



EFL Students' Metacognitive Awareness Listening Strategies in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the metacognitive awareness listening strategies that students commonly employ in their listening comprehension. The study used explanatory mixed-method research design. The data were acquired using a questionnaire adapted from Vandergrift (2006) and through an interview. The respondents in this study were fifth-semester students of the English Study Program at Riau University. The respondents who filled out the questionnaire was 75 students of the 108 existing students. The results showed that students' metacognitive awareness in listening strategies were very high. The strategies were classified into: problem solving (4.00), mental translation (3.78), planning/evaluation (3.77), directed attention (3.58), and person knowledge (3.51). This result showed that most English Department students use problem solving as their listening strategy. It also shows that students often used their understanding of the context rather than translating word-for-word in their heads; compared the impact of their listening efforts; maintained concentration and stay focused in listening. In line with the qualitative data also showed that there were positive responses that students applied in using metacognitive listening strategies for their learning process. In the interview, students also shared some of the things they do when they lose focus. Such as pause the audio, relax the body and refresh the mind, and focus only on the key words. It also shows that students use more words they understand to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words. In addition, students make more comparisons between their background knowledge and their listening context.

Keywords: *listening, listening strategy, metacognitive awareness*

Introduction

A crucial part of learning a language is developing listening comprehension, which calls for a lot of mental effort on the side of the listener (Vandergrift, 1999). Due to its four benefits—cognitive, efficient, utilitarian, and affective—it is crucial for supporting language development (Gary, 1975 as cited in Vandergrift, 1999). Students benefit greatly from listening skills as they are a crucial learning tool. There's no agreement among scholars regarding what makes up listening or listening comprehension (Wang, 2016).

Listening is an important skill because successful communication depends not only on receiving messages but also on interpreting them correctly (Guo & Will, 2006). As research conducted by Lui (2008) showed the result that 93.8% of the learners' opinion was that listening was a more important skill than the other three a language skill. Nonetheless, it perhaps the hardest talent for students to master.

Listening comprehension is one of the most important skills in second language learning (Dang, et. al., 2021). According to several researchers, listening is the most commonly used of the four basic skills needed to learn a language. For this reason, listening comprehension techniques and the capacity to apply them successfully are essential to language acquisition. However, there are other opinions regarding this. Ridgway (2000) argues that listening in a foreign language learning has a high level of cognitive difficulty and requires full attention. Yan (2006) said that there are linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors that affect listening comprehension. Pronunciation, vocabulary, and pattern practice are linguistic factors. Psychological, physiological and cultural are non-linguistic factors. Thus, students are required to realize what strategies they should do in understanding how they can listen and to further develop the effectiveness of these strategies, such as cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective.

A listening strategy is a technique or approach that helps listeners reach the objective of listening comprehension, either directly or indirectly. The development of strategies is critical to listening instruction because strategies are deliberate means by which students direct and assess their own comprehension and responses (Vandergrift, 1999; Gilakjani, 2011). This means that the learners should be able to decode the message, understand and interpret what has been conveyed during the listening process.

This study focuses on metacognitive awareness of English listening strategies used at university level. Researchers have furthered in investigating listening strategies used by EFL learners. All listening strategies that are cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-effective have been addressed in previous studies. Cognitive strategies have been explored by O'Malley and Chamot (1990). Some studies that focus on metacognitive strategies including Holden (2004), Bingol, et al., (2014), Goh (2006) and Vandergrift (2005). Socio-affective strategies have been explored by Habte – Gabr (2006) in the field of second language acquisition.

From the researcher' observation at English Study Program, most of the students have good skills in listening, but they are not aware of their actual ability. Some students nevertheless frequently struggle with feelings of insecurity regarding their grammar, as well as a lack of methods, vocabulary, and sentence construction skills. In other words, they do not believe in their abilities. As a result, they always procrastinate and do the work when the deadline approaches. Then the results are below expectations. In fact, they can maximize their tasks if they believe in their abilities and are aware of the metacognitive strategies that can be used. In other words, if they are going to do listening tasks, they should be aware of listening metacognitive strategies for good results.

