restricted to this particular group of learners at this university.

From the limitation above, it is suggested that further research needs to be a longitudinal study; that is, future research should observe the effects of schema-building activities on the improvement in students' listening skills from the time they enter university until their completion of university.

Acknowledgments

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Biodata

Dr. Bui Thi Kim Loan has been a lecturer of English at Binh Duong university, Vietnam. She got her Ph.D. degree in linguistics and her M.A. degree in TESOL. She has taught English skills, ESP, translation, academic writing, sociolinguistics and so forth. Her research interests are discourse analysis, genre analysis, EFL teaching, CALL, CLIL, and SFL. She has published some articles in national and international journals. She has been a reviewer of some international conferences and journals.