



IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS THROUGH METACOGNITIVE
STRATEGY INSTRUCTION: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY AMONG EFL
LEARNERS

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Abstract: Listening is the most frequently used yet least explicitly taught of the four language skills. This study examined whether metacognitive strategy instruction, based on the pedagogical sequence proposed by Vandergrift and Goh (2012), improves the listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness of intermediate (B1) English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control-group design was used with 60 first-year university students, who were assigned to an experimental group (n=30) and a control group (n=30). Over eight weeks, the experimental group followed a guided plan–monitor–evaluate cycle embedded in regular listening lessons, while the control group received conventional comprehension-question listening practice. Listening comprehension was measured with a 30-item test, and metacognitive awareness with the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ). The experimental group made significantly larger comprehension gains than the control group and showed marked increases in adaptive metacognitive strategies, together with reduced reliance on word-for-word mental translation. The findings support the integration of explicit, process-oriented metacognitive instruction into EFL listening curricula.

Keywords: listening comprehension; metacognitive strategy instruction; EFL; MALQ; process-oriented teaching

Аннотация: Аудирование — наиболее часто используемый, но наименее эксплицитно преподаваемый из четырёх языковых навыков. В настоящем исследовании рассматривалось, способствует ли обучение метакогнитивным стратегиям, основанное на педагогической последовательности, предложенной Вандергрифтом и Го (2012), развитию навыков аудирования и метакогнитивной осведомлённости у учащихся среднего уровня (B1), изучающих английский язык как иностранный (EFL). Использовался квазиэкспериментальный план с предварительным и итоговым тестированием и контрольной группой; в исследовании приняли участие 60 студентов первого курса, распределённых на экспериментальную (n=30) и контрольную (n=30) группы. В течение восьми недель экспериментальная группа выполняла управляемый цикл «планирование–мониторинг–оценивание», встроенный в обычные занятия по аудированию, тогда как контрольная группа занималась традиционной практикой с вопросами на понимание. Навыки аудирования измерялись с помощью теста из 30 заданий, а метакогнитивная осведомлённость — с помощью Опросника метакогнитивной осведомлённости в аудировании (MALQ). Экспериментальная группа продемонстрировала значительно больший прирост понимания по сравнению с контрольной группой, а также заметное увеличение адаптивных



метакогнитивных стратегий при снижении опоры на дословный мысленный перевод. Полученные результаты подтверждают целесообразность включения эксплицитного, ориентированного на процесс обучения метакогнитивным стратегиям в программы преподавания аудирования в EFL.

Ключевые слова: *понимание на слух (аудирование); обучение метакогнитивным стратегиям; английский как иностранный язык; MALQ; обучение, ориентированное на процесс*

INTRODUCTION

Of the four language skills, listening occupies a paradoxical position: learners spend more time listening than reading, writing, or speaking, yet listening has historically received the least explicit instructional attention in the language classroom. For decades it was assumed that listening would develop incidentally as a by-product of exposure and of tasks aimed at other skills (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). This neglect is partly a consequence of the transient, real-time nature of speech, which makes the listening process difficult to observe, slow down, or correct in the way that written text allows.

Theoretical accounts now describe listening not as the passive reception of sound but as an active, constructive process in which the listener decodes a rapidly unfolding phonological stream, recognises lexical and grammatical patterns, activates relevant background knowledge, and holds information in working memory while building an interpretation (Field, 2008). Comprehension therefore depends on the coordinated operation of bottom-up (perceptual) and top-down (knowledge-driven) processing. When this coordination breaks down, learners experience the familiar sense of "words rushing past" without meaning.

A productive response to this problem has been the metacognitive turn in listening pedagogy. Drawing on Flavell's theory of metacognition and Wenden's model of self-regulation, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argue that skilled listeners do not merely possess more vocabulary; they also manage their own comprehension more effectively by planning before they listen, monitoring their understanding while listening, solving problems when comprehension falters, and evaluating their performance afterwards. Their pedagogical sequence operationalises these processes into a repeatable classroom cycle. To make such awareness measurable, Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghodtari (2006) developed and validated the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), which captures five factors: planning and evaluation, directed attention, problem-solving, mental translation, and person knowledge.

Despite a growing body of supporting evidence, including the empirical demonstration by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) that teaching learners how to listen produces measurable gains, explicit metacognitive instruction remains under-implemented in many EFL contexts, where listening lessons are still dominated by the testing of comprehension rather than the teaching of process. The present study addresses this gap among university EFL learners. It is guided by two research questions:



RQ1. Does metacognitive strategy instruction improve learners' listening comprehension more than conventional listening practice?

RQ2. Does metacognitive strategy instruction increase learners' metacognitive awareness as measured by the MALQ?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research design

The study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control-group design. Intact class groups were used rather than random assignment of individuals, which is typical of authentic classroom research; equivalence of the groups at baseline was therefore verified statistically before the intervention.

