

Using Listening Strategies to Enhance First-Year Students' English Listening Skills: A Case of Rangsit University

การใช้กลยุทธ์ในการฟังเพื่อสร้างเสริมทักษะการฟังภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 :

กรณีศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต

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บทนำ

การสร้างเสริมทักษะการฟังให้กับนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี ชั้นปีที่ 1 โดยใช้กลยุทธ์ในการฟัง ทำให้พวกเขาได้รับประโยชน์อย่างมากเพราะทักษะการฟังมีบทบาทที่สำคัญต่อการสื่อสาร งานวิจัยที่ดีพิมพ์ในบทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อที่จะค้นหาว่าการใช้การกลยุทธ์ในการฟังทั้ง 3 แบบ ซึ่งประกอบด้วย กลยุทธ์เชิงการรู้คิด (Metacognitive Strategy) (ซึ่งมีแนวคิดมาจาก Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari, 2010), กลยุทธ์เชิงความรู้ความเข้าใจ (Cognitive Strategy) และกลยุทธ์เชิงสังคม (Social Strategy) (ซึ่งมีแนวคิดมาจาก Oxford, 2006) สามารถสร้างเสริมทักษะการฟังของนักศึกษา โดยในงานวิจัยนี้จะเน้นที่ความสำเร็จในการฟัง กลุ่มตัวอย่างประกอบด้วยนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 ของมหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต จำนวน 30 คน โดยใช้วิธีการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบง่าย (Simple Random Sampling Method) เครื่องมือวิจัยประกอบด้วย แผนการเรียนรู้เกี่ยวกับการฟัง (Listening Lesson Plans) 9 แผน ที่บูรณาการกลยุทธ์การฟังทั้ง 3 แบบ เข้าด้วยกัน และแบบทดสอบก่อนและหลังเรียน (Pre-and Post-Test) เพื่อประเมินความสำเร็จในการฟังของนักศึกษา โดยมีระยะเวลา 9 สัปดาห์ สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลประกอบด้วยค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐานและการทดสอบที ผลการวิจัยพบว่ามีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ ระหว่างคะแนนเฉลี่ยของผลการทดสอบก่อนและหลังการเรียนที่ระดับความเชื่อมั่น 0.05 ผลวิจัยนี้สามารถตอบสมมุติฐานว่านักศึกษาอาจจะไม่คุ้นเคยกับการใช้กลยุทธ์การฟังหรืออาจจะมีปัญหาบ้างเมื่อต้องฟังภาษาอังกฤษซึ่งไม่ใช่ภาษาแม่ แต่อย่างไรก็ตามเมื่อนักศึกษาได้ใช้เวลาในการฝึกใช้กลยุทธ์ในการฟังไประยะหนึ่ง ในที่สุดก็สามารถสร้างเสริมทักษะการฟังที่มีความแตกต่างก่อนและหลังเรียนได้อย่างมีนัยสำคัญ

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Abstract

Enhancing first-year students' listening skills through listening strategies brings them many advantages because listening skills play very important roles in communication. The purpose of this paper was to find out how three integrated listening skills: metacognitive listening strategies (from Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari's teaching listening concept, 2010), cognitive and social listening strategies (from Oxford's teaching listening concept, 2006) could enhance first-year students' listening skills in terms of their achievement. Thirty first-year students from Rangsit University participated in this study. The simple random sampling method was employed to select a sample group. Nine

listening lesson plans with three integrated listening strategies were designed to enhance their listening skills. Pre-and post-test was used to assess students' achievement before and after 9-week treatment. Means, standard deviations, and t-test were used for data analysis. The research findings showed that there was a significant difference between RSU first-year students' pre-and post-test average scores at the level of $\leq .05$. 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 significantly enhanced their listening skills in the end.

Keywords: English listening skills, Enhancement, Listening strategies: Metacognitive, Cognitive and Social

1. Introduction

Importance of English Listening Skills

English is widely regarded as an essential tool for the globalized community and a good medium for communication used by people around the world. It has played so many important roles in our communication that it has come to be considered as a global language. Punthumasen (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 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 messages and improve 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 skills 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 in 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. Hence, research of the enhancement of students' listening skills should be conducted to find an appropriate method to improve their listening skills.

