


# A Review of Strategies for Teaching English Listening Comprehension: Vietnamese Context

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## Abstract

Listening is an important skill for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). This paper examined the listening strategies relevant English learning and teaching in Vietnam. It revealed that most Vietnamese students had favorable attitudes towards the use of listening strategies on learning listening comprehension. The result could be a great help for EFL teachers in the teaching of listening in Vietnam and other countries in Southeast Asia as well. Moreover, a few points to ponders have been suggested for the improvement of students' learning and their cognitive development.

**Keywords:** EFL, Student's listening problems, Strategies for listening comprehension

## Introduction

Listening is one of the skills of language learning. Listening strategies are generally regarded as important components of learning strategies and research on listening strategies evolves from studies on learning strategies. Thus, the definition and classification of listening comprehension strategies are correspondingly connected with those of learning strategies. Before defining listening strategies, there is a need to review the definition of learning strategies. However, the definitions of learning strategies have no consensus because of the different interpretations of them. The typical definitions of learning strategies are discussed by some influential researchers (e.g., Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978; Bacon, 1992; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998). Some definitions will be considered as follows: Rubin (1975) defines strategy as the techniques or equipment that learners can use to acquire knowledge of second language learning. Oxford (1990) suggests that learning strategies are the actions taken to improve the skill learned second language that could accelerate storage, modify and use a new language. O'Malley (1990) agrees that strategies consist of conscious, deliberate behavior which enhances learning and allows the learner to use information effectively.

Strategy can be divided into three groups: cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies. Cognitive strategies are the ones we use to accomplish a task immediately. For example, a student can learn about these topics (perhaps using information in L1) before listening to predict the content.

Meta-cognitive strategies are related to learning in general and often have long-term benefits. For example, student can choose to adjust in a recorded BBC once a week as a strategy to improve listening. Socio/affective strategies involve the interaction of learners with other speakers and their attitude for learning. For example, they may choose to exercise a phone conversation in L2 with other students to develop self-confidence, or reward your-self with a donut when they complete a number of tasks in the language destination. Moreover, meta-cognitive strategies are described as higher order executive skills that make use of knowledge about processes and

constitute an attempt to regulate language learning by means of planning for, monitoring and evaluating of the process of a learning activity. Metacognitive strategies involve advance organizers, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, functional planning, self-monitoring, delayed production and self-evaluation. Second, cognitive strategies are the strategies which are limited to the specific learning tasks and involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself. They include repetition, resourcing, directed physical response, translation, deduction, recombination, imagery, auditory representation, keyword method, conceptualization, elaboration, transfer, inferencing and summarizing. Third, Social/affective strategies deal with social-mediating activities and transacting with others. They include cooperation, questioning for clarification, self-talk and self-reinforcement.

Recent studies recognize the factors affecting ESL in listening comprehension. In Vietnam, previous studies have investigated the general learning strategies used in listening comprehension as follows:

Phung Thi Tho (2016) has conducted a research “*A study on difficulties & solutions in English Listening skill of Second-year students Faculty of Foreign Language at UTEHY* “. There were 52 second-year students. The result of study showed that English were limited and they have to face up with many difficulties with their learning strategies and students are still passive with their ability’s using listening strategies. The author pointed out the students wants to study listening better, they should try their best to change bad habits of listening, improve their background knowledge. Besides that, they should focus on the message. The learners should spend 5-10 minutes to listen short English news. Furthermore, the teacher should provide a more topic and material. Result of the study due to limitation scope of study, the researcher focusses on students in Faculty of foreign language which account for a small of number of students at UTEHY, so result of the study could not be generalized.

Chau (2007) has carried a research “*Problem and Solution for teaching and Learning Comprehension skills for student of HUFP*”. The author pointed out that the teacher should have much time to teach listening in class. Besides that, extra communicative classes in order to acquire English communicate skills, especially listening skill.

Ji and He (2004) performed “*a study on college students and teachers using teaching strategies*”. The finding indicates that listening strategies in order from that with the lowest to highest they’ve strategy social, emotional, meta-strategy, and strategic awareness. Moreover, Wang (2002) studied 178 strategic hears students not specializing in English China’s average by quantitative methods. The findings show that the strategy can effectively hear positive results listen, but only to a limited.

Wang (2012) has done a research “*Listening strategies of non-English, major EFL students*” with 280 third-year students. The author pointed out that. The teacher should find of the study provide useful & valuable information for listening teaching & learning for the learners. Especially among the students who is low quality and high quality. Furthermore, the teacher should be aware of listening skill is important and making students aware of listen skill bring them success. The result of this study showed differences existed between high listening proficiency students and low listening proficient students in science-oriented and non-science-oriented fields of study, and there was a difference in using cognitive strategies between low listening proficiency students majoring in science-oriented and non-science-oriented.

