

The Impact Of Pre-Listening Questioning Techniques On Listening Comprehension Among Vietnamese EFL University Students

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Abstract:

Background: *Listening remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, particularly for non-English majors who often lack both exposure and confidence in dealing with authentic spoken English. This study investigates the effectiveness of using pre-listening questioning techniques to improve listening comprehension and learner motivation among first-year university students in Vietnam*

Materials and Methods: *A quasi-experimental design was employed with two intact classes: the experimental group (23 students) received instruction supported by structured pre-listening questions, while the control group (22 students) followed traditional listening procedures without questioning. Over a 14-week intervention, both groups completed pre- and post-tests to assess listening performance, and students in the experimental group responded to a post-intervention questionnaire.*

Results: *Quantitative results revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group with statistically significant gains in post-test scores. Questionnaire data further indicated that students perceived the questioning techniques as beneficial for enhancing comprehension, maintaining focus, and increasing engagement. Learners also reported reduced anxiety and greater confidence during listening activities. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the value of scaffolding in listening instruction and demonstrate that pre-listening questions can be a simple yet powerful pedagogical tool.*

Conclusion: *The study highlights the need for more interactive, learner-centered approaches in Vietnamese EFL classrooms and recommends that teachers integrate questioning techniques into lesson planning to activate background knowledge and direct attention. Future research may explore the effects of different types of questions or examine long-term retention outcomes.*

Key Word: *Pre-listening questioning; Listening comprehension; EFL learners; Vietnamese university students; Learner motivation.*

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I. Introduction

In today's globalized society, English proficiency is considered a vital asset for both academic advancement and professional mobility. As English continues to serve as the dominant medium for international communication, mastery of the language—particularly receptive skills like listening—has become increasingly important for learners in non-English-speaking countries (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Field, 2008). In Vietnam, English has been officially integrated into the national curriculum and is a required subject at all levels of education, including technical and vocational institutions such as the College of Mechanics and Metallurgy. Despite this policy emphasis, English language instruction at many Vietnamese colleges still faces substantial challenges, especially in the area of listening comprehension.

Listening is widely acknowledged as one of the most difficult skills to acquire and teach in the EFL classroom. Scholars such as Vandergrift (2007) and Rost (2011) argue that listening is not a passive process but a complex, active skill that requires learners to decode, interpret, and construct meaning in real-time. Unfortunately, in many EFL classrooms, particularly in technical colleges where students are not majoring in English, listening instruction remains teacher-dominated, often limited to comprehension checks after audio playback, with minimal support for pre-listening or during-listening strategies (Nguyen & Boon, 2016). As a result, students often struggle with low motivation, limited comprehension, and poor confidence when encountering authentic spoken texts. Vietnamese EFL learners, particularly non-English majors, face several barriers to effective listening. These include unfamiliar vocabulary, fast speech rate, lack of contextual knowledge, and limited exposure to natural spoken English (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of failure, and low self-confidence further impede performance (Pham & Nguyen, 2019).

In technical and vocational colleges, these challenges are often compounded by large class sizes, limited classroom interaction, and rigid exam preparation routines (Tuan, 2012).

Moreover, many students are accustomed to passive learning and teacher-centered instruction. As a result, they may struggle to engage with spoken texts that require inferencing, attention to discourse markers, or real-time processing. Without proper scaffolding, learners become demotivated and disengaged, reinforcing a cycle of low performance and low confidence (Nguyen, 2020).

Pre-listening strategies are designed to activate learners' background knowledge, establish a purpose for listening, and reduce cognitive overload. Scholars have emphasized that well-structured pre-listening activities can significantly enhance comprehension by preparing students for the input they are about to receive (Nunan, 2001; Brown, 2001). These strategies may include previewing vocabulary, discussing relevant topics, predicting content, and clarifying task goals. According to Vandergrift (2004), pre-listening support is especially valuable for lower-proficiency learners who may otherwise struggle to cope with unmodified speech. In Vietnamese classrooms, however, pre-listening stages are often skipped or reduced to a few brief questions, limiting their effectiveness (Le, 2018). Incorporating meaningful and interactive pre-listening tasks has been proposed as a means to increase learner involvement and comprehension, especially for non-English majors with limited exposure to real-life English contexts.

