

# Task-based listening activities in english as a foreign language classroom



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**Abstract** This study aims to investigate the effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) through listening activities on first-year English major students' listening skills at Ba Ria – Vung Tau College of Education (BVCE) in Vietnam. The research subjects were 50 English major students from Ba Ria – Vung Tau College of Education during the 2024-2025 academic year. The participants were divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. Based on a three-phase framework (i.e., pre-task, while-task and post-task), the TBLT method was implemented with the experimental group for one semester, while the control group was taught using a traditional method. The research employed mixed methods, and the instruments used were listening tests, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with experimental group students, which highlighted positive attitudes, increased confidence, and perceived benefits of collaborative, real-life listening tasks. The experimental group successfully performed the assigned listening tasks, indicating TBLT's effectiveness in enhancing listening skills. Quantitative results revealed a statistically significant improvement in listening scores for the experimental group compared to the control group, while qualitative findings showed that students experienced reduced anxiety, improved vocabulary usage, and more effective application of listening strategies. Additionally, students displayed positive attitudes toward the method. The study provides pedagogical insights for improving EFL listening instruction, especially in Vietnamese tertiary contexts. It confirms the benefits of using contextualized and task-based approaches to foster students' listening proficiency and engagement. The findings also suggest that integrating TBLA encourages learner autonomy, promotes interaction in pairs and groups, and can be adapted for other language skills to enhance overall language competence. Discussion. Based on these findings, it is suggested that task-based listening activities be incorporated into English language instruction for first-year EFL students in Vietnamese tertiary contexts. The approach not only improves listening performance but also fosters learner motivation, reduces anxiety, and encourages active engagement through real-life communication tasks.

**Keywords:** pre-task, while-task, post-task, motivation, student engagement, anxiety

## 1. Introduction

Listening is the most essential language skill and a component of communication since it allows us to communicate our thoughts with others. According to Brown (2001), "Listening is the major component in language learning and teaching because in the classroom learners do more listening than speaking." This means that listening plays an important role in daily life. Even though students recognize the difficulty of mastering listening comprehension, they often neglect it in their learning process. This presents a significant challenge in education, especially for students. Essentially, listening ability is the capacity to grasp the meaning of what is heard. Through this process, students can both understand and respond to what has been asked or said. Ultimately, without accurate listening, particularly for easily misconstrued messages, all effective communication breaks down.

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) education in Vietnam, a persistent issue is observed: the majority of undergraduate students, who have typically undertaken English studies for 7-10 years prior to tertiary education, nonetheless struggle with accurate English listening comprehension, especially in real-world scenarios involving international speakers. This raises a crucial question about current teaching practices and learning strategies in Vietnamese EFL classrooms.

Recent research has emphasized that traditional approaches in EFL classrooms, which focus predominantly on grammar and reading, often fail to adequately develop listening skills and communicative competence (Vandergrift & Goh, 2022; Aryadoust, 2022; Le, 2024). In addition, a lack of authentic listening materials, minimal exposure to real-life English interactions, and limited use of effective listening strategies contribute to persistent comprehension difficulties among students (Goh, 2008; Chou, 2017).

English is taught as a compulsory subject across Vietnam. However, classroom instruction typically focuses on grammar, writing, and reading, often without adequately developing all four English skills, particularly listening and speaking. This gap between curriculum focus and communicative needs highlights the necessity of adopting more interactive and student-



centered approaches, such as task-based language teaching (TBLT), which has been shown to improve listening comprehension, motivation, and learner engagement in various EFL contexts (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2017; Promruang, 2012; Sarani et al., 2014).

There is a noticeable demand among students for improved critical thinking and listening abilities. This issue is especially pronounced at Ba Ria - Vung Tau College of Education (BVCE), where there is scarcely any dedicated listening instruction for first-year English major students. To address this challenge, it is essential to implement innovative teaching methods that combine authentic listening tasks and collaborative learning to help students overcome both linguistic and emotional barriers.

This study aims to investigate the effects of task-based listening activities on the listening skills of first-year English majors at BVCE. Specifically, it aims to identify the main factors contributing to listening difficulties, examine how TBLA influences listening comprehension, and explore students' attitudes toward this approach. The study addresses the following research questions:

- (i) What are the primary factors contributing to difficulties in students' listening ability at BVCE?
- (ii) How do task-based listening activities (TBLA) impact students' listening ability?
- (iii) What are students' attitudes toward task-based listening activities?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. English listening skill

#### 2.1.1. The general concept of listening

Listening is a receptive skill. Mukminatun (2009) believes that listening is a mental activity that is difficult to define since it is undetectable. Listeners must be able to differentiate between sounds, comprehend language and grammatical structures, and interpret this information both in the immediate and wider sociocultural setting of the speech. Listening is defined by Fachriza et al. (2023) as the process through which spoken language is translated to meaning in the mind. He says that listening includes three steps: Hearing; Listening; Auding.

