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Cognitive Processing Challenges in L2 Listening: A Case Study of Vietnamese Second-Degree English-Majored Students

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ABSTRACT: *Listening comprehension is widely recognized as a cognitively demanding yet often underemphasized skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly in exam-oriented educational systems. Grounded in Anderson's (1995) three-phase model of listening - perception, parsing, and utilization - this study investigates Vietnamese second-degree English-majored students' perceived listening difficulties at the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH). Data was collected from 41 participants using a structured questionnaire comprising 23 items aligned with the three cognitive phases. The findings indicate that participants reported experiencing moderate to high levels of difficulty across all phases. Perception-related challenges, particularly those associated with fast speech and phonological discrimination, were reported most frequently. Perceived difficulties in the parsing phase were linked to unfamiliar topics and information load, while those in the utilization phase were associated with discourse-level comprehension, including identifying relationships among ideas and retrieving detailed information. These findings provide insight into learners' subjective experiences and suggest that listening difficulties may be perceived at multiple stages of the comprehension process. However, given the reliance on self-reported data and the descriptive and exploratory nature of the study, the results should be interpreted with caution and not as direct evidence of actual cognitive processing or listening performance. The study contributes to understanding an underexplored group of adult EFL learners in the Vietnamese context and highlights the need for more process-oriented listening instruction.*

KEYWORDS: **Listening comprehension, cognitive processing; Anderson's model, Vietnamese EFL, adult learners, second-degree EFL students.**

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1. Introduction

Listening comprehension constitutes a foundational component of second language acquisition, functioning as the primary channel through which learners access linguistic input and construct meaning (Field, 2008). Despite its centrality, listening has historically been underrepresented in EFL pedagogy, particularly in contexts characterized by exam-oriented curricula that prioritize grammar, reading, and vocabulary acquisition. This imbalance is especially evident in Vietnam, where learners often have limited exposure to authentic spoken English and insufficient opportunities to develop real-time comprehension skills. Among the four core language skills, listening is the most frequently used in real-life communication, accounting for up to 50% of daily communicative acts (Ahmadi & Gilakjani, 2011). This proportion surpasses speaking, reading, and writing, reflecting its central role in both informal interaction and academic performance. Studies by Murphy (1991) and Ferris (1998) affirm that listening is the most employed skill in classroom settings, especially in English-medium instruction. Furthermore, Tomatis (1991) and Hasan (2000) underscore that listening facilitates the development of other language competencies, particularly speaking and writing, by providing a foundation for phonological, syntactic, and

semantic acquisition. Despite its critical role in language development, listening remains one of the most challenging and underexplored areas in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Mendelsohn, 1994). Learners often face cognitive overload when attempting to decode fast-paced, unfamiliar, or accented input, and their struggles are frequently exacerbated by limited strategy training and instructional support (Liu & Thondhlana, 2015; Erinta & Listyani, 2023). This challenge is particularly evident in Vietnam, where exam-oriented curricula tend to prioritize grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension over oral-aural communication skills (Duong & Chau, 2019; Nguyen & Thai, 2018). Consequently, learners have limited opportunities to develop their listening fluency or engage in real-world communicative tasks. One promising framework for analysing listening comprehension processes and pinpointing areas of difficulty is Anderson's (1995) three-phase model. This model divides the listening process into three sequential but interrelated stages: perception (the decoding of sounds), parsing (the analysis of syntactic and semantic patterns), and utilization (the integration of information into working memory for inferencing and response). Recent research has validated this model across different learner populations and listening tasks (Shen & Park, 2020). However, empirical applications of this framework remain scarce in Southeast Asia, and particularly within Vietnamese higher education, where listening instruction is often marginalized. Moreover, a notable gap exists in the literature regarding adult learners enrolled in second-degree programs. These students, often working professionals, bring unique cognitive and motivational profiles to the language learning process. Despite their systematic exposure to English phonetics, syntax, and lexicology, they frequently report difficulty engaging in authentic spoken interaction. Little is known about the specific listening challenges this population faces, nor how these challenges manifest across the three cognitive phases of comprehension. Addressing this gap is essential for tailoring effective pedagogical strategies that meet their particular learning needs.