Questioning is a versatile instructional strategy that can be used not only to check comprehension but also to guide thinking, generate curiosity, and encourage engagement. In the pre-listening stage, effective questioning helps learners anticipate information, predict content, and set listening goals (Cotton, 2001; Chen, 2005). Unlike post-listening questions that test memory, pre-listening questions scaffold the listening process by drawing attention to key ideas and structures before the task begins. Boornazian (2015) found that pre-listening questioning improves focus and comprehension, particularly when the questions are open-ended and thought-provoking. Similarly, research by Rahimirad (2014) shows that combining metacognitive instruction with pre-task questioning enhances learners' ability to regulate their listening strategies. In Vietnam, Le (2018) and Tuan (2012) reported that students taught through interactive questioning techniques were more responsive and better able to retain information from listening passages.

An increasingly recognized approach to address this problem is the integration of questioning techniques, especially at the pre-listening stage. Effective questioning serves multiple pedagogical functions: it activates learners' background knowledge, generates curiosity, sets listening purposes, and guides attention to key points in the input (Cotton, 2001; Nunan, 2001). Questions posed before listening not only scaffold comprehension but also enhance learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness (Chen, 2005; Brown, 2001). Research by Tuan (2012) in Vietnamese secondary schools and Le (2018) in higher education settings has shown that strategic questioning significantly improves learners' listening focus and retention. Furthermore, when used interactively, questioning encourages students to anticipate content, formulate predictions, and engage with the material in a more meaningful way (Rahimirad, 2014; Boornazian, 2015).

Despite these benefits, questioning remains underutilized in listening classes at technical institutions in Vietnam, where lessons tend to prioritize test-oriented outcomes over communicative competence. At the College of Mechanics and Metallurgy, preliminary observations indicate that students often enter listening activities with limited context or preparation, leading to poor performance and disengagement. This highlights a pressing need for more student-centered, strategy-based approaches to listening instruction, particularly for non-English majors who lack both language confidence and authentic exposure.

This study aims to investigate the application of effective questioning techniques at the pre-listening stage in English classes at a Vietnamese technical college. Specifically, it explores (1) the common difficulties students encounter in listening comprehension, (2) the extent to which pre-listening questioning improves students' listening outcomes and engagement, and (3) the instructional implications of integrating questioning as a core strategy in listening pedagogy. To guide this investigation, the study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What is the effect of pre-listening questioning techniques on the listening comprehension performance of non-English major university students?
- (2) How do students perceive the impact of pre-listening questioning on their motivation and engagement during listening lessons?

By addressing these dimensions, the study seeks to contribute to both the theoretical understanding and practical improvement of listening instruction in Vietnamese EFL contexts, with a focus on under-researched learner populations in vocational education.

II. Material And Methods

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the effectiveness of pre-listening questioning techniques in enhancing students' listening comprehension and learning motivation. A pre-test and post-test design was employed to measure the impact of

the intervention on learners' performance, while a post-treatment questionnaire was administered to collect students' reflections on the pedagogical strategy. The research was conducted at a university in Vietnam, involving 55 first-year students enrolled in general English courses. All participants were non-English majors with similar educational backgrounds and had studied English for at least seven years. They were divided into two intact classes through random assignment: the experimental group (23 students) received listening instruction supported by structured questioning techniques in the pre-listening stage, while the control group (22 students) followed a conventional format with no explicit questioning prior to listening. Both groups were taught by the same instructor and followed the same institutional curriculum, ensuring consistency in materials, learning objectives, and lesson duration.