#### 2.1.2. Types of listening

Díaz-Rico (2002) categorizes listening into three forms based on its specific goal: (1) Listening to repeat: Aims to improve accurate pronunciation by having students repeat heard words; (2) Listening to comprehend: Focuses on developing students' understanding of content. This is often done by having students answer questions or complete tasks based on listening materials; (3) Listening to communicate: Seeks to enhance students' overall communication skills and effective, meaningful speech. This involves integrating all language abilities, including anticipating inquiries, understanding questions, taking notes, and practicing pronunciation.

Rost (2011) claims that there are six forms of listening that students must be aware of. The six forms of listening are as follows: (1) Intensive: The student concentrates on what is being stated. Teacher's comments on accuracy; (2) Selective: The learner tries to extract important information and create or use it in a meaningful way. During the task, the teacher will intervene and provide comments; (3) Interactive: In collaborative assignments, the learner engages orally with others to acquire knowledge or negotiate solutions. Teacher feedback on the interaction's form and outcome. (4) Extensive: The learner hears lengthier excerpts and completes meaning-oriented activities. Teacher-directed training on comprehension methods; teacher-provided global feedback; (5) Responsive: The learner looks for opportunities to reply and express her own thoughts and views. A learner's production is pushed by the teacher; (6) Autonomous: The learner chooses its own extracts and tasks, keeps track of his or her progress, and determines his or her own patterns of engagement with others. On a learning route, the teacher provides global feedback.

#### 2.1.3. Importance of listening skills in language learning and teaching

According to Cameron (2001), listening is the receptive use of language, and as the purpose is to make sense of speech, the attention is on meaning rather than language. Sevik (2012) claimed that listening is how spoken language becomes input for students. As a result, it is the initial step of learning a new language. This occurs in the classroom by listening to the teacher, real materials, or other students. It is the process of deciphering signals from many sources. Linse (2005) believes that training listening skills is equally essential for the development of other language abilities. Teachers, on the other hand, must be mindful that any type of listening comprehension exercise must be effectively directed and have specific goals.

Recent research emphasizes that listening comprehension is not only a receptive skill but also a cognitively and metacognitively complex process. Learners benefit from strategies that involve attention control, prediction, and reflection to understand spoken input (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Aryadoust (2022) highlighted the multidimensional nature of listening assessment, demonstrating that effective listening instruction should integrate both bottom-up and top-down processes, alongside learner self-monitoring. Furthermore, Sujatha (2024) found that technology-assisted listening activities, such as interactive audio-visual tasks, significantly improve learners' engagement, comprehension, and retention, confirming the importance of designing varied and meaningful listening experiences in the classroom.

#### 2.1.4. The principles of teaching listening

Nunan (2003) offered the following principles: (1) Integrate Information Processing Systems: Students should experience both bottom-up processing (focusing on linguistic details such as words and grammar) and top-down processing (using background knowledge and context). Combining these approaches, for instance, through pre-listening brainstorming, helps create a more integrated understanding. (2) Expose Students to Diverse Listening Situations: Teachers should introduce various listening scenarios to help students focus their attention based on the goal. Nunan highlights two types: (i) Specific listening: Where students aim to find particular details within a text. (ii) Global listening: Where students try to grasp the main idea, sequence of events, or overall information. (3) Teach a Wide Range of Activities: Listening tasks should be tailored to students' abilities and should avoid demanding excessive or complex output. For example, asking a beginner to write a full summary of a story might be counterproductive, as it could mask difficulties in comprehension with difficulties in writing. Tasks that require too much output can also make it hard for teachers to discern if a student truly did not understand the listening material or simply struggled to express their comprehension.

Brown (2006) believes that listening in another language is difficult, but we can make it easier by using what we know about activating prior knowledge, assisting students in organizing their learning by considering their listening purposes, and he proposed four principles of teaching listening: (1) Activation of prior knowledge for improved listening comprehension. (2) Systematic presentation of listening for main ideas, listening for details, and listening and making inferences. (3) Stimulating the integration of real-world cultural information for students to know and share. (4) Presentation of extensive listening tasks leading to personalized speaking.

These principles, drawn from both classic (Nunan, 2003; Brown, 2006) and contemporary perspectives (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021), indicate that effective listening instruction requires balancing bottom-up and top-down processes through meaningful tasks. This alignment suggests that listening comprehension can be effectively developed within a task-based framework where learners actively construct meaning rather than passively receive it.

### 2.2. Task-based language teaching (TBLT)

#### 2.2.1. The task-based framework

Willis (1996) invented the task-based-language framework. A TBLT-lesson includes three major stages: (i) The pre-task provides easy access to the topic that the students will be exploring. It often comprises a brief task activity. The teacher assists students in comprehending the task's concept and objectives. (ii) Also known as the "while-task," this is the main activity phase. It comprises planning and reporting. In the planning phase, students discuss the task, collaboratively work out solutions, and prepare their final presentation, which often involves drafting and rehearsing. Following this, the reporting phase sees students presenting their findings, sharing written reports, or engaging in debates and comparisons of their results. (iii) Language Focus (Post-task) is the final task, and students' duties have presented their results to the class. They are given feedback or evaluation in the language emphasis. It is divided into two sections: Analysis and application.