Context of Teaching Listening Skills at Rangsit University (RSU)

Rangsit University (RSU) 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) was 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 has been widely regarded as a productive 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 common 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 CDs. The students keep listening, and at the end, they read the questions and choose correct or appropriate answers without talking about listening strategies. From these teaching steps, 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, very little research about teaching listening strategies has been conducted to explore and solve the English listening problems.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching listening skills to undergraduates at Rangsit University was very challenging. The researcher, as an English instructor, could see his students complaining about their difficulties in listening skills. Here are the summaries of their grievances against listening exercises: the speech delivery was fast, they were not familiar with the sound, they were not good at grammatical structures, they had a limited vocabulary, and they had no time to think about what they had listened to. Though the textbooks for teaching this skill have been carefully chosen by matching to the level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) at A1 and B1 levels, 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 276 students (42.52%) failed to reach the average score of the listening quiz. This could probably be assumed that they needed good listening strategies to enhance their listening skills. Accordingly, the researcher decided to conduct a study to find out how the integrated listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, and social could enhance Rangsit University first-year students' listening skills. In this paper, the use of these integrated listening strategies to improve the students' listening skills and enhance their listening achievement was examined.

2. Literature Review

Metacognitive listening strategies mean processes that guide listeners to achieve their goals in listening tasks. Goh (2009) said that the metacognitive strategy referred to each person's awareness of thinking and listening. Vandergrift (2011) said that the metacognitive listening strategy consisted of the following listening activities that led listeners to succeed in listening practice: predicting, monitoring, evaluating, and problem-solving. The metacognitive listening strategy can benefit practitioners in many different ways. The students who were aware of this strategy would know what to do when they didn't know what to do, and they would seek or think of what they needed to do (Anderson, 2002). According to Liu (2008), Zhang (2012), and Birjandi (2012), a high level of metacognitive awareness would be able to regulate and direct students' listening style, and they could employ it to boost their performances. Chamot (2008) said that when listeners developed metacognitive strategies, they were more likely to plan what to listen to, monitor their own activities, figure out solutions to the problems confronted, and evaluate themselves when they finished their tasks. Similarly, Vandergrift & Goh (2012) noted that metacognitive listening strategies helped listeners to

plan what to listen to, monitor the accuracy of the context, solve encountered problems, and evaluate overall comprehension.

Cognitive strategies help listeners to master their listening skills. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) said that cognitive strategies referred to mental activities functioning preciously on incoming messages and exploiting the language to boost learning. The common types of cognitive strategies are summarizing, guessing the meaning of words, phrases, or short sentences from language context, and relating new messages to prior knowledge. Oxford (2006) said that, for language learners, it was necessary to use cognitive learning strategies to learn a new language. A common function of cognitive learning strategies was to manipulate and transform the target language by learners. It is typically considered to be the most well-known strategies for language learners.

The social strategy can help learners succeed in developing their listening skills. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) and Brown (2001) said that the social strategy consisted of another person's interaction, such as asking questions for clarification or explanation about the task and cooperating with peers to achieve learning goals. The learners need cooperation and give harmonization to others when they are studying in the classroom. Oxford (2006) grouped social strategies into three categories as follows: (1) asking questions, (2) cooperating with others, (3) empathizing with others.

Low-and high-proficient listeners employ listening strategies differently when practicing listening tasks. Chen (2009) said that high proficient learners orchestrated many strategies while practicing listening. On the contrary, low proficient learners heavily relied on word-by-word translation. Meanwhile, high-ability listeners automated their listening processes by paying attention to strategies, low-ability listeners wasted a lot of time with linguistic background such as grammatical structures. High-ability listeners applied world knowledge and previous life experiences to enhance their listening activities, but low-ability students did not do that.

In summary, listening strategies can enhance learners' listening skills because these strategies empower them to regulate and direct their own learning style. Following the process of metacognitive listening strategies, learners can process autonomy in listening. By applying the cognitive strategy, listeners can use their background knowledge to enhance their listening performances. Finally, the social strategy will support the way learners utilize the listening target language and give them more confidence when practicing listening skills. Of these three types of listening strategies, low-and high-proficient listeners employ listening strategies differently when practicing listening tasks.