The intervention was conducted over 14 weeks, with each group receiving two 50-minute listening sessions per week. The instructional difference lay in the pre-listening phase: the experimental group engaged in interactive questioning activities such as predictive, guiding, and open-ended questions designed to activate background knowledge, stimulate curiosity, and direct attention to key elements in the listening texts. Students were encouraged to discuss their responses in pairs or small groups before listening. In contrast, the control group was introduced to the topic briefly and proceeded directly to the listening activity without such scaffolding. To evaluate outcomes, two key instruments were used: (1) a listening comprehension test administered before and after the intervention to both groups, and (2) a post-intervention questionnaire completed by the experimental group, consisting of Likert-scale and open-ended items. To ensure reliability, the listening pre-test and post-test were piloted with a similar group of students prior to the main study, and items were reviewed for clarity and consistency. The test content was aligned with the course objectives and CEFR A2–B1 listening descriptors (as predescribed in the university requirements), enhancing content validity. Additionally, the student questionnaire was adapted from previously validated instruments, including the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery developed by Gardner (1985) and listening-related engagement items from Rahimirad (2014) and Vandergrift et al. (2006), ensuring relevance to the motivational and affective dimensions of EFL listening instruction. The test scores were analyzed using paired and independent t-tests, while responses to the open-ended items were subjected to thematic coding to identify patterns in student attitudes, engagement, and perceptions of the questioning strategy's impact on their listening development.

III. Result

1. Results of the Listening Pre-Test and Post-Test

To evaluate the effect of pre-listening questioning techniques on students' listening comprehension, both the experimental and control groups completed a listening test before and after the 14-week instructional intervention. The descriptive statistics for both groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Listening Scores

Group	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	Pre-test	23	5.74	0.67
Experimental	Post-test	23	6.65	0.72
Control	Pre-test	22	5.70	0.64
Control	Post-test	22	6.10	0.68

As shown in Table 1, both groups exhibited improvement in their listening test scores following the intervention. The experimental group, which received pre-listening questioning instruction, saw an increase in mean score from 5.74 to 6.65, a gain of 0.91 points. Meanwhile, the control group, which received traditional listening instruction without structured questioning, improved from 5.70 to 6.10, resulting in a 0.40-point gain. Although both groups benefited from regular listening exposure, the experimental group demonstrated a more substantial improvement in overall performance.

To determine whether these improvements were statistically significant, paired-sample t-tests were performed within each group to compare pre- and post-test results. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test results comparison

Group	Mean Difference	t	df	p-value
Experimental	0.91	4.35	22	0.000
Control	0.40	2.11	21	0.047

For both groups, the improvement from pre-test to post-test was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). However, the experimental group's gain was more substantial, both in terms of absolute improvement and statistical strength ($p = 0.000$, $t = 4.35$), compared to the control group ($p = 0.047$, $t = 2.11$).

To evaluate the difference in post-test performance between the two groups, an independent-sample t-test was conducted. Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Differences in Post-Test Scores

Group	Mean (Post-test)	t	df	p-value
Experimental	6.65	2.71	43	0.009
Control	6.10			

The results indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups in post-test scores ($p = 0.009$), with the experimental group outperforming the control group. This confirms that the use of structured pre-listening questioning techniques had a measurable and beneficial impact on students' listening comprehension.

Data from the listening tests reveal several key findings. First, both the control and experimental groups improved their listening performance over the 14-week period, likely due to consistent exposure to listening tasks and classroom practice. However, the improvement in the experimental group was significantly greater, both in terms of test scores and statistical effect size. The 0.91-point increase in the experimental group, compared to the 0.40-point gain in the control group, suggests that pre-listening questioning strategies helped learners better prepare for the listening tasks by activating background knowledge, guiding attention, and enhancing focus.

The statistical tests reinforce these findings: the highly significant p -value (0.000) for the experimental group's improvement indicates a strong instructional effect, while the between-group comparison ($p = 0.009$) provides further evidence that students benefited from the intervention beyond what could be achieved through traditional instruction alone. These results are consistent with prior studies (Boornazian, 2015; Rahimirad, 2014; Le, 2018), which emphasize the effectiveness of questioning in scaffolding listening comprehension.

Additionally, the slight increase in standard deviation in both groups (from 0.67 to 0.72 in the experimental group and from 0.64 to 0.68 in the control group) suggests greater variability in individual outcomes. This may reflect the differential impact of the intervention across learners, possibly influenced by individual differences in motivation, background knowledge, or participation.

