# The Effect of Metacognitive Strategy Instruction on Listening Comprehension Performance, A Case Study of English - Majored Freshmen at Ba Ria - Vung Tau University, Viet Nam

**Thu, Thi Hoang[1], Yen, Thi Hai Pham[2]**

[1,2] Faculty of Foreign Languages - Social Sciences, Ba Ria - Vung Tau University, Viet Nam

**ABSTRACT:** The research was carried out with 50 university freshmen at Ba Ria - Vung Tau University (BVU) to find out how metacognitive strategy instruction motivates them to improve their listening comprehension. The researchers executed a qualitative action research method during twelve weeks, using a combination of the teachers and students' diaries. Then semi-structured interviews in Vietnamese were purposefully administered to the participants and 1 observer by using individual-administered survey procedure. The findings in this paper indicate that metacognitive strategy instruction enhances learners' listening comprehension performance and should be implemented in English communicative classes.

**KEY WORDS:** metacognitive strategy instruction, listening comprehension performance, freshmen, Ba Ria - Vung Tau University, English major, English communicative classes

## I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of listening is emphasized when conversation takes place and only when the listener understands what their interlocutor says, the conversation happens as expected (Zhang, 2009). To succeed in communication, it is increasingly worth to consider the need for competence in listening. As much as 80% of information is obtained through this primary means of communication (Hunsaker, 1990). For this reason, listening teaching has attracted considerable attention.

Before doing this research, we observed our colleagues' listening classes, which aimed to identify if our listening class got stuck and then diagnosed the problems. Though the learners are from the different classes and are instructed by the different teachers, we discovered the similarity in these classes including ours. Learners' listening abilities were not good enough to do the listening tasks. The teachers taught some new words which found in the listening parts in the first few minutes. Then they let the students listen to the materials two or three times, and at last they checked the answers to the exercises. Most students seemed to be absent-minded or rather tired in listening classes because of constantly failing to comprehend previous listening tasks. Consequently, this leads to the decrease in learning motivation in the subject.

This paper reports a metacognitive strategy instruction study of listening in English as a foreign language. It is designed to address the following research question:

What is the effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on the listening comprehension performance of BVU's English - majored freshmen?

The effect of the instruction in listening comprehension process was discovered and the discussion was also given to increase the quality of teaching and learning listening skills for students in communicative courses.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Rost (2002), strategies are conscious steps by which learners can guide and evaluate their own comprehension and responses. Metacognitive instructional research with and beyond the field of L2 listening has reported benefits for learners such as improved confidence and performance and teachers play a pivotal role in the instruction process (Goh, 2008). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) identify three main types of strategies, namely, metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies. Buck (2001) attaches special importance to two kinds of strategies in listening; these are, cognitive and metacognitive. This approach's metacognitive techniques make listeners more conscious of how they might utilize what they already know to bridge listening gaps. Vandergrift (2004) shows how the metacognitive activities of planning, monitoring and evaluating can be applied to the teaching of listening. The steps of the metacognitive strategies underlying are presented below:

- Planning/predicting stage: Students prepare for listening

- Monitoring: Students listen and verify their predictions while taking notes following the three stages below:

+ First verification stage: Students compare notes, discuss disagreements, and identify areas needing more information

+ Second verification stage: Students focus on discrepancies, correct notes, and add new information, then they participate in a class discussion, reconstruct key points, and reflect on understanding the text.

+ Final verification stage: Students listen for missed information and compare their notes with a transcription of the text.