In this study, the researchers want to further investigate students' metacognitive awareness listening strategies. Having awareness in learning listening is important to help students realize their abilities, maximize their competence in listening, and put more effort into the task. The researchers are interested in investigating metacognitive awareness listening because listening strategies are related to students' performance and are the first aspect that contributes to students' listening ability. In this case, the researcher is interested in conducting a study on students' metacognitive awareness listening strategies at English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau. As a result, this research attempted to respond to the following question:

1. What is the most metacognitive strategy that students used in listening at English Study Program?
2. How do they apply the strategies while listening?

Method

In this research, the researchers used explanatory mixed-method design. The data consisted of quantitative and qualitative. To collect quantitative data, a questionnaire on students' metacognitive awareness listening strategies adopted from Vandergrift (2006) was conducted in August 2024 and then distributed using Google Form. Then, to collect the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were used in November 2024 to provide detailed information on how students applied metacognitive awareness listening strategies. There were 108 fifth-semester students of the English Department and 75 students agreed to complete the questionnaire. As for the qualitative data, interviews were conducted with 10 informants.

The Likert scale is one of the most basic and widely used psychometric instruments in social science and education research (Joshi, et.al, 2015). In the form of a metric scale, participants will be asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with a given statement. Researchers use a Likert Scale with five levels, score 1 for the lowest level and score 5 for the highest level; Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), neutral (3), Agree (4) and strongly agree (5) with the interpretation of the scale as follows.

Table 1. The Interpretation of the Scale

Range Score	Description
4.5 – 5	Very High
3.5 – 4.49	High
2.5 – 3.49	Moderate
1.5 - 2.49	Low
0.5 – 1.49	Very Low

(Santiago, 2010)

Results

Students' Planning/Evaluation Strategies

Before listening, students also need to plan how they will listen and what their goals will be. Table 2 presented the average result of planning/evaluation strategies. There are 5 items that are related to the planning/evaluation strategies namely item number 1 until 5.

Table 2. Respondents' Responses on Planning/Evaluation Strategies

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
1	"Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen"	4 (5,3%)	5 (6,7%)	19 (25,3%)	32 (42,7%)	15 (20%)	3,65 (High)
2	"Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to"	1 (1,3%)	7 (9,3%)	10 (13,3%)	45 (60%)	12 (16%)	3,8 (high)
3	"After listening, I think back to how I listened, and about what I might do differently next time"	1 (1,3%)	4 (5,3%)	21 (28%)	35 (46,7)	14 (18,7%)	3,76 (high)
4	"As I listen, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension"	1 (1,3%)	9 (12%)	14 (18,7%)	38 (50,7%)	13 (17,3%)	3,7 (high)

5	"I have a goal in mind as I listen	1 (1,3%)	4 (5,3%)	13 (17,3%)	35 (46,7%)	22 (29,3%)	3,98 (High)
The Overall Mean Score (high)							3,77

The planning/evaluation strategies showed item 5 "I have a goal in mind as I listen" got the highest mean score of 3,98 (High). Item 1 "Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen" had the lowest average score of 3,65 (High). The overall mean score of planning/evaluation strategies was 3,77 (High).

Students' Directed Attention Strategies

The capacity to sustain concentration during audio listening will serve as an assessment criterion for subsequent learning. Therefore, it is necessary to know how students maintain their focus while listening to audio. Table 3 showed the average result of directed attention strategies. There are 4 items that are related to the directed attention strategies namely item number 6 until 9.

