

Effectiveness of Listening Strategies Enhancing Comprehensive Listening Skill of English Learners

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Abstract

This study focuses on effectiveness of Strategy based listening activity to enhance comprehensive listening skills of engineering students. The second language learning requires various skills to extract the desired essence of teaching. Especially English language learning requires 'Strategy based' activities to acquire the language skills. It is necessary to modify the teaching-learning approach and to include multiple ways to get attention of students in second language learning class room. Listening is a critical skill that underlies all verbal communication inside and outside the class room. The purpose of this study is to look into comprehensive listening skills of engineering students and to guide how to go about listening and how to get over their problems in listening to English. More over the study aims to suggest effective strategies to enhance comprehensive listening skills

Key Words: Strategy, listening skills, Listening comprehension, language learning

Introduction

The everyday concept of listening is erroneously associated with hearing. Listening tends to be assumed as the process of receiving a spoken message and converting it into a meaning in mind. The first commonly held false conception assumes that listening and hearing are synonymous. However, hearing does not necessarily imply we are listening. Hearing can be seen as the physiological function of our auditory sense, whereas listening is conceptualized as the physiological attribute, which is in action when we discern and actively respond to the sounds heard. In this sense both listening and hearing involve sound perception, but listening involves a degree of intention.

Issues in Listening

The classroom of English still, for instance, reflects a teacher-centered ideology

with all its underpinning assumptions. The instructional approach used in most classes is grammar translation where the formal teaching of grammar is ultimately still a panacea; grammar is at the heart of what is done in the classroom. Teachers in this context are perceived as the dispensers of knowledge who are unquestionably empowered with the expertise to set goals, assign tasks, correct mistakes, and assess progress. In contrast, students are ultimately the passive recipients who are easily giving themselves in for teachers to pour piles of grammatical rules and vocabulary as well as ready-made well-written paragraphs that suit any topic to be learnt by heart only for the exams and completely forgotten afterwards. The interest in listening or speaking seems to be totally absent from the teaching practices in the classroom. This means that there is no room for these two skills in the final examination and as the teacher's whole

teaching is mainly oriented towards the exams s/he overlooks these two skills. So students find it difficult to understand word meaning and to catch sounds of individual words when they do listening comprehension. Therefore it is necessary to identify a range of strategies those are referred as effective or crucial for a listener if s/he wants to listen strategically.

Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this study is to help graduate students in Engineering Colleges learn how to go about listening and how to get over their problems in listening to English. To realize this, the study aims to suggest effective strategies for the most common problems that hindered students' comprehension while listening. The subjects of this study comprise of 54 second year students from the Engineering Colleges in Chennai.

Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies are a sequence of steps taken by a learner, deliberately, in a specific order for a specific purpose that is to learn, recall or comprehend the target language. Cognitive strategies refer to strategies that manipulate the material to be learned mentally, like 'elaboration' or physically as in 'note-taking'. They are more directly related to the performance of a particular learning task and involve direct manipulation or transformation of the learning material (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990 [9]; Brown & Palinscar, 1982)[3]. Metacognitive

strategies refer to strategies concerned with planning, regulating, and managing learning. They do not process input directly, but go beyond cognitive manipulation and transformation of incoming information. They involve thinking about the way information is processed and stored as well as taking appropriate steps to manage and regulate the cognitive processes.

Listening Comprehension Strategies

Listening comprehension strategies were actually based on general language learning strategies with the main focus given to listening, and therefore, some very listening-oriented strategies have been added (e. g., auditory monitoring, voice inference and others). Rost (1990)[12], based on examining extracts of native and non-native speaker interaction, proposed three sets of social strategies in oral communication between native and non native speakers: global questioning, local questioning, and the inferential strategies . One other taxonomy was developed by Vandergrift (1992)[13], who built on the taxonomies proposed by O'Malley & Chamot (1990)[9], Oxford (1990)[11], Rost (1990)[12], and developed his own strategy inventory of second language listening comprehension. His scheme following O'Malley & Chamot (1990)[9] consists of three main groups: cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies. Classification of listening strategies: Vandergrift's scheme (1992)[13]