- Reflection stage: Students reflect on their listening strategies, set goals for improvement, and discuss any difference between spoken and written versions of the text.
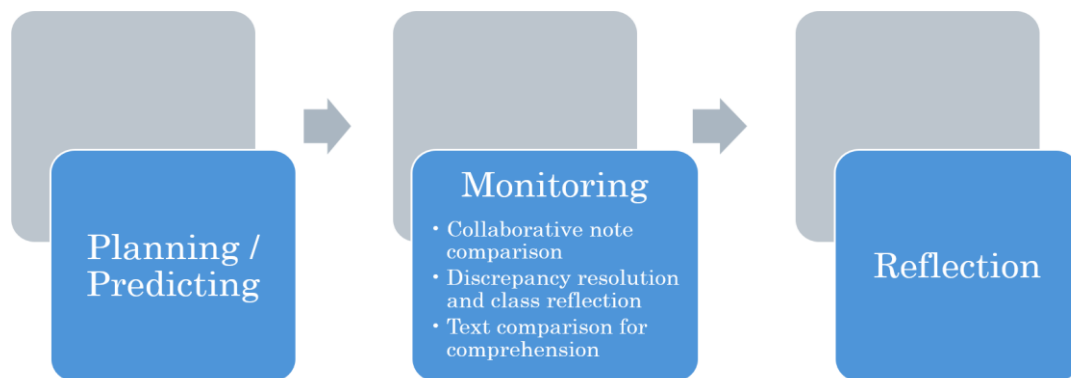


**Diagram 1: Metacognitive Strategies Steps**

Goh and Yusnita (2006) points out the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy among a group of ESL learners in Singapore. Following metacognitive teaching, the students reported improved comprehension strategies and a greater awareness of the nature and requirements of listening in their written diaries. The scores in the listening examinations are higher than they did in the past.

Bidabadi and Yamat (2010) in the study of 92 female freshman participants studying Teaching English as a Foreign Language at a University in south of Esfahan, Iranian EFL freshmen clearly employed metacognitive listening strategies in the listening comprehension. According to the study, metacognitive listening techniques are crucial as they support good listening in all learning environments. The main purpose of Coskun's study (2010) is to investigate the effect of metacognitive strategies training on 40 beginner preparation students' listening performance. During five weeks in the beginning half of the academic year, the experimental group received control training at a Turkish university's preparatory school. The methodology approach was explained clearly leading the readers to the findings that the post-test scores of the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group. This study offers evidence that using a listening strategy approach can effectively and successfully assist students in increasing their listening comprehension, as well as some insight into the value of metacognitive strategy training in listening classes.

Findings from these studies indicate the effect of metacognitive strategies in listening:

- It helps learners gain more confidence, more motivation, and anxiety reduction in enhancing their listening comprehension.
- It has a positive effect on listening performance which is the core of communication.
- Learners with weaker listening abilities stand to gain the most from this approach.

Field (1998) calls for a rethinking of the purposes of the listening lessons, and examines ways in which we can teach the skill rather than simply practice it. Educators are highly recommended to emphasize not only the correctness of answers but also the act of listening itself. Inappropriate feedback serves as indicators of comprehension breakdowns, guiding efforts to rectify understanding. Listening lessons are often top-heavy; teachers should revise the conventional lesson format adopted by many teachers and course books (Field, 1998, p.112). Pre-listening activity should be included in several minutes to create motivation and establish context in listening lessons. Brown (2011) believes in the power of repetition, not mindless listen-and-repeat, but carefully, principled practice. With a lengthy listening session, learners are allowed to re-listen and check their answer (Field, 1998).

The literature review has provided a base in understanding metacognitive strategies, benefits of metacognitive instruction on listening comprehension, processes of strategy instruction, and the contextual culture concerns.

## III. METHOD

In this research, the qualitative action research method was used. Data was collected in a naturalistic setting and the participants themselves explored how and why problems occurred during the process of the instruction. This research concludes interviews to participants and observer as well as diaries of both students and teachers. Learners were free to write their experiences during the instruction every week based on the guiding questions. They were encouraged to express their thoughts, feelings, or comments in Vietnamese regarding the metacognitive strategy instruction. In addition, the researchers noted in a class diary what happened during the treatment after each lesson.

Semi-structured interviews were purposefully administered to 50 participants randomly after a twelve week instruction. These students are coded in this paper as S01, S02, S03 and so forth to S50.

Diaries' database assisted the researchers in pinpointing necessary questions to deeper understanding of learners' feelings, thoughts, and experiences. At the same time, the observer was also interviewed and teaching learning strategies checklist papers were collected for analyzing process after the interview.