#### 2.2.2. Overview of TBLT and TBLA

The TBLT is an approach that supplies a natural context of language use to learners through communicative tasks. The goal of the tasks is to stimulate real communications in the target language. In the TBLT, the learners prepare for the task, report the task and then learn the language that arises naturally in the task cycle (Willis, 1996). According to Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) one of the main features that makes TBLT different from previous language teaching methods is that it relies on research derived from second language acquisition. The most important component of TBLT is Task, to make the TBLT method successful in teaching; teachers must rely on tasks and activities to design lessons.

Task-based listening activities require students to activate their prior knowledge and contextual understanding to interpret what they hear, as well as comprehend the roles and relationships between speakers and listeners for effective meaning-making and response. To ensure effective lessons, teachers should employ realistic listening tasks and incorporate a variety of texts (both formal and informal). This approach boosts student confidence and helps them overcome detrimental habits such as omitting words or losing focus. A typical listening task unfolds in three stages: pre-listening (preparing the context and activating knowledge), while-listening (engaging with the task and responding to information), and post-listening (developing skills through activities such as summarizing or role-playing) (Shaby & John, 2019).

The theoretical foundation of TBLT has also been strengthened by recent studies. Ellis (2017) argues that task-based approaches provide authentic contexts for language use and support the development of communicative competence, particularly in listening and speaking. Long (2016) emphasized the role of interactional feedback in TBLT, showing that tasks encourage learners to negotiate meaning and develop comprehension skills effectively. Xiao (2025) demonstrated that blended TBLT tasks - combining online and classroom activities - enhance learners' listening comprehension by offering repeated exposure, contextualized practice, and collaborative problem-solving opportunities. These findings align with the original task cycle proposed by Willis (1996) but expand its applicability in modern, technology-enhanced classrooms.

The task-based framework (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2017) complements listening pedagogy by promoting authentic communication and learner autonomy. Recent studies (Chou, 2017; Hashemzahi et al., 2023; Sujatha, 2024) confirm that TBLT facilitates the integration of cognitive, metacognitive, and affective dimensions of listening, leading to deeper comprehension and engagement.

### 2.3. Factors affecting listening abilities

Vandergrift (2007) found that a lack of interaction also means that students do not have the opportunity to become accustomed to intonation, speaking speed and contextual factors in real communication. Research shows that exposure to English in real-life communication situations helps learners improve their listening comprehension significantly. According to Byram (1997), cultural understanding can affect the way learners approach language and communication. When there is a lack of interaction, students may have difficulty grasping intonation, expressions, and other cultural elements, leading to misunderstandings or inaccuracies in communication. With Goh's (2008) study, which showed that learners often have difficulty maintaining attention during listening, affecting their ability to grasp information. Many students lack effective listening skills, making them easily distracted. When they do not understand the content, they may lose interest and attention. Goh's (2021) study emphasized that "maintaining attention is an important factor in remembering what they have heard". Schunk's (2003) study found that "positive motivation can reduce anxiety and stress levels, thereby improving attention".

Integrating cognitive (attention, processing) and affective (motivation, anxiety) factors (Goh, 2008; Schunk, 2003; Aryadoust, 2022) highlights the importance of designing listening tasks that balance challenge and support. Within TBLT, such tasks can be scaffolded to sustain attention and reduce anxiety through interactive, meaning-focused activities.

### 2.4. The impacts of TBLT on students' listening activities

Incorporating listening activities in the pre-learning tasks made a significant contribution to students' advancement of foreign language input (Chou, 2017). - Regarding the importance of these particular contexts of learning materials in TBLT, Jiang (2017) asserted that real-life and contextual tasks encouraged students to practice their English skills. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) profoundly impacts the instruction of listening skills. It offers a practical framework that empowers students to engage in authentic communication. Furthermore, TBLT fosters the development of students' listening abilities by providing various opportunities for practice across diverse contexts and situations. This approach also motivates students to apply their existing knowledge and skills to solve real-life problems, thereby significantly boosting their motivation and active engagement in the learning process." (Hashemzahi et al., 2023)

### 2.5. The students' attitudes toward TBLT

When the researchers used different strategies, such as: role playing cards, group activities, technology and different assessment forms, students expressed positive feelings, enjoyment and fun, and the researchers recommended that teachers in similar university-level contexts should implement different strategies, such as: group wok, role playing, cards, videos and some applications, i.e. Padlet to motivate students to bridge the gap between school life and university life. It was also found that such strategies help to change students' attitudes toward listening (Masood & Qadomi, 2020). To help these students improve their listening and speaking skills, the teachers had to find ways to get them love listening and speaking. -Since students' performance in class activities and skills is important for them, the first step could be arousing their interest in such activities and language skills, also helping them liminate negative attitudes toward the activities and skills (Zoghi & Asadzadian, 2020). Both students and teachers highly understand and value Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), believing it significantly enhances the effectiveness of their teaching and learning processes. They find that TBLT actively motivates students through the authentic use of the target language, making learning materials more accessible by placing learners at the center of classroom activities (Kambali, 2016). Learners expressed favorable perceptions of the task-based listening approach, reporting that it supported the development of their listening abilities and contributed to improved listening performance. Moreover, adopting a task-based framework in listening instruction enables teachers to make more informed and flexible pedagogical choices tailored to different classroom contexts (Tran & Ngo, 2024).

