

## Enhancing Undergraduates' Listening Skills through Listening Strategies: A Case Study of Rangsit University's First Year Students

Mongkol Sodachan<sup>1\*</sup> and Anchalee Chayanuwat<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Education Program, Faculty of Education, Rangsit University, Thailand

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education, Rangsit University, Thailand

\*Corresponding author, e-mail: mongkol.s@rsu.ac.th

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### Abstract

Enhancing undergraduates' listening skills through listening strategies brings them many advantages because listening skills play very important roles in communication. This study was an attempt to find out how three integrated listening skills: metacognitive listening strategies (adapted from Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari, 2010), cognitive and social listening strategies (partly adapted from Oxford, 2006) enhance undergraduates' listening skills. Thirty one undergraduate students from Rangsit University participated in this study. Nine listening lessons integrated with three listening strategies were designed to enhance their listening skills. The results showed that the majority of participants had gradual enhancement in terms of listening progress. This was assumed that they might not familiarize with listening strategies or they might have some difficulties when dealing with listening to non-native language. However, when spending a lot of time practicing listening strategies, they all enhanced their listening skills in the end.

**Keywords:** *listening skills, listening strategies, metacognitive, cognitive, social, enhancement*

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### 1. Introduction

English is widely regarded as an essential tool for the globalized community and a good medium for communication used by the people around the world. It has played so many important roles in our communication that it has come to be considered a global language. Pattanida (2007) said that in this time of information and technology, English has become an indispensable tool for international or global language. Many countries all over the world are trying to raise awareness of their own people to use English effectively because it influences the way we communicate and contact other people around the globe.

When we talk about English, many Thai people think of grammar and reading. However, Richards (2005) and Holden (2004) pointed out that we should pay attention to listening skills because it is seen not only as something valuable for its own sake but as something that supports the growth of other aspects of language use, such as speaking and reading. Holden (2004) said that adults spend 40-45% of communication time engaged in listening, 25-30% speaking, 10-15% reading and less than 10% writing. Vandergrift (2007) also said that that listening skills are necessary to be developed because language learners can access the rich variety of aural and visual L2 texts available today via network-based multimedia.

Good listening skills benefit many groups of people. For the students, good listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. That is without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin. Tyagi (2013) said that English helps workers be more productive. That means effective listening skills helps them have effective communication, experience a few mistakes in their sending and receiving of messages and improves personal relationships with their colleagues.

In Thailand, listening skills are urgently prioritized for many people especially for students studying English as a second language because it is being widely adopted in all levels of education around the country. To succeed in their education, they have to possess a strong command of listening skill though it is considered the most difficult skill to study and the least researched skill (Vandergrift, 2007). However, the teaching steps have never been changed and the listening processes only focus on the outcome of listening instead of the processes of listening.

In summary, English plays very important roles because it is widely regarded as an essential tool for globalized communication. In Thai context, many Thai students think of grammar first when they want to study English. In fact, listening skills should be prioritized to serve their need to gain more knowledge especially in the level of university study because good listening skills benefit them at many different ways. Finally, all schools in Thailand teach all English skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, but listening skills have not been paid much attention. So, research on enhancement of students' listening skills should be conducted to find an appropriate method to improve their listening achievement.

### 1.1 Context of Teaching Listening Skills at Rangsit University

Rangsit University is one of the private universities founded with a philosophy to serve as an intellectual base to move Thai society to compete with other ASEAN countries and to produce both highly qualified undergraduates and graduates for this country and the world as a whole. One of the goals in terms of language teaching is to teach and enhance students to have good listening skills. In this regard, Rangsit English Language Institute (RELI) is founded with commitments to provide instructors with very modern teaching and learning materials and to help students to be able to communicate with good language skills especially with listening skills. The teaching method that has been introduced is Communicative Language Teaching, CLT. This method is widely regarded as an excellent language teaching approach. However, with Thailand context and the nature of Rangsit University students, this teaching and learning approach needs innovation to achieve the goal to see our students to have good listening ability.