The instruction included twelve two-period sessions. During each session, the metacognitive strategies were introduced, explained, demonstrated, and practiced following the CALLA lesson plan (Chamot and O'Malley, 1994, p.43-44):

- Preparation: Students prepare for strategies instruction by identifying their prior knowledge and how they approach a listening task.
- Presentation: The teacher demonstrates the new learning strategies and explains how and when to use it.
- Practice: Students practice using the strategies with regular class activities.
- Evaluation: Students self-evaluate their use of the learning strategies and how well the strategies are applied.

Another pertinent issue is how the teacher could best describe or assess changes in learner metacognition resulting from instruction (Goh, 2008, p.205) was considered. MALQ (Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire) proved by Vandergrift et al. (2006) was used as a conscious tool to assess students' awareness of the process of listening. It has been successfully used with nearly 1.000 learners from various countries. It consists of 21 items and it was used immediately after a listening task as a retrospective.

Teacher checklists retrieved from National capital Language Resource centre (NCLRC) were also marked by the observer to ensure that the researchers guided the instruction in the right way as initial intentions.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following data analysis, five major categories of the process of listening comprehension performance were derived. The categories are: building up interests, forming new habits, solving problems, planning and evaluating listening performance, and improving English proficiency.
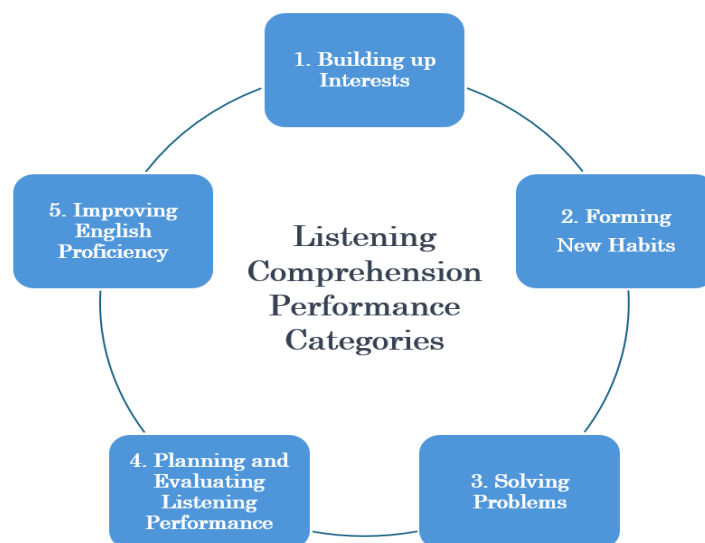


Diagram 2: Listening Comprehension Performance Categories

## 1. Building up interests

Students were no longer distracted by anxiety during the listening process enabling improved comprehension. S01 openly shared that he did not experience any depression when he struggled with listening comprehension tasks: "I did not get depressed because of a missing sentence; in the second listening, I would use background noises to guess the meaning of this sentence". Likewise, S02 emphasized that a self-monitoring strategy was functioning well and she was delighted to try a new strategy in the first week: "relied on the overall context of the text to guess the meaning of the words that I did not understand; I was excited that a new strategy helped me much". S01 supported the instruction when she highlighted that adopting a new strategy boosted her confidence during the listening lesson: "I used to be not confident in listening lessons, but now I feel comfortable when I knew what to do to improve my listening". S03 showed enthusiasm towards the the listening tasks and actively engaged in the instructional activities: "The listening class has been changed, and I prefer the new one. I find listening tasks easier when my predictions on what I am about to hear are successful, the activities created by the teacher helped me verify my predictions effectively". S04 elaborated that she was comfortable because this instruction was not challenging for her. She intended to constantly practise following the instruction to gain further benefits for her listening later. In sum, the relevant instruction and activities outlined in the lesson plans promoted learners' motivation to succeed in completing the listening tasks.