2.2. Participants

Sixty first-year university EFL students participated. Their proficiency was estimated at CEFR B1 on the basis of a placement test. One intact class was designated the experimental group (EG, n=30) and a comparable class the control group (CG, n=30). Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained. Table 1 summarises the participants.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Characteristic	Experimental (n=30)	Control (n=30)	Total (N=60)
Female	18	17	35
Male	12	13	25
Mean age (years)	19.4	19.6	19.5
Proficiency (CEFR)	B1	B1	B1

2.3. Instruments

Two instruments were used. First, a 30-item listening comprehension test (multiple-choice and short-answer items based on audio texts of comparable length and difficulty) measured comprehension; parallel forms were used at pre- and post-test to avoid memory effects. Second, the 21-item MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006), rated on a six-point Likert scale, measured metacognitive awareness across its five factors. The MALQ has demonstrated acceptable reliability in previous research, and internal consistency was checked for the present sample.

2.4. Intervention

The intervention lasted eight weeks (one 80-minute listening lesson per week). The EG worked through the metacognitive pedagogical sequence (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012): (a) a planning/prediction stage in which learners predicted content and set listening goals; (b) a first listen during which they monitored comprehension and noted points of difficulty; (c) pair discussion to compare understanding and identify problems; (d) a second and third listen with directed attention to unresolved points; (e) class discussion of strategies that worked; and (f) a reflection stage in which learners evaluated their performance and set goals for the next task. The CG listened to the same audio texts the same number of times but completed conventional comprehension questions without explicit strategy guidance or structured reflection.



2.5. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed for both instruments. Independent-samples t-tests confirmed baseline equivalence. Paired-samples t-tests examined within-group change from pre- to post-test, and independent-samples t-tests compared post-test performance between groups. Cohen's d was calculated to estimate effect sizes, with values of 0.20, 0.50 and 0.80 interpreted as small, medium and large, respectively. The alpha level was set at .05.

3. Results

At baseline the two groups did not differ significantly on either the listening comprehension test or the MALQ, confirming their equivalence before the intervention. Table 2 reports the listening comprehension results (maximum score = 30).

Table 2. Listening comprehension pre- and post-test results

Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post- test M (SD)	Gain	p / d
Experimental	14.2 (3.1)	20.6 (3.4)	+6.4	< .001 / 1.96
Control	14.5 (2.9)	16.1 (3.0)	+1.6	.01 / 0.54

Both groups improved, but the experimental group's gain was substantially larger. The EG rose from a mean of 14.2 to 20.6, while the CG rose from 14.5 to only 16.1. The between-group difference at post-test was statistically significant and associated with a large effect size, indicating that the metacognitive instruction, rather than mere exposure to the audio material, accounted for the additional improvement (RQ1).

The MALQ results showed a parallel pattern (Table 3). The experimental group reported clear increases in the adaptive subscales—planning and evaluation, directed attention, problem-solving, and person knowledge—and a marked decrease in mental translation, which is the one subscale on which lower scores are desirable because reliance on word-for-word translation impedes real-time comprehension. The control group's scores remained largely unchanged (RQ2).

Table 3. MALQ subscale means (6-point scale; EG = experimental, CG = control)

MALQ subscale	EG pre	EG post	CG pre	CG post
Planning & evaluation	3.2	4.6	3.3	3.5
Directed attention	3.5	4.7	3.4	3.6
Problem-solving	3.8	4.8	3.7	3.9
Mental translation*	4.4	3.1	4.3	4.2
Person knowledge	3.0	4.3	3.1	3.2

* For mental translation, a lower score indicates more desirable (less translation-dependent) listening behaviour.

4. Discussion



The results indicate that explicit, process-oriented metacognitive instruction improved both the listening comprehension and the metacognitive awareness of intermediate EFL learners more than conventional comprehension practice did. These findings are consistent with the central claim of the metacognitive approach—that listening ability can be developed by teaching learners how to listen rather than simply giving them more to listen to (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012)—and they replicate the broad pattern reported by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010).

Two aspects of the MALQ results are especially informative. The rise in planning, monitoring and evaluation suggests that learners internalised the plan–monitor–evaluate cycle and began to apply it independently, which is the intended outcome of the pedagogical sequence. The fall in mental translation is equally important: because translating word by word overloads working memory and cannot keep pace with natural speech, reducing it frees cognitive resources for meaning construction. The growth in person knowledge—learners' beliefs about themselves as listeners—also points to an affective benefit, as structured reflection appears to have lowered anxiety and increased confidence, factors known to influence listening success (Goh, 2008).

Pedagogically, the study suggests that listening lessons should devote time to the process of listening, not only to the product of comprehension. Predicting before listening, comparing understanding with peers, listening more than once with a clear focus, and reflecting afterwards are low-cost classroom practices that require no special technology and can be embedded in existing materials. Teacher modelling and supportive feedback appear central to helping learners develop and sustain these strategies.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample was modest in size and drawn from a single institution and proficiency level, which constrains generalisation. The eight-week duration captured short-term gains but not long-term retention, so delayed post-testing would strengthen future work. The MALQ relies on self-report, which may diverge from learners' actual strategy use, and intact-group assignment, although realistic, is less rigorous than randomisation. Future research could extend the design with delayed post-tests, larger and more diverse samples, qualitative data such as learner diaries or stimulated recall, and comparisons across proficiency levels.

5. Conclusion

This study found that integrating metacognitive strategy instruction into regular listening lessons produced significantly greater gains in listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness than conventional comprehension-question practice among intermediate EFL learners. Teaching learners to plan, monitor, problem-solve and evaluate—and to rely less on word-for-word translation—offers a practical and theoretically grounded route to improving listening skills. Embedding this process-oriented approach in EFL curricula and teacher education is therefore recommended.

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