The following are the present steps for teaching listening skills at Rangsit University. Teachers carry their textbooks and walk to the classroom. They tell their students to open their textbooks and then listen to audio files. The students keep listening and, at the end, they read the questions and choose correct or appropriate answers without talking about listening strategies. We can say that the teaching and learning listening skills here focus only on inputs and outputs of the listening skills without mentioning listening processes or how students have reached the right or wrong answers. The cycle of this kind of English teaching has repeated itself and, more importantly, only a few researches about teaching listening strategies have been conducted to explore and solve the English listening problems in this country.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Teaching listening skills to undergraduates at this university seems very challenging. The researcher sees many students complaining about the difficulty of listening skills. Though the textbooks for teaching this skill have been carefully chosen by matching the level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) at A1 and B1 level, students' listening skills have not improved much. Based on the researcher's class record of 649 students from the listening and speaking classes from three consecutive academic years, 2014, 2015 and 2016, the number of 260 students (40.06%) failed to reach the average score of the listening quiz. So, they need good listening strategies to enhance their listening achievement. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct a research to find out appropriate method to enhance Rangsit University first year students' listening skills through listening strategies.

## 2. Objectives

The objective of this study was to enhance undergraduates' listening skills through metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1 Population and Sample

The subjects of this study were Rangsit University first year students who have average ONET's scores of 21 points up and were registered in ENG 101, English for International Communication in the first semester of the academic year 2017. The sample group of this study were 31 volunteers from different fields of studies namely from (1) Science-Health, (2) Engineering-Technology, (3) Humanities-Social Studies, (4) Economics-Business and (5) Arts-Design.

### 3.2 Research Assumption

The assumption of this study was undergraduates' listening skills would be developed through three listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies.

### 3.3 Research Instrument

There were nine listening lesson plans designed for this research. The purposes of them were used as tools to enhance students' listening skills. The frame of these lesson plans covered the areas of metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies.

The following were the criteria for selecting audio files for this research:

- Under the theme of different topics suitable for creating conversations
- The CD length of 1-2.30 minutes
- The difficulty level of CEFR A2-B1
- Text that can generate the language function performance measurement for the communication in listening and speaking skills
- Content that can generate teaching-learning activities of 80 minutes for each class period

The lesson plans took 60 minutes to teach. Here were the steps to teach and time allowed for each lesson plan.

- Step 1: Reviewing the strategies for listening (10 minutes)
- Step 2: Practicing listening (50 minutes)

The step 1 was a warm up activity (Reviewing the Strategies Previously Studied from Previous Lessons) by allowing students some time to brainstorm and discuss the listening strategies necessary for each lesson (10 minutes). The second learning activity, practicing listening, took 50 minutes because students needed a lot of time to practice listening, share their ideas with their peers and discuss some unsolvable points.

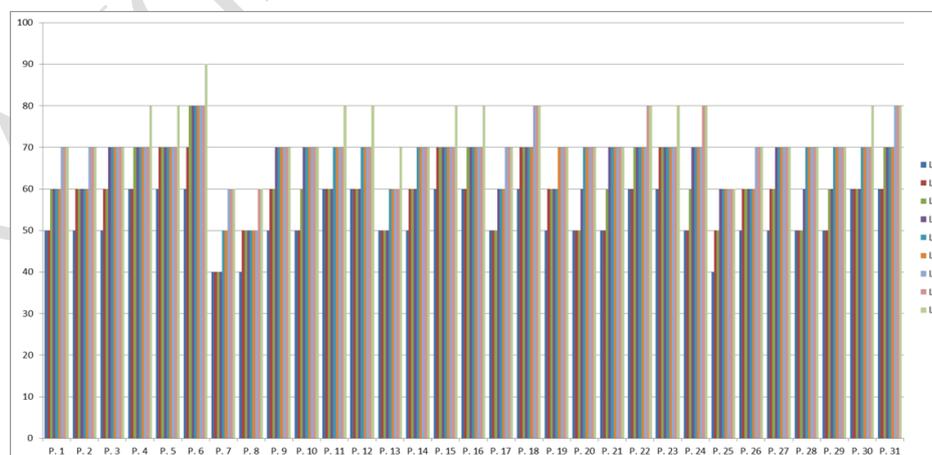
### 3.4 Worksheets

The purpose of this instrument was to collect data for the cognitive listening strategy based on the information obtained from students in different lesson plans. There were 9 worksheets designed differently to serve the objective of each learning activity.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

The focus of this study is to address how undergraduates' listening skills can be enhanced through implementing three listening strategies: metacognitive listening strategy model (Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari, 2010) and cognitive and social listening strategy model, partly selected to make it suitable for this study, (Oxford, 2006). The expected outcome of this research is to see how undergraduate students' listening skills were enhanced. This result is to respond to the objective: to enhance undergraduates' listening skills through integrating three listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies.