Table 3. Respondents' Responses on Directed Attention Strategies

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
6	"I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding"	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	9 (12%)	24 (32%)	36 (48%)	4,16 (high)
7	"When my mind wanders, I recover my concentration right away"	2 (2,7%)	4 (5,3%)	23 (30,7%)	34 (45,3%)	12 (16%)	3,66 (high)
8	"I try to get back on track when I lost concentration"	1 (1,3%)	3 (4%)	10 (13,3%)	37 (49,3%)	24 (32%)	4,06 (high)
9	"When I have difficulty understanding what I hear, I give up and stop listening"	18 (24%)	25 (33,3%)	14 (18,7%)	16 (21,3%)	2 (2,7%)	2,45 (low)

The Overall Mean Score **3,58 (high)**

Regarding the directed attention strategies, the highest mean score was item 6 "I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding" with mean score 4,16 (High). Item 9 "When I have difficulty understanding what I hear, I give up and stop listening" had the lowest average score of 2,45 (Low). The overall mean score 3,58 (High).

Students' Person Knowledge Strategies

The person knowledge strategies can influence how they approach learning to listen. Table 4 offered the average result of person knowledge strategies. There are 3 items that are related to the person knowledge strategies namely item number 10 until 12.

Table 4. Respondents' Responses on Person Knowledge Strategies

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
10	"I find that listening in English is more difficult than reading, speaking, or writing in English"	4 (5,3%)	13 (17,3%)	21 (28%)	16 (21,3%)	21 (28%)	3,49 (moderate)
11	"I feel that listening comprehension in English is a challenge for me"	2 (2,7%)	7 (9,3%)	14 (18,7%)	31 (41,3%)	21 (28%)	3,82 (high)
	"I don't feel nervous when I listen to English"	5 (6,7%)	16 (21,3%)	23 (30,7%)	19 (25,3)	12 (16%)	3,22 (moderate)

The Overall Mean Score **3,51 (high)**

Regarding the person knowledge strategies, item 11 with statement “I feel that listening comprehension in English is a challenge for me” had the highest average score of 3,82 (high). The lowest mean was 3,22 (moderate) that was on item 12 “I don’t feel nervous when I listen to English”. All items of person knowledge strategies were valuated “High” with an overall mean of 3,51 (High).

Students’ Mental Translation Strategies

The way students translate as they listen also needs to be considered so that it can make it easier for them to understand the audio. Table 5 presented the average result of mental translation strategies. There are 3 items that are related to the mental translation strategies namely item number 13 until 15.

Table 5. Respondent’ Responses on Mental Translation Strategies

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
13	“I translate in my head as I listen”	0	4	10	31	30	4,16
			(5,3%)	(13,3%)	(41,3%)	(40%)	(high)
14	“I translate key words as I listen”	0	2	15	36	22	4,04
			(2,7%)	(20%)	(48%)	(29,3%)	(high)
15	“I translate word by word, as I listen”	6	15	21	24	9	3,14
		(8%)	(20%)	(28%)	(32%)	(12%)	(moderate)
The Overall Mean Score (high)							3,78

Regarding the mental translation strategies, the highest average score was item 13 with statement “I translate in my head as I listen” with mean score 4,16 (High). Besides, the lowest mean score was item 15 “I translated word by word, as I listen” with mean score 3,14 (Moderate). The overall mean score of the mental translation strategies was 3,78 (High).

Students’ Problem-solving Strategies

The most common strategies that students employ when listening in English are those that deal with problems. Table 6 showed the average result of problem-solving strategies. There are 6 items that are related to the problem-solving strategies namely item number 16 until 21.

Table 6. Respondents' Responses on Problem-solving Strategies

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
16	"I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand"	0	1 (1,3%)	15 (20%)	35 (46,7%)	24 (32%)	4,09 (high)
17	"As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic"	0	4 (5,3%)	13 (17,3%)	35 (46,7%)	23 (30,7%)	4,02 (high)
18	"I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand"	0	3 (4%)	11 (14,7%)	32 (42,7%)	29 (38,7%)	4,10 (high)
19	"As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realize that is not correct"	0	3 (4%)	25 (33,3%)	38 (50,7%)	9 (12%)	3,70 (high)
20	"I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't understand"	0	1 (1,3%)	17 (22,7%)	43 (57,3%)	14 (18,7%)	3,93 (high)
21	"When I guess the meaning of a word, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess make sense"	0	1 (1,3%)	10 (13,3%)	37 (49,3%)	27 (36%)	4,20 (very high)

The Overall Mean Score

4,00 (high)

The evaluation of problem-solving strategies showed the highest mean score was item 21 "When I guess the meaning of a word, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess make sense" with mean score 4,20 (Very High). Item 19 "As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realize that is not correct" got the lowest mean score of 3,70 (High). The overall mean score of problem-solving strategies was 4,00 (High).