This study aims to explore Vietnamese second-degree English-majored students' perceived listening difficulties through the lens of Anderson's (1995) three-phase model of listening comprehension. The research is guided by the following questions:

1. What listening difficulties are perceived by Vietnamese second-degree English-majored students at the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH)?

2. To what extent do students report experiencing difficulties in the perception phase of listening?

3. To what extent do students report experiencing difficulties in the parsing phase?

4. To what extent do students report experiencing difficulties in the utilization phase?

Second-degree English-majored students represent a distinctive group of adult learners whose educational experiences differ from those of traditional undergraduate students. Many of them balance academic study with professional and personal responsibilities while returning to formal language learning after extended periods of limited English use. These characteristics may influence how they experience listening comprehension challenges and how they engage with spoken English in academic settings. Despite the growing number of adult learners in Vietnamese higher education, little research has examined their listening difficulties from a cognitive processing perspective. By applying Anderson's (1995) three-phase model, the present study provides a contextually grounded examination of how listening difficulties are perceived across different stages of the listening process. The study contributes to the literature by extending the application of a well-established cognitive framework to an underexplored learner population and by providing preliminary evidence regarding the listening experiences of adult EFL learners in Vietnam. Although the study adopts a descriptive and exploratory design, the findings may offer useful insights for language instructors seeking to develop more process-oriented approaches to listening instruction for adult learners.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical framework

2.1.1. Definition of listening comprehension

Listening comprehension is widely recognized as a core component of second language acquisition and communicative competence. However, rather than being a passive skill, it is increasingly conceptualized as an active and cognitively demanding process. Underwood (1989) defines listening as the act of attending to and deriving meaning from auditory input, whereas Vandergrift (1999) expands this definition by emphasizing its interactive nature, involving phonological decoding, syntactic processing, and contextual interpretation. Mendelsohn (1994) further highlights the role of listener intention and the ability to process spontaneous speech features such as hesitation markers and non-linear discourse structures. More recent perspectives have shifted toward viewing listening as a dynamic and constructive activity. Sohler (2020) and Weger et al. (2014) characterize listening comprehension as a process in which learners actively construct meaning through interaction with both the input and their prior knowledge. Similarly, Graham and Santos (2020) underscore the importance of metacognitive regulation, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension in real time. While these definitions collectively portray listening as a complex cognitive activity, empirical evidence suggests that learners' engagement with these processes varies across contexts. In exam-oriented environments such as Vietnam, learners are often trained to prioritize discrete linguistic elements rather than holistic meaning-making, which may limit the development of higher-order comprehension skills. Consequently, listening difficulties in such contexts may not only reflect linguistic limitations but also pedagogical orientations that emphasize form over meaning.

2.1.2. Anderson's three-phase model of listening comprehension

A foundational framework for understanding listening comprehension is Anderson's (1995) three-phase model, which conceptualizes listening as a sequence of perception, parsing, and utilization processes. Although originally developed for first language comprehension, this model has been widely adapted and validated in second language contexts (O'Malley et al., 1989; Goh, 2000; Kambhampaty et al., 2024). In the perception phase, listeners decode acoustic signals into phonological units; in the parsing phase, they organize these units into syntactic and semantic representations; and in the utilization phase, they integrate the processed information with background knowledge to derive meaning. Despite its broad applicability, empirical studies reveal that the relative difficulty of these phases varies across learner populations and contexts. Anderson (2000, 2015) identifies coarticulation and reduced forms as major perceptual challenges, particularly for learners with limited exposure to authentic input. In contrast, Vandergrift (2011) and Goh (1999) emphasize the cognitive demands of parsing, particularly the role of working memory in maintaining and integrating linguistic information. Utilization difficulties, as discussed by Nowrouzi et al. (2015) and Taguchi and Kádár (2025), are often linked to inferencing and pragmatic interpretation, especially when learners lack sufficient cultural or contextual knowledge. Importantly, these findings suggest that listening comprehension difficulties are not uniformly distributed across phases but are shaped by contextual variables such as instructional practices, learner proficiency, and exposure to authentic language. For instance, learners in input-rich environments may demonstrate stronger utilization skills, whereas those in exam-oriented systems may struggle more with perception due to limited exposure to natural speech. This variability highlights the need to examine listening difficulties within specific educational contexts.