**Figure 1** Percentages of the enhancement of participants' listening skills through integrating three listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies

Figure 1 shows that listening skills of all participants have been gradually enhanced through implementing three integrated listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies during the treatment period. Listening skills of 15 participants (15/31=48.39%) increased from 50 to 70 percent, followed by those of 11 participants (11/31=35.48%) from 60 to 80 percent, of 3 participants (3/31=9.68 %) from 40 to 60 percent, of 1 participant (1/31=3.23) from 50 to 80 and of 1 participant (1/31=3.23%) from 60 to 90 percent.



Figure 2 Group of participants with enhancement from 50 to 70 percent

From Figure 2, all of the participants of this group (15 participants) gradually enhance their listening skills from 50 to 70 percent. That is, at lesson one, all of them have their listening skills equally enhanced at 50 percent. After that, their listening skills were continuously increased to 60 percent before reaching 70 percent when most of them (9/15=60%) studied from lessons 4 to 9.

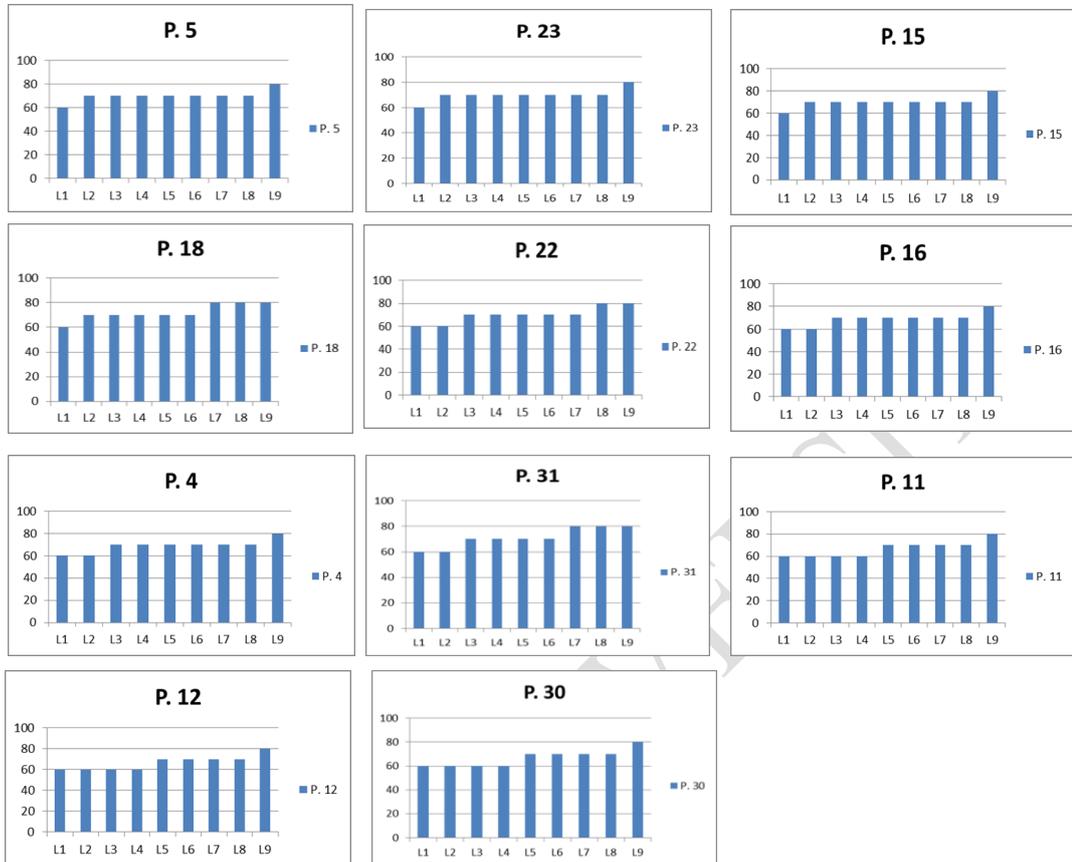


Figure 3 Group of participants with enhancement from 60 to 80 percent

From Figure 3, all of the participants of this group (11 participants) gradually enhanced their listening skills from 60 to 80 percent. That is, at lesson one, all of them have their listening skills equally enhanced at 60 percent. After that, their listening skills were increased to 70 percent and remained at this level for many lessons before reaching 80 percent during the last lesson by the majority of the participants (8/11=72.72).