3. Objective

This research aimed to find out how the three integrated listening strategies, namely metacognitive, cognitive, and social could enhance RSU first-year students' listening skills in terms of their listening achievement.

4. Research Hypothesis

There will be a significant difference between RSU freshman students' pre-and post-test scores at the level of $\leq .05$.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Population and Sample

The population of this study was freshman students of Rangsit University. They registered in the academic year of 1/2017 in the course of ENL 101 (English for International Communication) with the total number of 1,699 students. The researcher was assigned to teach 4 groups of this subject during this academic year. The random sampling method was employed to select a sample group. The researcher used the lottery method which is generally regarded as the most primitive and mechanical way to select a sample group. That was the researcher wrote their section codes on four small pieces of paper and placed them on a bowl and mixed thoroughly. After that, the blind-folded researcher picked numbered tags from the bowl. All the individuals bearing the numbers picked by the researcher are the subjects for the study.

Finally, the subjects of this study were a group of 37 freshman students enrolling in the course of ENG 101, English for International Communication, in the academic year of 1/2017. There were 34 female and 3 male students and their ages ranged from 18 to 26 years old. In order to relieve any anxiety during the treatment, the researcher informed students regarding rules of the study. They were told that they had the freedom to leave the study anytime and it would not affect their school grades. Therefore, because of some technical problems, 7 students left the study. The total number of the participants remained 30 until the end.

5.2 Research Instruments

The following were the instruments used in this study.

5.2.1 Lesson plans were used as an instrument for treatment to enhance RSU first-year students' listening skills. There were nine electronic listening lesson plans designed for this study. The contents were common topics and could regenerate dialogues after the listening practice. They were about (1) describing and asking about appearances, (2) describing and asking restaurants, (3) asking about travel preferences, (4) travel, (5) jobs, (6) health, (7) free-time activities, (8) style and fashion, and (9) opinion.

Each lesson plan composed of three activities: (1) Reviewing strategies for listening, (2) Listening practice and (3) Conversation.

Here were the steps of lesson plan construction. (1) After reviewing related literature, the researcher analyzed and synthesized all necessary data to formulate lesson plans. They were nine lesson plans covering all three listening strategies, namely metacognitive, cognitive, and social. (2) The lesson plans were evaluated for content validity by three language experts. The average result of the IOC (Indexes of Item-Objective Congruence) rated by the three language experts for nine lesson plans was .89 which indicated that this research instrument was acceptable to be applied in the study. (3) Then, the three lesson plans were tried out with a group of the students who were not the sample group, but they had the same English background. They all studied in the subject of Communicative English 101 and had more than 21 points of ONET (Ordinary National Educational Test). (4) Finally, the researcher corrected/adjusted some unclear parts and prepared complete lesson plans for data collection during the semester 1/2017.

The following were the stages of using lesson plans. In the listening practice, students were required to go through 5 stages of the metacognitive listening processes which are (1) Planning/Predicting, (2) First Listening: First Verification Stage, (3) Second Listening: Second Verification Stage, (4) Third Listening: Final Verification Stage, and (5) Reflection Stage.

(1) In Planning/Predicting Stage, the instructor informed students about the topic of a conversation. Then the instructor asked them to guess words/expressions/sentences they might hear from an audio file and took note on their tablets. Based on the instructor's directions, students had to use one set of metacognitive listening strategies: Planning and Directed Attention. They also used other two cognitive listening strategies: Getting the Idea Quickly and Taking Notes.

(2) In First Listening: First Verification Stage, before playing the audio file for first listening, the instructor asked students to pay attention to particular details such as names, places, prices, wh-questions, etc. and took notes. Then the instructor asked students to compare their notes with their peers to see if they still needed more details. Based on the instructor's directions, students had to use two sets of the metacognitive listening strategies: (2.1) Selective Attention, Monitoring and Evaluation, and (2.2) Monitoring, Evaluation, Planning, and Selective Attention. They also used two cognitive listening strategies: Recognizing and Using Formulas and Patterns and Taking Notes. Additionally, they used two social listening strategies: Asking Questions and Cooperating with Others.