2.2. Listening comprehension difficulties in EFL contexts

2.2.1. Perception difficulties

Perception difficulties primarily arise from challenges in decoding acoustic signals into recognizable linguistic units. Learners often struggle with word segmentation due

to phonological processes such as elision, assimilation, and coarticulation (Field, 2003; Rost, 2005). Anderson (2000) and Ur (1984) further identify fast speech rate, unfamiliar accents, and intonation patterns as significant barriers. Brown (2001) adds that exposure to informal language features such as idioms and reduced forms can exacerbate these challenges, particularly for learners accustomed to scripted input. Although perception difficulties are consistently reported across EFL contexts, their intensity appears to vary depending on learners' exposure to authentic spoken language. In contexts where learners primarily engage with textbook-based or teacher-controlled input, such as Vietnam, perceptual challenges may be more pronounced. Limited exposure to natural speech reduces learners' ability to develop automaticity in phonological decoding, thereby increasing cognitive load during listening tasks.

2.2.2. Parsing difficulties

Parsing difficulties involve the processing of linguistic input to construct coherent syntactic and semantic representations. Goh (2000) highlights that learners often experience breakdowns at this stage due to cognitive overload and limited working memory capacity. Similarly, Goh (1999) and Graham and Macaro (2008) argue that learners tend to focus on surface-level processing, which hinders deeper comprehension when encountering complex or unfamiliar structures. However, the prominence of parsing difficulties appears to be context-dependent. Studies conducted among lower-proficiency or vocational learners often report parsing as the most challenging phase, reflecting limited syntactic knowledge and processing capacity. In contrast, learners with stronger linguistic foundations may experience fewer parsing difficulties but still struggle when processing dense or unfamiliar content. These variations suggest that parsing challenges are influenced not only by cognitive capacity but also by learners' prior knowledge and strategic competence.

2.2.3. Utilization difficulties

Utilization difficulties emerge when learners attempt to integrate processed linguistic input with background knowledge to derive meaning. Nowrouzi et al. (2015) identify challenges such as difficulty identifying main ideas, interpreting speaker intention, and making inferences. Taguchi and Kádár (2025) emphasize the role of cultural knowledge in pragmatic interpretation, while Omar (2022) highlights the importance of discourse-level processing and schema activation. While utilization difficulties are often associated with higher-order comprehension, their occurrence is influenced by both cognitive and contextual factors. In digitally mediated learning environments, for instance, learners may have increased access to input but reduced opportunities for interaction and feedback, which can hinder the development of inferential skills. This suggests that utilization difficulties may not solely reflect cognitive limitations but also the nature of the learning environment.

2.3. Empirical studies employing Anderson's model

A number of empirical studies have applied Anderson's model to investigate listening comprehension difficulties across different contexts. Goh's (2000) seminal study identified recurring problems across all three phases, including word recognition issues, memory limitations, and difficulties in maintaining coherence. Similarly, Corner (2021) reported that perception difficulties, particularly related to attention and sound discrimination, were most prominent among Chinese learners. In contrast, Tran and Duong (2020) found that parsing difficulties were more prevalent among vocational students, suggesting that learner proficiency and educational background play a significant role in shaping listening challenges. Studies conducted in Middle Eastern contexts (Hamad Al-Khresheh, 2020; Hasan, 2000) have also highlighted the impact of speech rate and unfamiliar topics, further reinforcing the context-dependent nature of listening difficulties. Within the Vietnamese context, Tran and Duong (2020) documented widespread difficulties across all three phases, with particular emphasis on

perception and parsing challenges. However, these studies primarily focus on high school students, leaving a gap in understanding how these difficulties manifest among adult learners in tertiary education, particularly those enrolled in second-degree programs. By focusing on this under-researched population, the present study extends existing research by examining how listening difficulties are distributed across cognitive phases in a context characterized by both prior linguistic training and limited exposure to authentic communication. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how global patterns of listening difficulties are shaped by local educational conditions.