## 2. Forming new habits

Students were more inclined to their new listening strategies. They preferred to try the metacognitive strategies instructed in the training than to use their former listening habits. For instance, S05 changed her thinking that listening word by word is the only way to get the meaning of the text: "I used to listen word by word for quite a long time; this way was not working for me. Now I like to use key words and word families to understand the text". It proves that using self-monitoring changed her previous listening practice habits. This change is suitable and beneficial for her. Likewise, S06 was excited to share that she was able to focus on key information to accomplish the task after trying a new listening skill. For S07, self-monitoring was applied to not distract from the continuity of listening track. She acknowledged that self-reminders gives her more concentration to the listening tasks.

S08 raised the awareness of the importance of evaluation process after listening tasks: "I do not believe that I can evaluate my listening tasks because I think I am out of responsibility when the listening task are finished, I have no idea that evaluation plays an important role in my future listening, now I change my thinking". She added that the benefit of a new thinking in self-evaluating strategy from this instruction is considerably helpful.

Despite the fact that the introduction phase to new vocabulary in the preparation step facilitated listening comprehension, this seemed to hinder students' self-planning ability for comprehension. For instance, S09 shared that it was undeniable the benefit of new words introduced by the lecturer in the former listening way, but she preferred to revise her prior knowledge whether in English or Vietnamese before listening. By recalling the background knowledge, she was able to deal with certain difficulties in the listening text.

Generally, students experienced the improvement in their listening comprehension; as a result, they were eager to apply new strategies. In other words, giving metacognitive strategy instruction was feasible and students obtained fruitful learning outcomes right after practicing the instruction.

## 3. Solving problems

Students reported that they did better in recognizing and solving listening problems with the application of their prior knowledge. The students (S10, S11, S12) used to think that existing information could prevent them from understanding the text if it was instructed in pre-listening phase. S13 remarked she used background noises, tone of voice, and other clues to guess the meaning of utterance she did not understand when the speaker spoke too fast. This shows that the difficulty of identifying individual sounds in a stream of sounds was no longer a big problem for listening comprehension.

The learners (S14, S15) expressed that difficulties in retaining perceived input for listening processing were solved since the contextualization was carried out successfully. S12 added if what she had to listen to was too long, the contextualization strategy was preferred to use. PM-1 explained that the speakers always had their main idea to express, so what he needed to focus was how the text would develop. This strategy motivated him to maintain listening efficiently although the listening text was long.

Interpretation of the perceived input was also improved when some learners employed the inference strategy. For S16, the interpretation of the whole text was more efficient when she involved with inference: "I inferred the particular vocabulary and

entire text from the context, what the speaker mean was verified, I could review the main idea of the text. I think inference strategy is useful for better listening comprehension".

The application of direct attention was crucial in processing listening information. It was carried out by S17: "I focused harder on the text when I had trouble understanding, I always reminded myself to get back on track when I lost concentration". S18 was aware of his frequent distraction in the listening process and he experienced: "My attention was easily distracted by something outside, then I found direct attention as a lifebuoy which aided me in recovering my concentration right away".

## 4. Planning and evaluating listening performance

The students (S18, S19, S20, S21, S22, and S23) mentioned that a well-prepared plan in pre-listening stage facilitated their listening comprehension. The learner (S20, S22) suggested that they preferred to recall what they knew about the topic. They would ask the teacher for clarification and translation if necessary. They emphasized a fully worked-out plan based on prior knowledge improving their listening comprehension.

The learners (S07, S11, S13, S14, S18, S19 and S22) indicated the satisfaction with their level of comprehension. Some others (S23, S24, S25, S26 and S27) shared that it was essential for this instruction to stimulate their learning autonomy in self-evaluating. They detailed in the interview that they elaborated on their listening process and considering potential adjustments they could make to enhance their listening skills. Likewise, the learner (S28) believed that consistently asking himself about how to improve his current listening comprehension would ultimately lead him to better listening understanding one day. The learner (S13) wrote about her evaluation on her listening: "I am happy to know how to evaluate what I understood, and I have my own plan in mind. If I meet this type of topic next time, I think I am going to be more successful to accomplish the task next time".