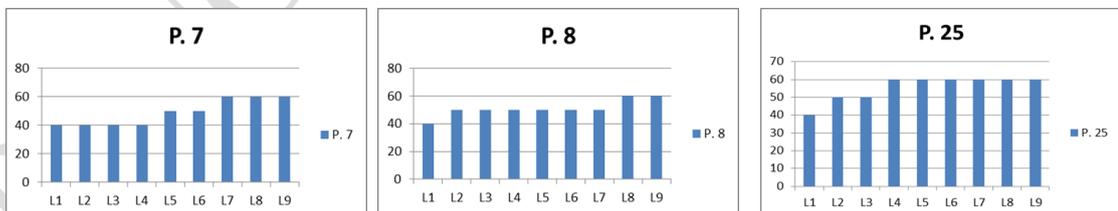
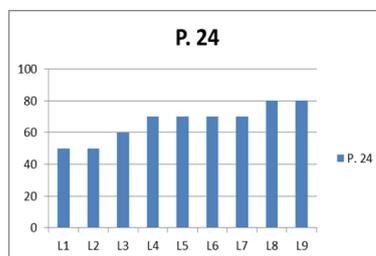


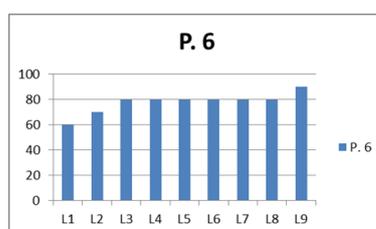
Figure 4 Group of participants with enhancement from 40 to 60 percent

From Figure 4, all of the participants of this group (3 participants) gradually enhanced their listening skills from 40 to 60 percent. That is, at lesson one, all of them have their listening skills equally enhanced at 40 percent. After that, their listening skills gradually increased to 50 percent, and it is noticeable that one of them (P. 25) enhanced their listening skills up to 60 percent from lessons 4 to 9.



**Figure 5** Participant with listening skill enhancement from 50 to 80 percent

From Figure 5, the participant (P. 24) gradually enhanced her listening skills from 50 to 80 percent. That is, at lessons 1-2, she had her listening skills enhanced at 50 percent. After that, her listening skills rose to 60 percent at lesson 3 and then went up to 70 percent from lessons 4-7 before reaching 80 percent at lessons 8-9.



**Figure 6** Participant with listening skill enhancement from 60 to 90 percent

From Figure 6, the participant (P. 6) gradually enhanced her listening skills from 60 to 90 percent. That is, at lesson 1, she had her listening skills enhanced at 60 percent. After that, her listening skills rose to 70 percent at lesson 2 and then went up to 80 percent from lessons 3-8 before reaching the highest point of 90 percent at lesson 9.

#### 4.2 Discussion

With regard to the objective of this study, enhancing undergraduates' listening skills through listening strategies, we could assume that all participants had enhanced their listening skills through three integrated listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies. The finding of this study responded to studies by Chattraporn (2011) and Zhang (2012). They both said that the instructors should raise participants' awareness regarding listening strategies in order to help them succeed in their tasks especially at the beginning of each activity.

In order to succeed in listening tasks, many scholars Moradi (2012), Jou (2010), Huy (2015) and Gebre (2015) suggested that learners should be trained to recognize different types of listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies and how important each category can help them achieve their goals in listening. Finally, authentic listening materials should be introduced to make students enjoy listening.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to find out how three integrated listening skills: metacognitive listening strategies (adapted from Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari, 2010), cognitive and social listening strategies (partly adapted from Oxford, 2006) could enhance undergraduates' listening skills. The result showed that they all gradually enhanced their listening skills in different aspects. The majority of them showed steady progress and maintained it until the end. Some showed high progress at the beginning, but fluctuated on the way. The other showed sluggish progress, but reached their goals with impressive improvement. It was

probably assumed that the root cause of these might be lack of good listening strategies because when spending more time raising awareness of these strategies, they showed promising improvement.

Based on the findings, it is suggested that students should be trained with listening strategies before listening to any kinds of texts or lectures. More importantly, they need strong command of both listening processes and listening strategies to succeed in gaining knowledge from incoming information. They must know how to plan, monitor and evaluate their listening activities. They need to learn how to get ideas quickly, take notes and use resources for receiving and sending messages. Finally, they need to collaborate with friends and ask questions when they need some help.

## 6. Acknowledgements

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