2.4. Conceptual framework

This study is grounded in Anderson's (1995) three-phase model of listening comprehension, which serves as the primary framework guiding the development of the research instrument and the interpretation of findings. The model conceptualizes listening comprehension as a process involving three interrelated phases: perception, parsing, and utilization.

In the present study, the framework was operationalized through the categorization of questionnaire items into these three phases. Perception-related items focused on learners' reported difficulties in recognizing sounds, words, and spoken input. Parsing-related items addressed sentence-level processing, including meaning construction and information retention. Utilization-related items examined discourse-level comprehension, such as identifying main ideas, supporting details, and relationships among ideas. The framework provides a theoretically informed structure for examining learners' perceived listening difficulties across different stages of the listening process. Rather than assuming that the questionnaire directly measures distinct cognitive constructs, the three categories are used as analytical dimensions derived from Anderson's model. This approach allows the study to explore patterns of perceived difficulty across different phases of listening comprehension while remaining consistent with the exploratory nature of the research. Accordingly, Anderson's framework functions as a conceptual lens for organizing and interpreting learners' reported experiences rather than as a validated measurement model. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning the study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research context and participants

This study was conducted at the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH), a public university in southern Vietnam. The

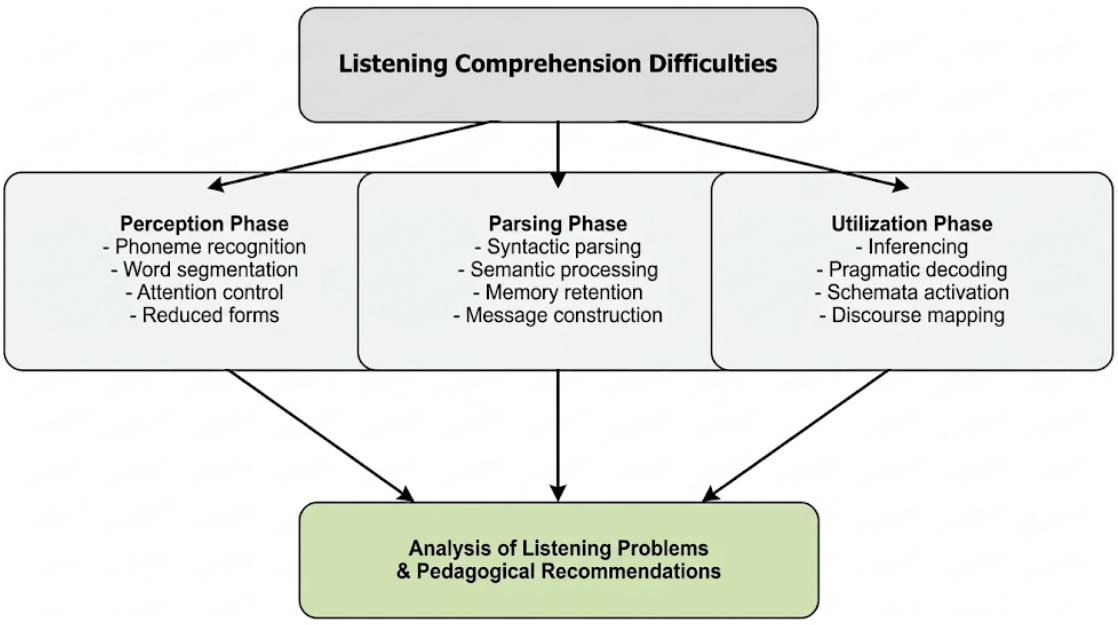


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of the study

participants were enrolled in a second-degree English program designed for adult learners and working professionals who wished to obtain an additional degree in English for academic and professional purposes. Within this program, students are required to complete a sequence of listening courses as part of their language-skill development. A convenience sampling technique was employed. The participants were selected because they had completed the required listening modules at the time of data collection and were therefore considered capable of reflecting on their listening comprehension experiences. A total of 41 students voluntarily participated in the study, including 10 males (24.39%) and 31 females (75.61%). Their ages ranged from 22 to over 45 years old, indicating that the sample represented adult learners rather than traditional undergraduate students. Although no standardized proficiency test was administered specifically for this study, the participants had successfully completed prior listening courses in the program, suggesting that they had at least an intermediate level of English proficiency. Given the small sample size and the use of convenience sampling within a single institutional context, the study should be understood as an exploratory case study. The purpose was not to generalize the findings to all Vietnamese EFL learners, but to provide an initial, contextually grounded account of perceived listening difficulties among second-degree English-majored students.

3.2. Research instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a structured questionnaire designed to investigate learners' perceived listening comprehension difficulties. The questionnaire was developed based on previous studies on L2 listening difficulties (e.g., Goh, 2000; Nowrouzi et al., 2015) and was theoretically informed by Anderson's (1995) three-phase model of listening comprehension. The final instrument consisted of 23 items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The items were categorized into three theoretically derived dimensions: Perception (10 items), Parsing (7 items), and Utilization (6 items). The Perception dimension focused on phonological decoding, speech perception, and lexical recognition. The Parsing dimension addressed sentence-level processing, meaning construction, and information retention. The Utilization dimension examined discourse-level comprehension, inferencing, and the integration of information across a listening text.