## 5. Improving English proficiency

There is a striking improvement in students' English proficiency in final test results compared to those of the placement tests from the beginning of the course. Particularly, the students (S02, S05, S06, S07, S11, S14, S15, S18) improved their listening skills significantly through using metacognitive strategies during and after the instruction. The learner (S29) detailed "thanks to the instruction, now I get better listening comprehension strategies for my upcoming listening tasks and in real-life listening in the future". Likewise, "My listening comprehension is better than before by using self-planning and self-monitoring appropriately for the listening task. I believe that my future verbal English communication in real-life working will be successful when I apply metacognitive strategy" said the learner (S24).

Along with listening skills, there was an increase in students' vocabulary regarding instructed topics. S07 was encouraged to predict the words appearing in listening text. She also built up vocabulary for herself in order to remember it longer. Furthermore, S30 shared that grammar and sentence structures were improved indirectly through discussing with peers in pre-listening, after the first and second time of listening.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The researcher hopes that the findings in this study can be as a reference for educators who are interested in implementing metacognitive strategies to improve their students' listening comprehension performance. As a result of the practicality and applicability of the research, students improved their self-directed listening ability and boosted their strong motivation in real-life English communication. More importantly, learners gained direct benefits from each week instruction when there was no longer anxiety or rejections in listening lessons. These results shed some light on the ability of teaching the strategy instruction. In other words, it is certainly essential for educators to take the results of this research into consideration to enhance their techniques and methods implemented in pre-teaching stage of listening skills.

This study investigated the impact of metacognitive strategy instruction on 50 freshmen to enhance listening comprehension proficiency. Overall, the metacognitive strategy instruction significantly contributed to students' listening comprehension performance in terms of building up interests, forming new habits, solving problems, planning and evaluating listening performance, and improving English proficiency. For this reason, it is feasible and beneficial to learners' listening comprehension. The question remains as to whether the instruction is a productive approach to take with all first year students. Thus, further research should investigate the effect of metacognitive strategy instruction with a larger number of participants. More research is needed to certify the benefits of the instruction for learners in term of different learning proficiency.

## REFERENCES

1. Bidabadi, F.S., & Yamat, H. (2010). The relationship between listening strategies employed by Iranian EFL freshman university students and their learning style preferences. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 16(*3*), 342-350.
2. Brown, S. (2011). Listening myths: *applying second language research to classroom teaching.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press
3. Buck, G. (2001). *Assessing listening*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
4. Chamot, A.U., & O'Malley, J. M. (1994). The CALLA handbook*: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach*. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman. 43-44.
5. Coskun, A. (2010). The effect of metacognitive strategy training on the listening performance of beginner students. *Novitas – ROYAL*, *4*(1), 35-50.
6. Field, J. (1998). Skills and strategies: *Towards a new methodology for listening. EFL Journal*, *52* (4). 110-118.
7. Goh, C & Yusnita, T. (2006) Metacognitive instruction in listening for young learners. *EFL Journal*. *60* (3), 222-232.
8. Goh, C. (2008). Metacognitive instruction for second language listening development: theory, practice and research implications. *Regional language centre journal, 39* (2), 188–213.
9. Hunsaker, R. A. (1990). *Understanding and developing the skills of oral communication: Speaking and listening* (2nd ed.). Englewood, CO: Morton.
10. O'Malley, J.M., & Chamot, A.U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
11. Rost, M. (2002). *Teaching and researching listening.* London: Pearson Education Press.
12. Vandergrift, L. (2004). Listening to learn or learning to listen? *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 24*, 3-25.
13. Vandergrift, L., Goh, C.C.M., Mareschal, C., & Tafaghodtari, M.H. (2006). The metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire (MALQ): Development and validation. *Language Learning, 56* (3), pp. 431-462.
14. Zhang, W. (2009). Teach more strategies in EFL college listening classroom: *US-China education review, 4* (3), 71–76.
15. National Capital Language Resource Centre (NCLRC). Retrieved December 2, 2024, from http://www.nclrc.org/http:calla.ws/overview.html