The convergence of evidence from various contexts (Iran, Indonesia, Vietnam) underscores that TBLT not only enhances listening comprehension but also fosters positive learner attitudes through engagement and authenticity (Zoghi & Asadzadian, 2020; Tran & Ngo, 2024). This supports the theoretical claim that learning occurs most effectively when language use is meaningful and goal-oriented (Ellis, 2017; Willis, 1996).

### 2.6. Previous study

Some previous studies that have been read by researchers are as follows:

Sarani et al. (2014) in the journal *Gist Education and Learning Research Journal* entitled the effect of video-based tasks in the listening comprehension of Iranian Pre-intermediate EFL Learners. This study investigates the effectiveness of video-

based learning in students in Iran. The study focused on the effectiveness of video-based learning materials in enhancing students' understanding of authentic texts, and the results showed a significant improvement in listening comprehension.

The second previous study was taken from Nahavandi (2011) in a journal entitled the effect of task-based activities on EFL learners' reading comprehension. This research investigates the effectiveness of task-based learning on students' reading skills. The author uses experimental methods in which students are given activities based on the task while the control class is not. There was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The last previous research is an article from Promruang (2012) on his thesis entitled "The use of tasks-based learning to improve English listening and speaking abilities of Mattayomsuksa 1 students at Piboonprachasan school. This research investigates solutions for low motivated learning. The author uses interview techniques, questionnaires and diaries. The results show that student motivation increases.

Recent research has extended these findings and focused more specifically on listening skills. Mustapha (2023) found that online task-based learning effectively enhanced secondary students' EFL listening comprehension in Nigeria. Le (2024) reported that TBLT significantly improved learners' listening, speaking, and writing abilities in EFL classrooms. Zhou and Deocampo (2023) highlighted that students perceived task-based approaches positively, noting increased engagement and comprehension in listening activities. Ebedy (2017) demonstrated that task-based instruction substantially improved young adult learners' listening performance through structured and interactive tasks. Gong et al. (2025) emphasized the benefits of integrating blended learning with TBLT, showing that repeated exposure to contextualized listening tasks enhanced comprehension and retention.

The difference between current and past research lies in the type of skill being analyzed. The first study focused only on video reality or reading/listening/speaking in isolation, while current research investigates listening comprehension using more varied realia and authentic contexts, whereas current research will focus its research on a more varied range of realia. Previous research is more dominant in discussing reading, writing and speaking skills than listening. Therefore, research will now focus on listening skills. The things adopted by researchers are the technique of data retrieval and how data collection. Moreover, previous research primarily explored task effects on motivation or reading, whereas the present study investigates task-based listening activities specifically, adopting data collection techniques suitable for evaluating listening comprehension and learner engagement.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

#### *3.1. Research design*

The researchers conducted experimental research using a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data. Participants were divided into a control group and an experimental group, randomly assigned from two existing classes. The experimental group received task-based listening activities (TBLA), while the control group followed traditional listening instruction.

Data were collected through pretests and posttests of listening skills, along with questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze students' performance and measure the improvement in listening abilities. The qualitative data collected from questionnaire responses were analyzed thematically to triangulate the quantitative results and provide deeper insights into students' perceptions of the TBLA approach.

#### *3.2. Participants*

The participants were 50 first-year English-major students at Ba Ria – Vung Tau College of Education, selected randomly from two existing classes (28D1 and 28D2). The students were assigned to two groups: the experimental group consisted of students from class 28D1, and the control group consisted of students from class 28D2. All participants had studied English as a compulsory subject throughout their high school years. Their English listening proficiency levels were relatively similar, with low scores recorded in the initial diagnostic listening tests.

#### *3.3. Instruments*

##### *3.3.1. Pretest and posttest*

The pretest and posttest were used to quantitatively measure changes in students' listening proficiency before and after the intervention. Structure and Alignment: Both tests adhered to the standard KET/A2 Key Listening format (comprising 5 parts) and consisted of a total of 25 questions (Q1-25) based on authentic English listening passages (short conversations and monologs). The tests used objective scoring formats (multiple choice and completion). The total score was 10 points, evenly distributed across the 25 questions.

To ensure validity and reliability, both tests were adapted from official Cambridge KET practice materials and piloted with a comparable group of students prior to the study. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was computed to confirm internal consistency.

### 3.3.2. Pre- and post-motivational questionnaires

Two motivational questionnaires were employed to investigate students' attitudes, motivation, and difficulties in English listening before and after the intervention.

The pre-motivational questionnaire included 9 items, focusing on factors affecting students' listening ability, such as limited vocabulary, lack of real-life listening practice, anxiety during listening tasks, and insufficient exposure in class. It aimed to identify the main difficulties and contextual constraints in the students' learning environment before applying task-based listening activities (TBLA).

The post-motivational questionnaire consisted of 7 items, that explored students' attitudes toward task-based listening lessons after the treatment. It examined aspects such as enjoyment, engagement, perceived usefulness, confidence, and preference for TBLA compared to traditional methods.

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The items were adapted from established motivational frameworks and reviewed by two experts in ELT methodology to ensure content validity and clarity.