To enhance comprehensibility and minimize linguistic bias, the questionnaire was presented bilingually in English and Vietnamese. The translated version was reviewed by two bilingual specialists in applied linguistics to ensure semantic equivalence and content appropriateness. Prior to the main study, the instrument was piloted with 15 second-degree English-major students. The pilot results yielded an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .80, indicating acceptable internal consistency. For the main study (N = 41), internal consistency reliability was examined for both the overall instrument and the three subscales. As shown in Table 1, all subscales demonstrated acceptable levels of internal consistency ($\alpha > .70$), supporting the reliability of the questionnaire for exploratory analysis. The reliability coefficients were satisfactory and exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of .70 recommended for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2019). Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were $\alpha = .78$ for Perception, $\alpha = .80$ for Parsing, $\alpha = .78$ for Utilization, and $\alpha = .86$ for the overall instrument.

Table 1.Internal consistency reliability of the listening difficulty questionnaire and its subscales

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's α
Perception	10	.78
Parsing	7	.80
Utilization	6	.78
Overall Instrument	23	.86

It should be noted that the questionnaire was developed as a theory-informed exploratory instrument rather than a fully validated

psychometric scale. Although the items were systematically mapped onto Anderson's (1995) three-phase framework, no exploratory factor analysis or confirmatory factor analysis was conducted due to the limited sample size. Consequently, the three dimensions should be interpreted as theoretically derived analytical categories rather than statistically validated latent constructs.

Furthermore, one perception-related item ("I know the meaning of a word when seeing it") may not fully represent a listening-specific difficulty because it refers to visual lexical recognition rather than auditory processing. While the item was retained to preserve the structure of the original instrument, its interpretation requires caution. Future studies are encouraged to refine or replace this item with a more listening-oriented indicator.

3.3. Data collection procedures and analytical techniques

Data collection was conducted over a three-week period from February 4 to 26, 2025, with an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the survey. Out of 42 eligible students, 41 completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 97.6%. The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were employed to summarize participants' responses. This analytical approach is appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study, which aims to identify patterns of perceived difficulty rather than establish causal relationships. To interpret the degree of listening difficulty, mean scores were categorized into three levels: low ($M \leq 1.65$), moderate ($M = 1.66 - 3.35$), and high ($M \geq 3.36$), following a modified approach based on Nowrouzi et al. (2015). While this categorization facilitates interpretability and comparison across dimensions, it should be noted that these thresholds are not universally standardized and may appear somewhat arbitrary. Accordingly, the classification of difficulty levels in this study should be understood as heuristic rather than definitive. The categories serve as a practical tool for descriptive interpretation rather than as strict boundaries of learner performance. Future studies may consider employing more robust statistical techniques, such as inferential analysis or scale validation procedures, to refine these classifications.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the School of Foreign Languages at UEH. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality. All data were securely stored and used exclusively for research purposes. The study did not involve vulnerable populations or any form of deception, and it adhered to institutional ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