Based on the data above, the following presents the overall table of metacognitive awareness listening strategies most often used by students.

Table 7. The Table of Metacognitive Awareness Listening Strategies

No	Strategies	Mean Score	Percentage
1	Problem-solving	4,00	21,5%
2	Mental translation	3,78	20,2%
3	Planning/evaluation	3,77	20,2%
4	Directed attention	3,58	19,2%
5	Person knowledge	3,51	18,8%

The table shows that the highest score is 21,5% which is problem-solving strategies, the second highest is planning/evaluation strategies and mental translation strategies with 20,2%, the second lowest is directed attention strategies with 19,2%, and the lowest average is 18,8% which is person knowledge strategies.

This part will answer the second research question, how the students apply these strategies when listening to English audio.

Applying Planning/Evaluation Strategies

The following presents how students apply the planning/evaluation strategy. The questions given are “Before listening to the audio, what listening strategies did you have in mind? After listening to the audio, did your listening strategies change?”

Student 4: “before listening **I plan to focus on main ideas and take a note** and after listening I realize that I need to **focus more on key details and tone usual as possible**”.

Student 5: “**I have some listening strategies**. For the first like, I have to **understand the topic, and then when I listening, I have to taking note like for the summary or just write what the vocabulary I know and I don't know like that**. So, **I'm focusing on the keyword** according to the topic. After that I think I just have to upgrade my vocabulary skill not for my listening strategies”.

Student 6: “my listening strategies before I listen to the audio is just to **stay focus and try not to translate every word** that I heard in the audio. And after listen to the audio, my listen strategies are the same”.

Some of the statements above prove that before students listen to the audio, they have a plan of how they will listen later. For example, they will focus on the main idea and keywords regardless of how long the audio is, they will also write small notes or vocabulary that they think will help them answer questions later.

Applying Directed Attention Strategies

The following presents how students apply the directed attention strategy. The questions given are "While listening to the audio in class, did you maintain your focus? Did you lose your focus easily? How did you recover your focus?"

Student 1: "I try to **stay focus but sometime I got distract. I regain focus** by taking **deep write** and listening for main ideas".

Student 2: "yes, I have to **maintain my focus. To recover my focus,** I have to stay focus to listen to the audio and I have to relax my body and my mind. That's why I can recover my focus while I listening to the audio in class".

Student 6: "yaa, I try to **maintain my focus,** and I didn't lose my focus easily, and **if I did, I try to focus on the current audio and try not to think too much on the audio that I lost my focus on**".

Based on some of the interview results above, it can be concluded that when listening to audio, students try to stay focused. When they lose focus, they immediately set their focus back with various tricks. For example, writing and listening to the main idea of the audio and relaxing their body and mind to focus on the audio again.

Applying Person Knowledge Strategies

The following presents how students apply the person knowledge strategy. The questions given are "Do you have any difficulties in listening? What are they?"

Student 2: "of course any difficulty for me in listening to the audio, but there's only one difficulty I have in listening is I cannot listen to the conversation audio clearly because **I think like there are differences between native speaker and Indonesian people speak in English.** Sometimes it's easier for me to listen Indonesian than native speaker especially in TOEFL test conversation audio".

Student 5: "yes, I do of course. When I listening the audio **I pay some difficulties like the accents, the pronunciation, and the vocabulary.** Sometimes I find that I can't understand the vocabulary and if the audio speak too fast, I lose my focus too".