### 3.3.3. Semi-structured interview

To gain deeper insights into students' perceptions of task-based listening instruction, a semi-structured interview was conducted with five students selected randomly from the experimental group after the posttest. The interview aimed to explore students' attitudes toward task-based listening activities (TBLA), their perceived benefits and challenges, and their suggestions for improving future listening lessons. The interview guide included open-ended questions related to students' motivation, learning experiences, and perceived improvement, ensuring flexibility and depth in responses.

### 3.4. Data collection & analysis

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were utilized. Three main instruments were employed: listening tests, motivational questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The instruments included listening tests, motivational questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The data collection process was carried out in three stages: the pretest and pre-questionnaire were administered before the intervention; the posttest and post-questionnaire were administered after the treatment; and finally, semi-structured interviews were held with five students from the experimental group to gain deeper insights into their learning experiences.

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, median, mode, and SD) were computed for the listening test scores and Likert scale responses. Inferential analyses included an independent samples t test for between group comparisons at posttest and a paired samples t test for within group comparisons from pretest to posttest. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ . These procedures provided a clear assessment of the effects of task based listening activities on students' listening performance.

Qualitative data collected from the questionnaires and semi structured interviews were analyzed thematically. Open coding was used to identify recurring themes related to students' attitudes, perceived benefits, challenges, engagement, and motivational aspects in listening activities after the TBLA intervention. The qualitative findings were then triangulated with quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of task-based listening activities.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Results

- The pre-motivational questionnaire:

The first step was administering a pre-intervention motivational questionnaire. This questionnaire was distributed to both the experimental and control groups prior to the implementation of the experimental lessons. A comparison of the responses revealed no statistically significant differences in motivation levels between the two groups. Fifty students (N=50) participated in this study. Before starting the experimental treatment, the students were asked about the factors affecting students' listening ability in English at BVCE. As shown in Table 1, the most prominent difficulties reported involved lack of real-life listening practice, challenges with guessing meaning from context, limited use of listening strategies, and insufficient classroom listening exposure.

The data presented in Table 1 show a number of important factors that contribute to students' difficulties in listening comprehension at BVCE. The results reflect both language difficulties and contextual constraints in the students' learning environment.

**Table 1** Factors affecting students’ listening ability in English at BVCE.

No	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I often lose focus while listening to English.	0 (0%)	10 (20%)	5 (10%)	31 (62%)	4 (8%)
2	I always face difficulty in guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words based on context.	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	40 (80%)	6 (12%)
3	I don’t have enough practice with listening in real-life situations.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (30%)	35 (70%)
4	Lack of vocabulary knowledge affects my listening comprehension.	0 (0%)	5 (10%)	6 (12%)	21 (42%)	18 (36%)
5	I feel anxious or stressed during listening activities.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (14%)	23 (46%)	10 (20%)
6	I don’t use any listening strategies to help me understand better.	2 (4%)	3 (6%)	8 (16%)	19 (38%)	18 (36%)
7	My English classes do not provide enough listening practice.	3 (6%)	5 (10%)	6 (12%)	21 (42%)	15 (30%)
8	I mainly learn grammar, reading, and writing—not listening.	4 (8%)	4 (8%)	9 (18%)	24 (48%)	9 (18%)
9	I have never been taught how to listen effectively in English.	5 (10%)	6 (12%)	6 (12%)	28 (56%)	5 (10%)

As shown in Table 1, we can easily see the prominent difficulties that affect the English listening ability of students at BVCE, such as students not having enough opportunities to practice listening in real situations (Item 3), with 100% of students agreeing (30% agree and 70% strongly agree) that this is the most difficult problem recorded in the survey. For (Item 2), more than 90% agree of students (80% Agree, 12% Strongly Agree) about the difficulty of guessing the meaning of words in context. In addition, over 70% of students indicated challenges related to a lack of listening strategies (Item 6), and students lacked vocabulary (Item 4), leading to difficulties when listening to English. Regarding the context and learning method, 72% of students said that their classes do not provide enough time for listening practice (Item 7), while 66% stated that most students mainly focused on grammar, reading and writing without paying attention to listening (Item 8). Furthermore, 65% of students agreed that they had never been taught effective listening techniques in class (Item 9). From the emotional and psychological factors, 66% of students felt anxious or stressed during listening tasks (Item 5). These findings confirm that students’ listening challenges stem not only from linguistic limitations but also from limited classroom exposure and ineffective learning methods.

• Results of pretest

To exactly evaluate students’ listening ability before using TBLA, the authors carried out the pretest. The time for the pretest was before administering TBLA to both the control and experimental groups. They were given the listening tests. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the pretest scores, showing that both groups had comparable baseline listening proficiency.

**Table 2** The statistics of pretest total.

	Control group	Experimental group
N Valid	25	25
Missing	0	0
Mean	5,12	4,92
Median	6	5
Mode	5	5
Std. Deviation	1,22	1,52
Minimum	3	2
Maximum	8	8

The pretest results in Table 2 reveal that both the control and experimental groups had relatively similar levels of listening proficiency before the intervention. The mean score of the control group was slightly higher (M = 5.12) than that of the experimental group (M = 4.92), but the difference was minimal and likely not statistically significant. In the control group, the minimum was 3, and the maximum was 8. The mode of the control group was 5. In the experimental group, the minimum and maximum values were 2 and 8, respectively. The mode of the experimental group was 5. The median score was 6 for the control group and 5 for the experimental group, indicating that the central tendency of scores in the control group was



marginally higher. The standard deviation (SD) was 1.22 for the control group and 1.52 for the experimental group. These comparable results confirm that the two groups were equivalent before applying the task-based listening activities.