4. Results

4.1. Perception phase difficulties

The perception phase concerns the initial decoding of auditory input, including the recognition of sounds and lexical items. As presented in Table 4.1, participants reported an overall high level of difficulty in this phase ($M = 3.42$). Among the items, difficulty in understanding fast speech was the most frequently reported challenge ($M = 4.22$), followed by confusion between similar-sounding words ($M = 3.90$) and difficulty recognizing familiar words in spoken form ($M = 3.49$). Other items, including concentration and word recall, were generally rated at moderate levels. The findings suggest that the perception phase was perceived as the most challenging stage of listening comprehension by the participants, with reported difficulties concentrated in speech rate, phonological discrimination, and lexical recognition.

4.2. Parsing phase difficulties

The parsing phase involves the processing of linguistic input to construct sentence-level

Table 4.1.Perception difficulties encountered by EFL learners

Item	Mean	SD	Level
I can hear the sounds but not clear words.	3.32	0.69	Moderate
I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak too fast.	4.22	0.69	High
I find it difficult when I miss the beginning of the text.	3.46	0.81	High
I know the meaning of a word when seeing it.	3.49	0.68	High
I am slow to recall the meaning of familiar words.	2.95	0.86	Moderate
I mistake one word for another.	3.90	0.77	High
I encounter too many unfamiliar words and/or expressions.	3.32	0.61	Moderate
I fail to recognize many sounds and words.	3.10	0.58	Moderate
I miss the next part of the listening while thinking about earlier parts.	3.34	0.79	Moderate
I find it hard to concentrate on the listening comprehension.	3.12	0.84	Moderate
Average Dimension Score	3.42	0.73	High

meaning. As shown in Table 4.2, participants reported a moderate level of difficulty overall (M = 3.28). The most prominent challenges were related to following unfamiliar topics (M = 3.83), processing dense information within a limited time (M = 3.59), and inferring word meaning from context (M = 3.51). Other items, such as memory retention and segmentation of longer utterances, were rated at moderate levels. These results suggest that parsing difficulties are primarily associated with cognitive load and the processing of unfamiliar or information-rich input.

4.3. Utilization phase difficulties

The utilization phase refers to the integration of processed input into a coherent understanding of the overall message. As indicated in Table 4.3, the overall level of difficulty in this phase was moderate (M = 3.28). Participants reported higher levels of difficulty in identifying supporting ideas (M = 3.85), retrieving detailed information (M = 3.71), and understanding relationships among ideas (M = 3.37). Other aspects, such as identifying main ideas and sequencing information, were rated at moderate levels. These findings indicate that learners experience challenges primarily at the discourse level, particularly in organizing and interpreting information beyond individual sentences.

4.4. Summary of listening difficulties

Table 4.4 presents a summary of listening

Table 4.2. Parsing difficulties encountered by EFL learners

Item	Mean	SD	Level
I forget phrases or words just heard.	2.71	0.78	Moderate
I cannot understand the meaning of the sentences.	3.05	0.63	Moderate
It is difficult to divide the long listening into several parts.	2.83	0.70	Moderate
It is difficult to guess the accurate meaning of words in sentences.	3.51	0.60	High
It is difficult to follow unfamiliar topics.	3.83	0.86	High
It is difficult to understand a lot of new information in a short time.	3.59	0.81	High
I miss the next part because of earlier problems.	3.41	0.67	High
Average Dimension Score	3.28	0.72	Moderate