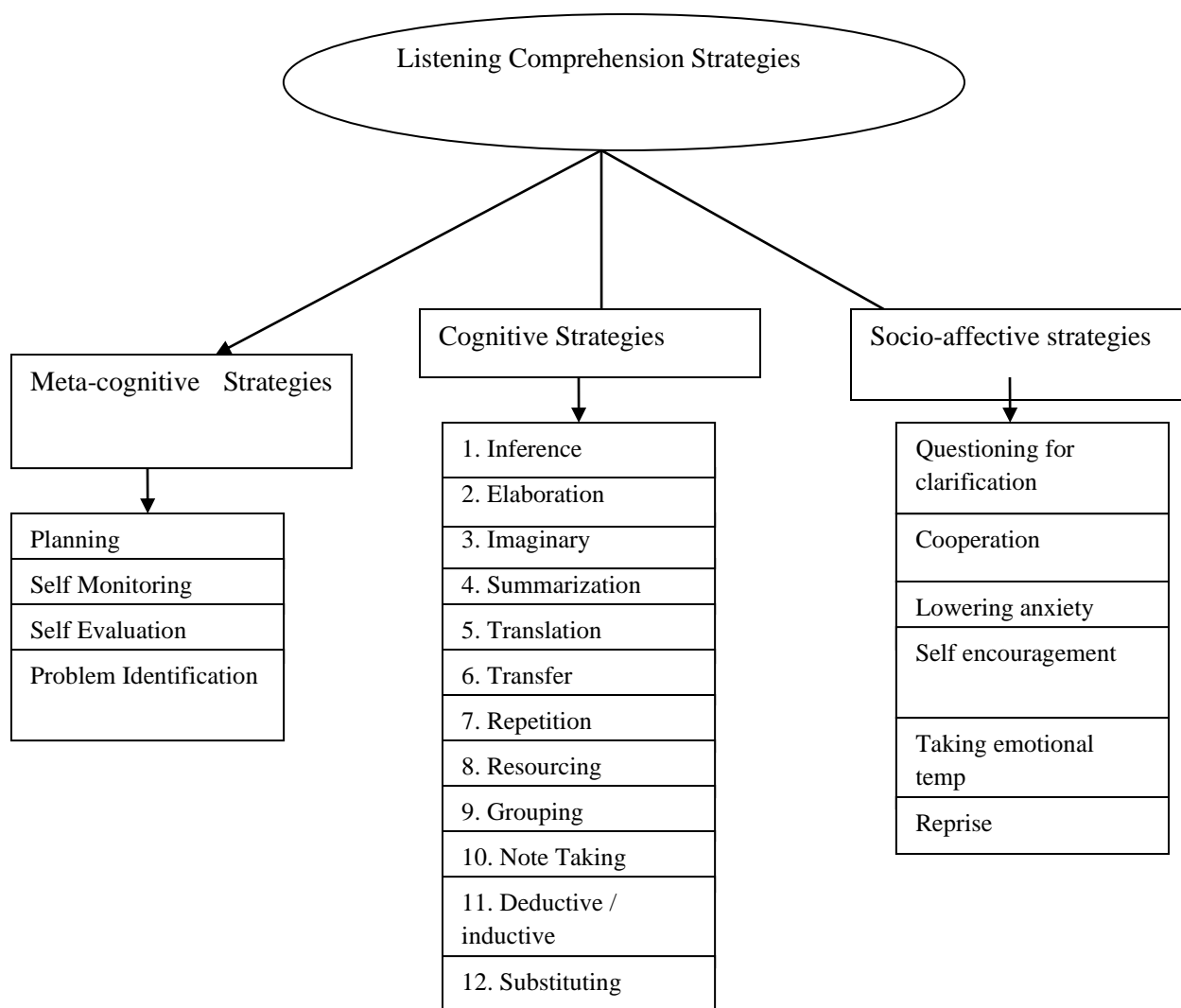


Fig-1 Classification of listening strategies

The scheme developed by Vandergrift (1992)[13] seems to be extensively inclusive. It is apt to apply to different settings of listening whether they are interactive, where listening occurs in two ways and there is a chance for asking and answering questions for better communication or in one-way listening; listening to lectures, TV programmes or to a tape recorded materials where listeners can make use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to help themselves achieve better comprehension.