• Results of posttest

After treatment, the researchers conducted a posttest. An English-language posttest test was given to students to see if their language abilities had improved as the result of this study’s experimental component. The posttest assessed students’ listening abilities once more, and the results were evaluated with SPSS software. As shown in Table 3, the experimental group achieved higher posttest scores than the control group, indicating the effectiveness of TBLA.

**Table 3** The statistics of posttest total.

		Control group	Experimental group
N	Valid	25	25
	Missing	0	0
Mean		5,48	6,12
Median		5	6
Mode		5	6
Std. Deviation		1,16	1,38
Minimum		3	3
Maximum		7	9

The distribution of total posttest scores is depicted in the Table 3. The control group’s mean score was 5.48, with a standard deviation of 1.16. The experimental group’s mean was 6.12, with a standard deviation of 1.38. There were statistically significant differences between the two groups’ scores. In the posttest results, the minimum and maximum scores were 3 and 7 for the control group, respectively. The mode of the control group was 5. In the experimental group, the minimum and maximum values were 3 and 9, respectively. The mode of the experimental group was 6. An independent-sample ttest revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $p < .05$ ), confirming the effectiveness of task-based listening activities.

• Post-motivational questionnaire

In addition, the study utilized the post-motivational questionnaire for the experimental group after conducting the posttest (N = 25). As shown in Table 4, students generally reported highly positive attitudes toward task-based listening activities (TBLA), highlighting enjoyment, increased confidence, and preference for TBLA over traditional listening tasks. Some of the most essential questions and responses are summarized below.

**Table 4** Students' attitudes toward task-based listening activities.

No	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I enjoy participating in listening tasks that involve real-life situations.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (20%)	16 (64%)	4 (16%)
2	Task-based activities make listening more interesting.	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	5 (20%)	12 (48%)	6 (24%)
3	I find it easier to understand English when tasks are connected to real contexts.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (28%)	8 (32%)	10 (40%)
4	Listening tasks help me improve my vocabulary.	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	6 (24%)	13 (52%)	3 (12%)
5	I feel more confident listening to English when working in groups or pairs.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (16%)	10 (40%)	11 (44%)
6	I prefer task-based listening activities to traditional activities.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	19 (76%)
7	I think teachers should use task-based listening more often in our English classes."	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	12 (48%)	10 (40%)

According to Table 4, no student selected "Strongly Disagree" for any of the seven statements, indicating that all participants responded positively. Most responses fall into the "agree" and "strongly agree" categories, suggesting a generally positive attitude toward task-based listening activities. It can be seen that 64% of the students agreed and 16% strongly agreed that they enjoy participating in listening tasks that involve real-life situations, while only 20% responded neutrally (Item 1). Similarly, 72% of the students agreed that task-based activities make listening lessons more interesting (Item 2). The majority of the students found that understanding English is easier when combined with real-life contexts, with 40% strongly agree and 32% agreed and only 28% remaining neutral (Item 3). Next, listening tasks help students improve their vocabulary, with almost



40% of students agreeing and only 12% of students disagreeing (Item 4). In addition, students feel more confident listening to English when working in groups or pairs with 40% Agree and 44% Strongly Agree (Item 5). Finally, more than 80% of students preferred task-based listening activities to traditional activities and wanted teachers to use task-based listening more often in the classroom (Item 6 & Item 7). These results support the quantitative findings, showing that task-based listening activities enhanced both performance and motivation among students.

- Post-intervention Interview Questions

To complement the quantitative findings and gain deeper qualitative insights into students' experiences with task-based listening activities (TBLA), a semi-structured interview was conducted with five students from the experimental group after the posttest. The interview aimed to explore students' perceptions, attitudes, and reflections regarding the task-based listening lessons. The interview focused on three main questions, and the students' responses were analyzed and synthesized by the researchers to identify common themes.

1. How did you feel about task-based listening lessons compared to traditional ones?

Most students felt more interested and motivated in task-based listening lessons than in traditional ones because the activities were lively, interactive, and highly practical. In addition, these lessons helped them expand their vocabulary and gain a better understanding of how English is used in real-life situations. Some students shared that they used to feel anxious about listening lessons; however, since the teacher applied task-based activities, they have become more confident, especially during group work and discussions, which helped them overcome psychological barriers and reduce their lack of confidence in listening.