Table 4.3. Utilization difficulties encountered by EFL learners

Item	Mean	SD	Level
I understand the words but not the intended message.	2.88	0.71	Moderate
I have difficulty getting the order of ideas in a text.	2.73	0.71	Moderate
I get confused about the main idea.	3.12	0.81	Moderate
I have difficulty getting the details.	3.71	0.68	High
I have difficulty understanding the relationships among ideas.	3.37	0.70	High
I have difficulty getting the supporting ideas.	3.85	0.73	High
Average Dimension Score	3.28	0.72	Moderate

difficulties across the three cognitive phases. Perception difficulties were rated highest (M = 3.42), followed by parsing (M = 3.28) and utilization (M = 3.28), both at moderate levels. The results show that listening difficulties are distributed across all three phases, with perceptual processing emerging as the most prominent area of challenge among the participants.

Table 4.4. Summary of EFL learners' listening difficulties

Phase	Mean	Level
Perception	3.42	High
Parsing	3.28	Moderate
Utilization	3.28	Moderate
Overall	3.32	Moderate

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Vietnamese second-degree English-majored students reported experiencing listening difficulties across all three phases of Anderson's (1995) model, with perception-related challenges being most frequently identified. Given the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data, these results should be understood as reflecting learners' perceived difficulties, rather than direct evidence of actual cognitive processing limitations. Accordingly, the discussion focuses on interpreting these perceptions while maintaining alignment with the descriptive and exploratory nature of the study. In the perception phase, participants most frequently reported difficulties related to fast speech and phonological discrimination. This pattern is consistent with prior research highlighting the role of speech rate and phonological variability in shaping listening experiences (Field, 2003; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). However, the present findings do not demonstrate learners' actual inability to process such input; rather, they suggest that learners perceive low-level decoding processes as particularly challenging. This distinction is important, as self-reported difficulty may be influenced by factors such as prior exposure, confidence, or metacognitive awareness, which were not directly examined in this study. At the parsing stage, the reported difficulties associated with unfamiliar topics and dense information suggest that learners may experience increased challenge when processing linguistically or conceptually complex input. Previous studies have linked such challenges to cognitive load and working memory demands (Goh, 2000; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Nevertheless, as the present study does not include direct measures of cognitive capacity, these explanations should be treated as interpretive rather than empirically established. More cautiously, the findings indicate that learners report greater difficulty when dealing with complex or unfamiliar content, which may affect their ability to construct sentence-level meaning.

Similarly, in the utilization phase, participants reported difficulties in identifying supporting ideas, understanding relationships among ideas, and retrieving detailed information. These patterns are broadly aligned with earlier research

on discourse-level processing in L2 listening (Nowrouzi et al., 2015; Taguchi & Kádár, 2025). However, as discourse comprehension was not directly assessed, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of learners' actual ability to construct global meaning. Instead, they suggest that learners perceive challenges in managing and organizing information beyond the sentence level. The findings suggest that learners perceive listening difficulties across multiple phases of the comprehension process. While perception-related difficulties were reported most frequently, challenges were also identified in the parsing and utilization phases. This pattern is broadly consistent with Anderson's (1995) framework, which conceptualizes listening as involving multiple stages of processing. However, the present study does not provide evidence regarding causal relationships among these phases. While this pattern is consistent with the recursive nature of Anderson's (1995) model, the present study does not provide empirical evidence of causal relationships between phases. Any interpretation of interdependence among phases should therefore be considered theoretical rather than data-driven. From a contextual perspective, the reported difficulties may be associated with characteristics of the Vietnamese EFL learning environment, such as limited exposure to authentic spoken input and a focus on form-based instruction (Nguyen & Thai, 2018). However, since these contextual variables were not directly examined, such explanations should be understood as plausible interpretations rather than confirmed findings. Further research is required to investigate the extent to which instructional conditions shape learners' listening experiences.