Execution of Listening strategies

The subjects of the study comprise of 54 second year students from the Engineering

Colleges who were effective and less effective listeners, identified according to their scores on a proficiency test. Participants are divided into two groups of 27 each namely Effective and Ineffective listeners. Effective listener is someone who pays attention in class, understands what must be done, quickly "links in" to the gist of a text, is willing to participate and respond appropriately in conversation, and is willing to take risks in guessing the meaning of what is unknown. On the other hand an ineffective listener is someone who has a great deal of difficulty understanding, is "thrown off" by unknown words, and easily "gives up". The participants are explained with various listening

strategies and asked to listen to recorded academic lectures, Presentations on innovation and to raise their hands when they wanted to talk about the thought processes (think aloud) they engaged in while listening. Participants are

instructed to utilize all the strategies. Students' responses were audio-recorded and analyzed for strategies used and their frequency. The results indicates the efficiency rate of the usage of all the three strategies.

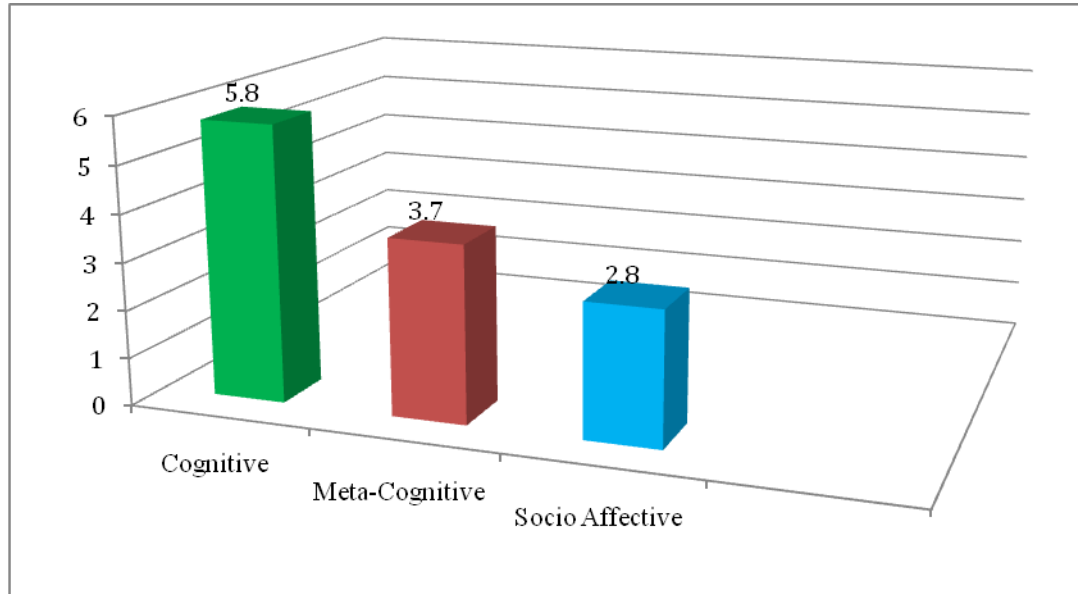


Fig -2 Effective Strategies

Fig-2 shows the utilization of the cognitive, metacognitive and socio affective strategies by the learners, and it is given to the understanding that 5.8, 3.7, 2.8 percentage of utilization has been attained respectively. Findings revealed that effective listeners were more open and flexible as well as able to select and deploy a wide range of different strategies. Less effective listeners, in contrast, focused too much on the text level. It is concluded that more effective listeners placed greater emphasis on the use of strategies such as personalizing (elaborating from their own knowledge), drawing inferences and predicting what comes next.

Findings

Findings revealed differences in the strategies reported by effective and ineffective listeners. Statistically significant differences between effective and ineffective listeners were reported for 'self-monitoring', 'elaboration', and 'inference'. Besides, qualitative data revealed that listeners used different strategies depending on the phase of the listening task. In other words

the analysis of the think-aloud protocols yielded empirical evidence to support and elaborate the three-stage model: perceptual processing, parsing and utilization stages.