(3) In Second Listening: Second Verification Stage, the instructor played the audio file for the second listening and reminded students to correct their answers. They had to discuss with their classmates to get the right answers. Based on the instructor's

directions, students were required to use two sets of the metacognitive listening strategies: (3.1) Selective Attention, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Problem-Solving, and (3.2) Monitoring, Evaluation, and Problem-Solving. They also used two cognitive listening strategies: Recognizing and Using Formulas and Patterns and Taking Notes. Additionally, they used two social listening strategies: Asking Questions and Cooperating with Others.

(4) In Third Listening: Final Verification Stage, the instructor played the audio file for the third listening and asked students to pay specific attention to catch the information they missed from their earlier discussions. Based on the instructor's directions, students were required to use one set of the Metacognitive Listening Strategies: Selective Attention, Monitoring, and Problem-Solving. They also used two cognitive listening strategies: Recognizing and Using Formulas and Patterns and Taking Notes.

(5) In Reflection Stage, the instructor reminded students about the use of strategies for what they could not understand and asked them to write their goals for the next listening activity. Based on the instructor's directions, students had to use one set of the metacognitive listening strategies: Evaluation and Planning. They also used one cognitive listening strategy: Taking notes.

After completing the 5 stages of their listening practice of each lesson, students in pair were assigned to prepare a dialog concerning what they had listened to during their practice and make conversation with each other.

5.2.2 Pre-and-Post Test was used as an instrument to assess students' achievement before and after the treatment. The researcher adapted the test from a commercial book called *Speak Now 2: Teacher's Manual* written by Richards & Bohlke (2012). There were 24 questions with four multiple choices, worth 1 point each. The range of the language was at the level of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) A2-B1, the language level expected by the Office of Higher Education Commission. The test was evaluated and rated by three language experts and was tried out with a group of ten students who were not a sample group, but had the same English background. Finally, some unclear parts of the test were adjusted or corrected, and then the complete test was prepared for data collection during the semester 1/2017.

4. Results and Discussion

The focus of this study was to address how RSU first-year students' listening skills could be enhanced through the use of the three integrated listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, and social. The main finding of this study was presented in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: T-test for Paired Samples Showing Significant Differences between RSU First-Year Students' Pre-and Post-Listening Test Scores

Test	n	Mean	S.D.	t	df	Sig
Pre-test	30	19.53	2.933	-4.722	29	.000**
Post-test	30	21.47	1.871			

** <0.5

From Table 4.1, it was found that before practicing their listening skills through the use of integrated listening strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, and social, the RSU first-year students participated in this study took the pre-test and earned the average score of 19.53 (S.D.=2.933). After the practice, they took the post-test and earned the average score of 21.47 (S.D.=1.871). Since the probability (p) value or the Sig (2-tailed) was .00 lower than .05, it could be assumed that there was a significant difference between pre-and post-test.

With regard to the objective of this study, "...to find out how the three integrated listening strategies, namely metacognitive, cognitive, and social could enhance RSU first-year students' listening skills in terms of their listening achievement." According to the research finding, it could be assumed that all the students participated in this study had enhanced their listening skills through the three integrated listening strategies. This was because they planned and directed attention to the topics, monitored the accuracy of the text, evaluated the listening process, and solved the listening problems they encountered. Many scholars like 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 could help them achieve their goals in listening. These scholars also said that university students who exposed to strategy training could be outperformed in their listening tests.

5. Conclusion

According to 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, evaluate their listening activities, and solve the language problems they encountered during the practice (Metacognitive). They need to learn how to get ideas quickly, take notes and use resources for receiving and sending messages (Cognitive). Finally, they need to collaborate with friends and ask questions when they need some help (Social).

6. About the Author

Mongkol Sodachan, Ed.D. received his Doctorate in Educational Studies from the Faculty of Education, Rangsit University. Presently, he has been a full-time lecturer at Rangsit English Language Institute (RELI) Rangsit University. His specialties are English language teaching-learning and technology.

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