An important aspect of the present findings concerns the characteristics of the participant group. Unlike traditional undergraduate EFL students, second-degree learners are typically adult students who return to formal language study after completing a previous degree and, in many cases, while maintaining full-time employment. These learners often possess greater academic maturity and broader professional experience, yet they may have fewer opportunities for sustained exposure to authentic English communication in their daily lives. Such characteristics may help explain why participants reported difficulties across all three phases of listening comprehension despite having completed multiple listening courses within the program. While their educational background may support vocabulary knowledge and analytical thinking, real-time processing of spoken language remains cognitively demanding, particularly when speech is rapid, information-rich, or contextually unfamiliar. In addition, work and family commitments may limit opportunities for extensive listening practice outside the classroom, potentially influencing learners' perceptions of difficulty. Although these interpretations were not directly examined in the present study, they highlight the importance of considering learner background when investigating listening comprehension. Future studies should explore how factors such as professional experience, age, language exposure, and learning motivation interact with listening performance among adult EFL learners. This study contributes to the growing body of research on L2 listening comprehension by focusing on an underexplored population in the Vietnamese context. While previous studies have primarily examined secondary school students or traditional undergraduate learners, relatively little attention has been given to adult learners enrolled in second-degree English programs. By applying Anderson's (1995) three-phase model, the study provides a structured description of how listening difficulties are perceived across different stages of the listening process. The findings also demonstrate the practical usefulness of Anderson's framework as a conceptual tool for organizing learners' reported listening experiences. Although the study does not seek to validate the model empirically, it illustrates how the framework can be applied to interpret listening difficulties in a specific educational context. In this respect, the study extends the contextual application of the model and contributes preliminary evidence regarding the listening experiences of adult Vietnamese EFL learners.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1. Limitations and conclusions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied exclusively on self-reported questionnaire data, which reflect learners' perceptions rather than actual listening performance. Second, the sample size was relatively small and drawn from a single institution, limiting the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Third, the questionnaire was theoretically informed by Anderson's (1995) framework but was not subjected to factor-analytic validation. Finally, the study adopted a descriptive design and therefore cannot establish causal relationships among the different phases of listening comprehension. Future research should employ larger samples and combine self-report measures with performance-based and qualitative data to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of listening difficulties.

This study examined Vietnamese second-degree English-majored students' perceived listening difficulties through the lens of Anderson's (1995) three-phase model. The findings suggest that learners report challenges across all stages of the listening process, with perceptual difficulties being particularly salient. Rather than providing direct evidence of cognitive processing limitations, the study offers a context-specific account of how learners experience listening comprehension in a tertiary EFL setting. In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by extending the application of a phase-based cognitive framework to an underexplored population of adult EFL learners, highlighting how listening difficulties may be perceived across multiple levels of processing. These findings support the relevance of Anderson's model as an interpretive framework while also suggesting that the manifestation of listening challenges may vary depending on learner characteristics and educational contexts. From a pedagogical perspective, the results point to the potential value of more process-oriented listening instruction that addresses different stages of comprehension. However, such implications should be interpreted cautiously, as they are derived from self-reported data and were not directly examined within the research design. Future research is needed to build on these findings by incorporating larger samples and triangulating self-reported perceptions with performance-based and qualitative measures. Such approaches would enable a more comprehensive and empirically grounded understanding of listening comprehension processes in diverse EFL contexts.

6.2. Recommendations and implications

The findings suggest that listening instruction should adopt a more process-oriented approach that explicitly addresses the three phases of comprehension. Given the prominence of perceptual difficulties, greater emphasis should be placed on developing phonological awareness and increasing exposure to authentic spoken input. At the same time, instructional practices should support learners in managing syntactic complexity and developing strategies for discourse-level comprehension, including identifying key ideas and interpreting relationships among them. From a broader perspective, the results underscore the need to move beyond form-focused instruction toward more integrated approaches that combine linguistic, cognitive, and strategic dimensions of listening. This is particularly important in contexts where learners have limited opportunities to engage with authentic communication. Future research should build on the exploratory nature of this study by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, as well as triangulating self-reported data with performance-based measures and qualitative methods. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of listening comprehension and strengthen the empirical foundation for pedagogical interventions.

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