In the perceptual stage, effective listeners listened selectively and monitored their comprehension; they were aware of their inattentiveness and consciously redirected their attention to the task. The ineffective listeners, in contrast, focused on the word-level and gave up when facing difficulties. They reported that when they encountered unknown words or phrases, they usually just stopped listening and failed to be aware of their attention any more. Selective attention appeared to be a crucial strategy in this stage. In the parsing stage, the effective listeners were listening for larger chunks of meaning, and inferred the unknown words from the context. They shifted their attention to the word-level only when comprehension breakdown occurred. Grouping (i. e., listening for larger chunks) and inference proved to be important during this phase. On the other hand, ineffective listeners approached

listening as a task primarily requiring comprehension on a word-by-word basis.

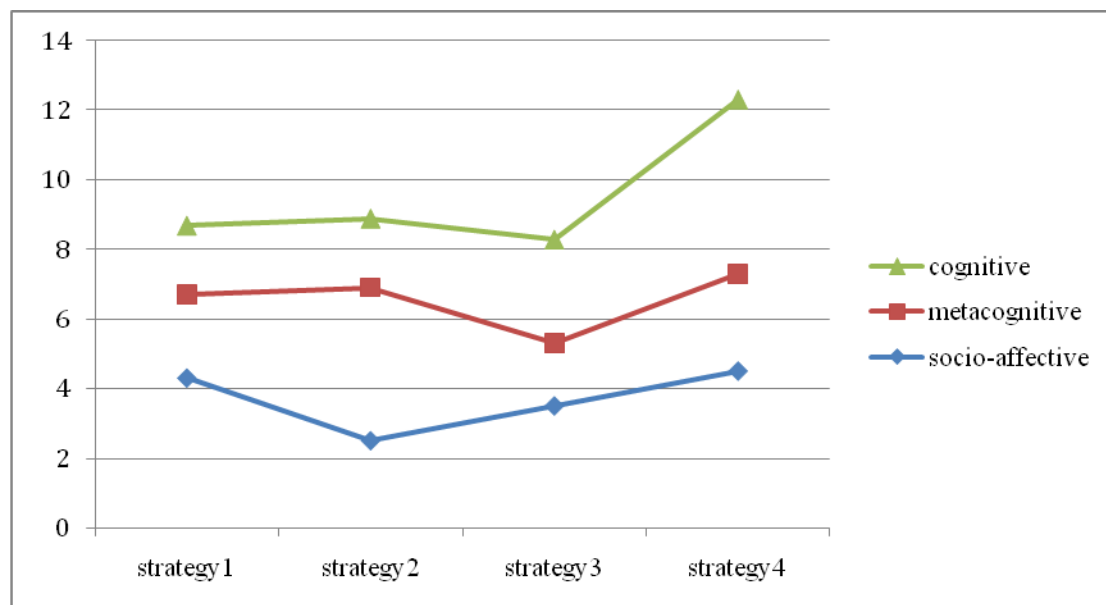


Fig-3 Usage of Strategies

According to the analysis it is stated through Fig-3 that Cognitive strategies are utilized in a range between 9-13% while metacognitive strategies remained 6 to 7%. In contrary to both, minimum of 4 to 5% of socio affective strategies are utilized by the learners.

In the utilisation stage, the effective listeners had more available background knowledge than the ineffective listeners. This could be due to the background knowledge of effective listeners being better organized and thus readily accessible. In this stage elaboration (relating the new to the known) seemed to be the dominant strategy; and the degree to which students were able to use this strategy determines their effectiveness as listeners. They made use of previously acquired knowledge in three ways: they used their world knowledge, their personal knowledge, which created

something meaningful for them, and carried out self-questioning. They also reported using 'differencing' (using the information within the text to fill in missing information) to make sense of the text. In contrast, ineffective listeners made little use of elaboration and inferencing. They used them separately and less frequently when solving a comprehension problem.

Findings indicated that all students evidenced a familiarity with metacognitive, cognitive, socio-affective and repair strategies. The use of metacognitive strategies such as comprehension monitoring, problem identification and selective attention appeared to be a significant factor distinguishing the effective from the ineffective listeners. The most popular frequently used cognitive strategies were elaboration, summarizing, guessing, inferencing, and transfer.