Student 9: "yes. Of course, I do have **a lot of difficulties** when I listening to an audio or when I am listening to someone speaking in English, like **accents,** I am not really use to be British accent or any other accent other than American accent. I am not really use that. So, when I listen to something that I am not

really use to, I find it difficult for me to understand what word they are saying and also **other difficulties like hard word that I am not understand**, I think I have to expend my vocabularies because I still find a lot of words that I don't know what that I don't even know the meaning of that word when I listening to someone speaking English”.

Based on some of the statements above, participants stated that listening to audio requires more knowledge about accent, pronunciation, and vocabulary to facilitate listening to audio.

Applying Mental Translation Strategies

The following presents how students apply the mental translation strategy. The questions given are “When listening to audio, how do you translate the text?”

Student 1: “I **translate in my mind** as I listen, and I focusing on the main point first”.

Student 2: “I can **translate the text by myself** because I can use my vocabulary understanding to translate the text word by words”.

Student 5: “I try to translate with my ability first, like **understand the overall meaning first before translating word by word** and then if I don't really trust my translation if I not sure, I'll using Google translate “

From the results of the interviews above, it can be concluded that students have various strategies in translating when listening to audio. The strategies that students have in translating are translating directly from their minds and understanding the meaning of the audio before translating word by word.

Applying Problem-solving Strategies

The following presents how students apply the problem-solving strategy. The questions given are “What do you do when you have difficulty listening to audio?”

Student 2: “when I have difficulty while listening to the audio, I will **take off my earphone and relax my body and my mind and then I can continue to listen to the audio conversation carefully** by doing all my best. And then, I should train myself by listening more to the conversation in order to develop my listening skill”.

Student 3: “when I encounter difficulties, I **pause the audio and try to break down the sentences into smaller parts, I also look for clues like keywords or context** to help my

understand”.

Student 7: “I usually **recover my focus and try to listen more** carefully to the **accent**, and the **keywords** set in the audio”.

The statement above strengthens the idea that when students have difficulty in listening and notice that something is not correct, they immediately try to solve the problem by pausing the audio, refreshing their bodies, looking for general ideas through the keywords and clues available, and then continuing with their listening activities.

Discussion

Among the five metacognitive awareness listening strategies, problem-solving was the most frequently used strategy with an average score of 4.00. The score is interpreted as a high score, meaning that while listening to audio in English, students often compare their understanding with what they have known about the topic. This strategy is used more often because listeners need to understand context, infer meaning, and make connections between ideas. Listeners may encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, accents, or topics, so they must use problem-solving strategies to adapt and understand. Problem-solving strategies are also used to understand spoken language directly, making adjustments as needed to understand the speaker's intended meaning.

As Vandergrift (2006) said, problem-solving strategies consist of strategies that students can use to guess the meaning of the spoken text they have listened to with the aim of monitoring their understanding during the listening process. Problem-solving strategies in the Metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire are divided into several statements. As for the results of interviews with several students regarding this problem-solving strategy, they mentioned that when experiencing difficulties while listening to audio, they immediately looked for ways to solve it in various ways, namely pausing the audio, looking for clues, looking for main ideas through the available keywords and also relaxing their bodies in order to stay focused.

Based on the statements and interview results above, English language education students class of 2022 prefer to compare their understanding so far with the topics discussed to make it easier to do listening assignments. The result of this research is similar to Ratebi and Amerian (2013) because both result show problem solving as the highest domain and the setting of both researches was conducted in undergraduate program majoring in English.

The second strategy that students often use is the mental translation strategy with an average score of 3.78. The results of student interviews regarding mental translation are in accordance with the statement that received the highest average score, namely they translate in their minds while listening to the audio, then proceed to translate key words and word by word. This result is different from

Alhaisoni (2017) which shows that this mental translation strategy is the least used strategy by students or the strategy that gets the lowest average among the other four strategies. This proves that the mental translation strategy is a strategy that should be avoided by listeners to become more proficient listeners (Goh, 2018; Vandergrift et al., 2006).