In summary, the findings provide robust evidence that pre-listening questioning techniques significantly enhance listening comprehension among non-English major university students. This pedagogical strategy appears to support learners not only cognitively, by structuring how they approach listening input, but also affectively, by reducing uncertainty and increasing engagement with the task.

2. Results of the Student Questionnaire

To complement the quantitative findings from the listening tests and gain deeper insights into learners' experiences, a post-intervention questionnaire was administered to all 23 students in the experimental group. The questionnaire comprised two parts: (1) Likert-scale items assessing student perceptions of the questioning techniques used during the pre-listening phase, and (2) open-ended questions inviting reflective feedback on their learning experiences. The results are presented below

The Likert-scale section consisted of 10 statements related to four thematic categories: motivation, comprehension support, engagement, and overall effectiveness. Students were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 5-point scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5).

Table 4. Summary of Student Responses to the Questionnaire (N = 23)

Statement	% Agree/Strongly Agree	Mean Score
1. The pre-listening questions helped me understand the listening tasks more easily.	91%	4.39
2. I felt more motivated to participate in listening lessons that began with questions.	87%	4.26
3. The questions made me think about the topic before listening.	95%	4.48
4. Discussing questions with my classmates helped me feel more confident.	83%	4.17
5. I was more focused during listening after answering the questions.	87%	4.30
6. The questions helped me predict important information in the recording.	91%	4.43
7. I enjoyed the lessons more when we used questions at the beginning.	78%	4.04
8. I want teachers to use questioning techniques in future listening lessons.	92%	4.44
9. The questioning activities made the lessons feel more interactive.	85%	4.22
10. I believe I improved my listening skills thanks to the pre-listening questions.	88%	4.26

The questionnaire responses indicate a strongly positive student perception of the use of pre-listening questioning techniques. Over 90% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the questions helped them understand the listening content more easily, made them think about the topic, and supported their ability to predict key information. Items related to motivation, engagement, and confidence also received high ratings, with mean scores ranging from 4.04 to 4.48. These findings suggest that the questioning activities were not only cognitively helpful but also affectively supportive, creating a more interactive and student-centered learning environment.

The open-ended section of the student questionnaire invited participants to reflect on their experiences with pre-listening questioning techniques, focusing on what they found most helpful, how the approach affected their attitudes toward listening lessons, and any suggestions for improvement. Several key themes emerged from their responses. First, many students reported improved comprehension and focus, noting that the questions helped them “know what to expect” and “listen for the right things.” They felt that thinking through the questions beforehand enabled them to “understand the recording better.” Second, learners expressed increased engagement and enjoyment, highlighting that the interactive format “made the class less boring” and “more interesting than just listening and answering questions.” They appreciated the opportunity to “work in pairs” and “share ideas before listening,” which made the lessons more dynamic. Third, students reported reduced anxiety and greater confidence in participating. They described feeling “more relaxed,” “less afraid of getting wrong answers,” and “more confident to participate” after discussing questions with classmates. Lastly, students offered suggestions for more variety, recommending the inclusion of different question types such as “true/false,” “games,” or “topic-related pictures” to enhance novelty and engagement. Illustrative comments included: “*The questions helped me concentrate because I had a purpose when listening,*” “*I liked talking with my friends before listening—it helped me understand the topic more,*” and “*At first I was shy, but the questions made it easier to start speaking and listening.*” These reflections provide strong qualitative support for the effectiveness and appeal of pre-listening questioning techniques.

In sum, the student feedback provides strong qualitative support for the effectiveness of pre-listening questioning techniques. The strategy not only improved listening comprehension, as shown in the test results, but also had a positive psychological and emotional impact on students. Learners felt more motivated, more prepared, and more engaged during lessons that included pre-listening questioning. These findings further validate the role of questioning as a powerful pedagogical tool that enhances both the cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

IV. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that pre-listening questioning techniques can play a significant role in enhancing both listening comprehension and learner engagement among non-English major university students. The experimental group, which received instruction supported by structured pre-listening questions, outperformed the control group significantly in post-test scores. Additionally, the student questionnaire revealed that learners found the questioning strategies highly beneficial for improving focus, reducing anxiety, and increasing motivation. These results are consistent with previous international and local research and extend the literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of this technique within a Vietnamese university context over an extended 14-week intervention.