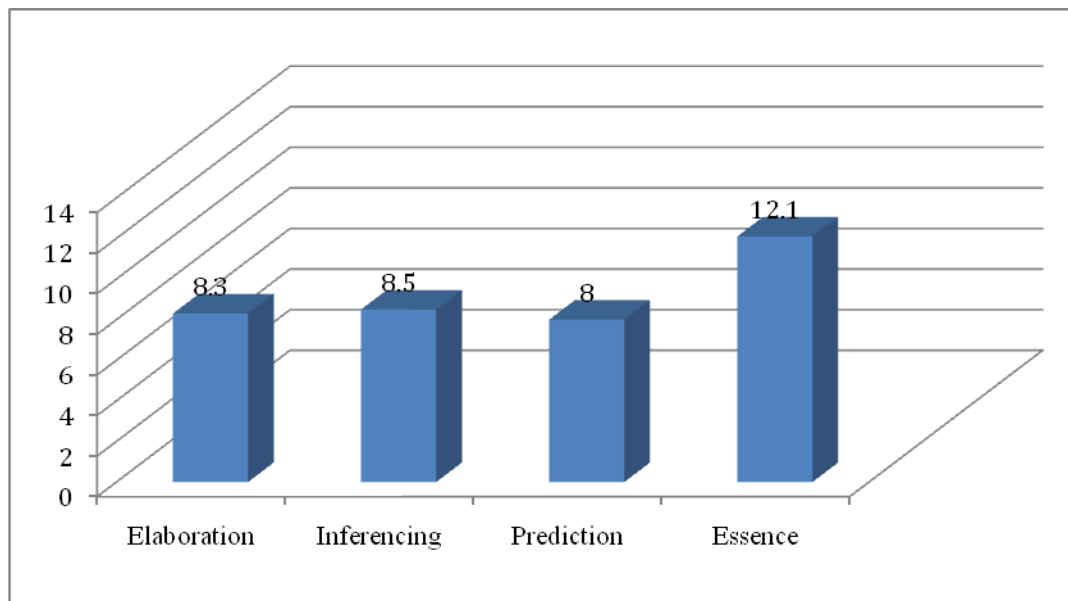


Fig -4 Usage of Cognitive Strategies

Fig-3 is getting proved hence using the Cognitive strategies like Elaboration, Drawing Inferences, Prediction and Essence. As per the Fig-4, it is clear that 8.3% usage is recorded in Elaboration strategy while 8.5% usage in Inferencing by the learner. The highest usage of 12.1% is recorded in Essence when 8% usage in Prediction.

The study revealed that both good and poor listeners use strategies. However, the difference between the two groups seems to be in the approach, strategy use and affective aspects of

listening, in the ability to select and deploy a wide range of strategies in the ability to match the strategies to the task demands and listening phases; perceptual processing, parsing and utilization. This line of research pointed out that the most successful cognitive strategies in helping learners achieve a better level of comprehension are inferencing, elaboration, essence and focus of meaning, anticipation (prediction)

Effective listening strategies

Strategy		What it involves
1. Meta Cognitive	Planning	What shall I focus on? What do I expect to listen to? What words might I listen to?
	Monitoring	Do I understand this? Does it make sense?
	Comprehension	Is the strategy I selected is the appropriate one?
	Self Evaluation	How well did I understand this? How successful was the strategy I used

2. Co gni tiv e	Elaboration	What do I already know about this? What does this make me think of?
	Inferencing	Logically, What could this mean? Can I make an intelligent guess?
	Prediction	What can I anticipate given that topic? What words can I listen to? What of genre is it?
	Essence and focus of meaning	What is the most important information? What signals this focus of information?

Conclusion

The present study suggests the strategy group for developing listening comprehension skill of engineering students. The most common metacognitive strategies identified and associated with effective listeners are monitoring comprehension, self-evaluation and planning, especially selective and directed attention. Cognitive strategies are Elaboration, Inferencing, Prediction, Essence and focus of meaning. Both these metacognitive and cognitive strategies are considered as very effective in improving listening comprehension. This study paves the way for further investigation in strategy training with different subjects.

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