Then, the third strategy that is often used by students is planning/evaluation with an average score of 3.77. The score is interpreted as a high score. Planning/evaluation is a strategy that students use to prepare and compare their listening effectiveness (Vandergrift et al., 2006). This strategy is also used by students to organize themselves in listening and evaluate the results of their listening efforts.

These strategies reflect the intentionally shaped nature of the comprehension process and assess comprehension targets (Richards, 1983). For the interview results of some students, it was found that they had a plan before listening to the audio such as focusing on the main idea and writing small notes, as well as writing known and unknown vocabulary. This result is different from Acar and Balaban (2017) which shows that the planning/evaluation strategy is the strategy most often used by students when listening in English.

Directed attention strategy is slightly used by students in listening activities. This strategy gets an average score of 3.58 and is interpreted as a high value as well. According to Vandergrift et al (2006) this strategy is a strategy to concentrate and stay focused on directed attention. There are several statements in the metacognitive awareness listening strategy regarding the directed attention strategy, namely trying to focus more, getting back on track when losing concentration, restore concentration immediately when the mind is chaotic with the statement and when having difficulty understanding, one should not give up.

As for the results of interviews with several students, they stated that they often lose focus while listening and when they realize it, they immediately concentrate again. All of these strategies emphasize the importance of concentration attention in the listening comprehension process. This result is inconsistent with previous research which found that direct attention strategies are often used by students. Ratebi (2013) found that Iranian students majoring in English reported frequent use of direct attention strategies, which was second only to problem-solving strategies. Moreover, in a recent study in the Saudi context, Altuwairesh (2016) found that Saudi EFL female students reported high use of this factor compared to other factors.

The last strategy that students use when listening is the person knowledge strategy with an average score of 3.51 and interpreted as a high score. Personal knowledge strategies are rarely used by listeners because they rely on prior knowledge or experience, which may not always be directly relevant to the listening context. Listeners use these strategies to relate new information to existing schemas or frameworks, which can facilitate comprehension but can also lead to

bias. Person knowledge strategies include the listeners' judgments of the difficulty presented by L2 listening, as well as their self-efficacy in L2 listening (Vandergrift et al., 2006).

There are three statements regarding person knowledge strategies. These statements include measures that assess students' linguistic abilities in listening, perceived difficulties in listening compared to the other three language skill, as well as their readiness in listening. Then for the interview results show that they experience many difficulties in listening such as differences in accents, pronunciation, and lack of vocabulary. In other words, students consider listening as a difficult job, they concentrate on the difficulties, and they try to do their best in this regard.

This result supported by previous research, Alhaisoni (2017) who conducted a study on Saudi Arabian EFL medical students, he found that the least frequently used strategy was 'personal knowledge' with an average frequency value of 3.32. This suggests that Saudi Arabian EFL medical students have a low level of confidence and self-efficacy in listening comprehension and they consider listening skills more difficult than other skills. Perhaps it can be said that since Saudi EFL students consider listening as a difficult task to perform they concentrate hard and try to do their best in this regard.

Conclusion

Respondents of this study used problem-solving strategies more often when listening to audio in English. They use problem-solving skills when they are about to listen and also when they have difficulties or lose concentration. They find ways to regain their concentration and understand the audio well, such as guessing and comparing the words they understand with what they know about the topic being discussed, and they immediately regain their concentration when they realize that something feels wrong. In the interview, students also shared some of the things they do when they lose focus. Such as pause the audio, relax the body and refresh the mind, and focus only on the key words. It also shows that students use more words they understand to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words. In addition, students make more comparisons between their background knowledge and their listening context.

In this study, the researcher recommends that lecturers facilitate students with material that is familiar to them because the results show that students like to relate their background knowledge to the material. The researcher recommends to student to expose more for listening activities like watching movies, listening to English music and listening to the other English program. Then, researcher recommends that future researchers who want to conduct research can use this research as a reference for their research and the researchers can also develop other questions and increase the number of research samples.

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