2. Which aspects of task-based listening activities helped you improve your listening skills?

According to the five interviewed students, several aspects of the task-based listening activities significantly contributed to their improvement in listening skills. First, the activities were closely related to real-life contexts and communicative situations, which made the listening tasks more meaningful and easier to understand. The integration of three listening stages (pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening) was also highlighted as particularly helpful, as it enabled students to prepare effectively, focus on key information, and summarize main ideas after listening. Another important factor mentioned was collaborative learning. Group work provided opportunities for students to share ideas, learn from one another, and enhance interaction, making the lessons more engaging and dynamic. Furthermore, post-listening activities such as vocabulary practice and group discussions helped learners expand their vocabulary and build greater confidence in communication. Finally, the use of technology and the variety of authentic listening materials also contributed to a more stimulating learning environment, supporting both listening comprehension and lexical development.

3. Would you like to continue applying task-based listening activities in future English classes? Why or why not?

All five interviewed students expressed a strong willingness to continue applying task-based listening activities in their future English classes. They agreed that these activities were highly effective in improving their listening comprehension skills and creating a positive, engaging classroom atmosphere. The students believed that the task-based listening approach was highly effective, making listening lessons more interactive and less stressful, while providing opportunities to collaborate with classmates, which helped increase their motivation to learn English. They also suggested that similar activities should be applied more frequently in other language skills, such as speaking and reading, to create a more communicative and student-centered learning environment.

#### 4.2. Discussion

- (i) What are the primary factors contributing to difficulties in students' listening ability at BVCE?

Based on the data collected through questionnaire surveys, the fundamental factors affecting the listening ability of BVCE students are as follows:

**Lack of real-life listening practice:** All students (100%) reported limited exposure to authentic listening situations, which restricts the development of listening fluency and comprehension in natural contexts. This aligns with Vandergrift (2007) and Byram (1997), who argue that insufficient exposure to authentic interaction limits learners' ability to recognize intonation, speech rate, and cultural cues, thereby impeding comprehension. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) principles (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2017; Chou, 2017; Hashemzahi et al., 2023) suggest that incorporating contextualized tasks provides learners with meaningful opportunities to engage in authentic communication, thereby enhancing listening fluency and comprehension in real-world contexts.

**Limited vocabulary and contextual guessing skills:** A large majority (92%) indicated difficulties in inferring the meaning of unfamiliar words from context, reflecting gaps in vocabulary knowledge and reasoning skills necessary for understanding spoken English. Corresponding with Díaz-Rico's (2002) and Rost's (2011) emphasis on the importance of integrating bottom-up (linguistic decoding) and top-down (contextual inference) processes in listening. Goh & Vandergrift (2021) and Aryadoust (2022) also stress that effective listening requires the ability to infer meaning from context and activate prior knowledge, which are

fundamental for comprehension. These findings suggest that students' difficulties in vocabulary and inference are major cognitive barriers, which task-based listening activities help mitigate by embedding tasks within meaningful and authentic scenarios.

**Insufficient listening strategies and instructional support:** Approximately 74% of students admitted not using strategies such as predicting, notetaking, or focusing on details. Additionally, 72–66% felt that their classes did not provide enough listening practice and emphasized grammar, reading, and writing over listening, while 65% had never been taught effective listening techniques. Nunan (2003) and Brown (2006) emphasize that effective listening instruction should combine both bottom-up and top-down processes, guiding learners to predict meaning, focus on details, and summarize information. Goh (2008) discusses how metacognitive instruction supports listeners' strategic engagement and highlights how lack of strategy use can contribute to distraction and comprehension breakdown. Goh and Vandergrift (2021) further emphasize the importance of metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation for effective listening comprehension. Task-based listening activities, through pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening phases, provide structured opportunities for learners to employ and internalize these strategies actively.

**Psychological factors (anxiety and stress):** Sixty-six percent of students reported feeling anxious or stressed during listening tasks, which negatively affected their concentration and overall performance. This finding aligns with Schunk (2003), who emphasizes the role of motivation and affective factors in sustaining attention and enhancing learning outcomes. Goh (2008) discusses how lack of strategic listening approaches can lead to distraction and breakdowns in comprehension. Goh and Vandergrift (2021) further emphasize the importance of maintaining focus and employing metacognitive strategies during listening tasks. TBLA, by fostering interactive group work, pair activities, and real-life contextual tasks, reduces anxiety and promotes a supportive learning environment, increasing learners' confidence and engagement (Tran & Ngo, 2024; Chou, 2017).

In general, these results indicate that first-year students' listening difficulties are related to language proficiency, the learning environment, and psychological factors. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of implementing task-based activities that are closely linked to real-life contexts, providing guidance on listening strategies, and creating a supportive learning environment that reduces learners' anxiety and stress.

#### (ii) How do task-based listening activities enhance first-year English majors' listening skills?

The findings indicate that task-based listening activities (TBLA) positively enhance first-year students' listening skills at BVCE by providing meaningful, context-rich communication opportunities. This aligns with Willis (1996) and Ellis (2017), who highlight that task-based approaches foster authentic language use and support the development of communicative competence. By engaging with pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening stages, students activate prior knowledge, focus on main ideas, predict meaning, and infer information, practices consistent with Goh & Vandergrift (2021) emphasis on cognitive and metacognitive strategies in listening.