These different results show that it is not the same for the learners to have perceptions of difficulties in EFL listening. It can be seen that listening learning strategies are used variously in particular countries. This variety could stem from the difference of condition. Therefore, it is necessary to carry much more research in many places to have a thorough understanding of the learners’ difficulties and their practicing strategies.

In the most recent study with the title “Eighth Graders’ Students and their Use of Listening Strategies in EFL Listening Comprehension: A Study at Tan Duong Secondary School”, by Oanh (2019), the conclusions are drawn as follows:

Firstly, the study has come up with some preliminary findings which may contribute to understanding of the difficulties affecting grader’s listening comprehension in general and secondary school students in specific context of Tan Duong secondary school. The results of the investigation indicated that several problems occurred learning of English listening. The problems were related to learners’ performance such as speed of speech, same sounds and general understanding of the text. Based on the data obtained, the major problem faced by the students was related to listeners’ performance.

The findings of study also showed that students applied several strategies to develop their listening comprehension. Most of them prefer social/affecting strategies in listening. The findings of this study provided useful information and valuable for listening teaching and learning for students. Data collected from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were analyzed from their favorable attitudes towards using strategies in listening comprehension.

With the insightful findings of the research on factors and strategies affecting listening EFL comprehension of graders in Tan Duong Secondary School, some recommendations are offered to students and teachers with the hope that effectiveness of improving listening comprehension for graders can be achieved and Vietnamese teacher could have better methods to teach listening skill to their students.

Oanh (2019) had the following recommendations for students:

Firstly, the teachers should teach their students how to pronounce words with the same sound and others repeatedly; moreover, practicing regularly will help them easily recognize words better. Besides that, one good example should be given for them to practice and make it more interesting by using YouTube.

Secondly, students should record their own voice by using smartphones. Students can choose a topic and practice recording every day, which will help them distinguish homophones, and easily recognize the differences between the sounds and gradually familiarize themselves with the speed of lessons.

Thirdly, teachers should assign homework to help the students practice at home and class regularly. Besides, teachers can be of assistance to the students by describing homonyms, and ask the students to repeat again. Moreover, after the lesson, teachers can check the recordings or homework given the students.

Moreover, during listening, if the students cannot catch up with the speed, they could go over it many times to be sure. The students will be familiarized with how the words are pronounced and follow up the speed by pausing and repeating during its process. On one hand, teachers should better let the students choose which method is more suitable for them on the internet; therefore, they can improve and perfect their listening skill. On the other hand, the school needs to upgrade its listening laboratory to improve students' listening skill, and each classroom can take up from 12-15 students. Also, the classroom should be sound-proofed so that the students can focus on their lessons better.

### **Points to Ponder for More Effective Learning in Vietnamese and other ASEAN Countries Context**

*Points to Ponder I:* Teacher scaffolding can be considered effective in promoting student learning, increasing control upon a student's failures, decreasing control upon a student's successes and keeping the degree of control the same in the case of partial student understanding. These are considered contingent support which provides an appropriate level of challenge. However, these theoretical premises have not yet been tested in classroom situations. Contingent support can be effective and future research should focus on facilitating teachers in learning how to correctly diagnose students' understanding (Janneke & Elbers, 2013).

*Point to Ponder II:* Within the broad field of research on learning, culture and social interaction, sociocultural theory is now commonly used as an explanatory conceptual framework. The empirical research on talk and learning has been inspired and informed by a sociocultural perspective. We should consider how research on the educational functions of classroom talk might be developed, both theoretically and empirically, by using a sociocultural framework to link it with other lines of enquiry into learning and cognitive development (Mercer & Howe, 2012).

*Point to Ponder III:* We need a culture that promotes learning because the school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning. A high priority should be given to building and maintaining positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents. There should be a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing. The school should work to maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, inclusive and that promotes intellectual rigor (A culture that promotes learning, n.d.).

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, listening skill is one of the four skills that still need more research studies. There are several reasons such as time, material, and school management of equipment that affect the quality of learning and teaching as mentioned in the above discussion. The results of previous studies indicated that listening strategies can have positive effect on the students' listening outcomes, depending on their background knowledge and practicing strategies. However, we still need to improve and develop learning strategies for students to learn better and more effectively in the lights of new discoveries in terms of teaching and learning English, both as a foreign and second language, especially in Vietnam in particular and other ASEAN countries as a whole.

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