Internationally, the results are in line with those of Boornazian (2015), who found that pre-listening questions increased learner focus and listening comprehension by encouraging students to engage actively with the topic prior to listening. Similarly, Rahimirad (2014) concluded that incorporating metacognitive strategies such as pre-listening questioning enhanced Iranian students’ ability to anticipate key information and monitor their own comprehension. Both studies emphasized that learners benefit not just from listening practice but from structured scaffolding that supports processing and retention. The present study supports these conclusions and adds further evidence from a Southeast Asian context, suggesting that these cognitive benefits are transferable across diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The current findings also align with research conducted in Vietnam. Le (2018) reported that Vietnamese tertiary learners showed higher motivation and comprehension when pre-listening prediction questions were used. Likewise, Tuan (2012) highlighted that questioning enhanced classroom interaction and retention of content in high school English listening classes. The participants in the present study echoed similar sentiments, describing the questions as useful tools that helped them predict content, stay focused, and feel more confident during the listening tasks. These results strengthen the case for adapting questioning strategies as a core element of listening instruction in Vietnamese higher education.

However, some differences emerged when compared with previous studies. For instance, while Rahimirad (2014) found only moderate learner satisfaction with questioning techniques, the students in this study expressed strong positive attitudes, with over 90% indicating that they wanted questioning to be used more frequently in future lessons. This discrepancy could be attributed to cultural and institutional differences: Vietnamese learners may particularly benefit from strategies that reduce the affective barriers created by teacher-centered approaches, which are still dominant in many local institutions (Nguyen & Boon, 2016). Additionally, the interactive group-based format used in the experimental group of this study (e.g., pair discussion of questions before listening) may have contributed to more favorable learner perceptions compared to individual prediction tasks used in some prior studies.

Another notable aspect of the current research is the longer duration of the intervention (14 weeks), which exceeds the timeframes of many similar studies. The extended period allowed students to become

familiar with the questioning routine and benefit from sustained practice, possibly resulting in more stable improvements in listening skills. This contrasts with shorter interventions such as those in Chen (2005) and Owolewa & Olu (2017), where inconsistent gains were reported, possibly due to limited exposure and practice time.

In summary, the results of this study support the growing consensus that effective pre-listening support, especially through questioning, can bridge the gap between passive and active listening instruction. They affirm the cognitive and affective value of guiding learners to predict, reflect, and focus before engaging with audio input. Furthermore, they demonstrate that such strategies are not only effective in theory but are also feasible, welcomed by learners, and impactful in practice, especially when implemented consistently and interactively in Vietnamese EFL classrooms

V. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of using pre-listening questioning techniques on the listening comprehension and motivation of non-English major freshmen at a Vietnamese university. The results demonstrated that structured questioning prior to listening tasks significantly enhanced learners' understanding and focus, as evidenced by the experimental group's statistically higher post-test scores compared to the control group. Moreover, students exposed to this technique reported greater engagement, increased motivation, and reduced anxiety in listening lessons. These findings confirm that pre-listening questions not only prepare learners cognitively but also support them emotionally by creating a sense of direction and purpose during listening tasks. The study thus reinforces the pedagogical value of treating listening as an active, scaffolded process rather than a passive reception of information.

Based on these outcomes, several implications for EFL instruction can be drawn. First, teachers should incorporate purposeful pre-listening questioning into regular lesson design to activate learners' prior knowledge and promote predictive thinking. These questions should encourage collaborative discussion, guiding students to engage with the topic before the input begins. Second, curriculum developers are advised to embed questioning techniques into textbook activities and lesson frameworks to ensure consistent application. Third, teacher education programs should train future instructors in how to design and use effective questioning strategies that foster interaction and comprehension. Finally, it is recommended that future research extend this work by exploring different types of questions (e.g., display vs. referential), assessing long-term retention, and applying similar interventions in diverse educational settings to strengthen generalizability.

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