TBLA also encourages collaborative learning through pair and group activities, which reduces anxiety and increases attention, echoing Schunk's (2003) and Goh's (2008) findings on the importance of affective support for listening comprehension. Students confirmed that they enjoyed participating in the TBLA sessions because the class was lively, there was interaction between students and teachers, between pairs and groups, which helped them concentrate better and reduce anxiety, and these factors improved their listening results, supporting the notion by Nunan (2003) and Brown (2006) that effective listening instruction should integrate both bottom-up and top-down processing while fostering learner autonomy. Finally, in line with Le (2024), implementing complex task-based activities enabled Vietnamese students to improve their listening proficiency more effectively than traditional instructional approaches.

Overall, these findings indicate that TBLA effectively enhances listening skills and learner engagement among first-year English majors.

#### (iii) What are students' attitudes toward task-based listening activities?

The results of the post-questionnaire also show that the majority of EFL students in the experimental group held positive attitudes toward using task-based listening activities (TBLA) to enhance their listening skills following the treatment period. No student expressed a negative attitude, and a strong majority (80% or more) either agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements about TBLA. Most participants also confirmed that TBLA helped them improve their vocabulary and listening strategies, demonstrating its practical contribution to language development. Finally, they preferred TBLA to traditional methods and supported its continued use in English language classrooms.

This is related to the studies of Sarani et al. (2014), in which TBLA not only improved listening skills but also showed that learners held positive attitudes and enjoyed participating in TBLA. Promruang (2012) reported that learners found TBLA enjoyable and were encouraged to apply active listening strategies, indicating positive attitudes. Ravindra (2023) found that learners highly valued the interactive nature, authentic contexts, and increased motivation when participating in TBLA. Le (2024) showed that Vietnamese students enjoyed complex tasks in TBLA, felt engaged, and supported its implementation in classroom settings.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Findings

This study investigated the effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) through listening activities on first-year English majors' listening skills at Ba Ria – Vung Tau College of Education. The research identified key factors contributing to students' listening difficulties, including limited real-life listening practice, difficulties in contextual guessing, insufficient vocabulary, ineffective listening strategies, and anxiety during listening tasks. Pretest results showed no significant difference in listening skills between the control group ( $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) and the experimental group ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ). After the intervention, the experimental group's mean increased to 6.12 ( $SD = 1.38$ ), while the control group showed only a slight increase to 5.48 ( $SD = 1.16$ ), indicating a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group. These findings suggest that TBLT is an effective approach for enhancing students' listening comprehension and practical use of English. Moreover, students expressed highly positive attitudes toward task-based listening activities (TBLA), reporting increased confidence, motivation, and enjoyment, particularly when tasks were meaningful and collaborative. Over 90% of students preferred TBLA to traditional methods and supported its continued use in English classes.

### 5.2. Implications

Research has shown that TBLAs are effective in improving students' listening skills and motivation, while also reducing anxiety and increasing their confidence and concentration during classroom tasks. Teachers should integrate TBLA into their instruction using authentic, meaningful activities to enhance student engagement. Emphasizing listening strategies and vocabulary development through TBLA can help address common challenges that learners often face. Given students' strong preference for task-based methods, educators are encouraged to shift away from traditional approaches in favor of more interactive and learner-centered practices. Beyond the immediate context, these findings suggest that incorporating task based listening activities can enhance communicative competence and learner engagement in EFL classrooms more broadly. For teachers, the results underscore the importance of designing authentic, collaborative, and meaning focused listening tasks that build students' strategic processing and reduce listening anxiety. For institutions, the study highlights the need to align curriculum design and teacher professional development with communicative and task based pedagogies to better prepare learners for real world English use.

### 5.3. Limitations & recommendations for future research

Although this study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of TBLA in improving students' listening skills, a limitation of the study is that it was conducted with a relatively small sample size ( $N = 50$ ) from a single institution, which may limit the ability to generalize the findings to a broader EFL context. Second, the study period was limited to only one semester of the 2024-2025 academic year, which may not fully capture the long-term impact of TBLA on students' language development. Additionally, the study focused primarily on first-year English majors; therefore, the results may not reflect the experiences of learners at different proficiency levels or without an English major background. Future research should expand the sample size and involve learners from various academic levels, institutions, and language backgrounds to enhance generalizability and better reflect diverse EFL settings. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to investigate the sustained effects of task based listening activities over multiple semesters or academic years. Moreover, future research could explore the integration of task-based approaches across other language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing, to determine how TBLA influences overall communicative competence. Additional qualitative investigations, such as classroom observations, teacher reflections, and detailed student interviews, could further illuminate implementation challenges and best practices when applying TBLA in varied educational contexts.

### Acknowledgment

We would like to thank every team member of the research group for their valuable contributions to this study.

### Ethical Considerations

During the study period, ethical standards were strictly observed throughout all research procedures. First, the researchers prioritized the welfare of the participants, treating them respectfully and with full consideration from the formulation of the research questions to the conclusion of the study. Second, participants' privacy and confidentiality were safeguarded at all times. Although the researchers were aware of the identities of the participants, all personally identifying information was removed from the research report. Personal data such as names, contact details, physical characteristics, and photographs were kept strictly confidential in order to protect the participants' right to privacy. Finally, the authors affirm that this manuscript has not been submitted to, nor approved for consideration by, any other degree-granting institution.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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