

# THE EFFECT OF LISTENING STRATEGY TRAINING ON FRESHMAN ENGLISH MAJORS AND THEIR LEARNING PROCESS OF LISTENING SKILLS

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## Abstract

*This paper reports on a study on listening strategy training for first-year English majors at Dalat University. The study focused on the effect of strategy instruction on learners and the process in which learners handled strategies when performing listening tasks. Data were collected using pre- and post-tests, think-aloud tasks, observation, and interviews. Findings revealed that strategy instruction had a positive effect on learners' performance and benefited both low- and high-ability learners. Learners used an array of listening strategies for a specific task and for different phases of the listening process. The paper concludes by putting forward some recommendations for instructional practice.*

**Keywords:** Listening process; Listening strategies; Listening strategy instruction.

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# TÁC ĐỘNG CỦA VIỆC GIẢNG DẠY CÁC CHIẾN THUẬT NGHE HIỂU TIẾNG ANH ĐẾN SINH VIÊN NĂM NHẤT CHUYÊN NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH VÀ QUÁ TRÌNH HỌC KỸ NĂNG NGHE CỦA HỌ

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## Tóm tắt

Bài viết này báo cáo một nghiên cứu về việc giảng dạy các chiến thuật nghe hiểu tiếng Anh cho sinh viên chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh năm thứ nhất tại Trường Đại học Đà Lạt. Nghiên cứu tập trung vào hiệu quả của việc hướng dẫn chiến thuật nghe đối với người học và quá trình mà người học xử lý các chiến thuật này khi thực hiện các bài tập của kỹ năng nghe. Dữ liệu được thu thập bằng cách sử dụng các bài kiểm tra trước và sau thực nghiệm, bài tập suy nghĩ/tư duy thành lời, quan sát và phỏng vấn. Các phát hiện đã chỉ ra rằng việc giảng dạy và hướng dẫn chiến thuật nghe có ảnh hưởng tích cực đến hiệu suất của người học và mang lại lợi ích cho cả những người học có năng lực thấp và cao. Học viên sử dụng một loạt các chiến thuật nghe cho một bài tập cụ thể và cho các giai đoạn khác nhau của quá trình nghe hiểu. Một số khuyến nghị cho việc thực hành giảng dạy cũng được nêu ra ở cuối bài báo.

**Từ khóa:** Chiến thuật nghe hiểu; Giảng dạy/hướng dẫn các chiến thuật nghe hiểu; Quá trình nghe hiểu.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background**

It is generally agreed that listening comprehension is a complex process which involves a number of mental activities on the part of the listener. For people who learn English as a foreign language, listening is the most challenging and difficult activity. Many English majors at Dalat University have found listening courses stressful and impossible to some extent. More than often, pre-intermediate and intermediate students cannot process information quickly enough to understand what is said in the recordings. As a result, many learners in listening classes become passive and disengaged from the active process of learning. Moreover, the teachers often feel uneasy and uncomfortable when the students cannot perform a specific listening task and complain about their listening problems. The challenge for the teachers is finding ways to help their students facilitate their English listening process and improve their listening comprehension. There have been some articles about learning strategies which describe a great variety of teachable learning strategies to help learners study more effectively and easily. Learning strategies are “useful tools for students because they open up more reliable and less frustrating routes to language learning success” (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 174). In general, although some researchers on strategy training have claimed that strategy instruction can enhance language learners’ performance, others have discussed the success of strategy training with much caution (Oxford, 1992). There have been a few studies carried out on listening strategy training providing evidence that the strategies instructed enhance learners’ performance on listening tasks. However, these studies have focused on the product (through the gain scores of the pre- and post-tests) rather than the process in which learners engage in the use of strategies to fulfill a listening task.

### **1.2. Aims of the research**

For the purpose of this paper, the researcher conducted a study on listening strategy training in an attempt to discover whether the instruction of listening strategies had any positive effect on the performance of first-year English majors at Dalat University. In addition, what the researcher desired to know besides the product was the process in which learners handled the instructed strategies in doing listening tasks and tests. The study was carried out in order to find the answers for the questions addressed below:

- Will explicit strategy training result in improvement in listening comprehension?
- How will low-ability and high-ability learners apply the instructed strategies in doing listening tasks?
- Will strategy training benefit both effective and less effective listeners?

### **1.3. Research significance**

The research is important to the professional life of English teachers in general and listening teachers in particular. It is hoped that with good results from the study, English teachers will be confident about the methods they will use in their classrooms and thus improve their teaching practice. What is more, the listening strategies taught successfully will help facilitate learners' listening process, get learners to be more involved in the activity of listening, and motivate learners to control and monitor their own learning. Also, the research will benefit listening teachers by providing them with useful teachable strategies they can use in the classroom so that they can improve the quality of their listening teaching and make listening activity more interesting and less stressful for learners.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Definition of listening strategies**

Learning strategies are defined as "the conscious thoughts and actions that learners take in order to achieve a learning goal" (Chamot, 2004, p. 14). Listening strategies, therefore, can be in the form of tactics or techniques that learners use in order to perform a listening task in specific and to "improve their progress in developing L2 [listening] skills" (Green & Oxford, 1995, p. 262) in general.

### **2.2. The rationale for listening strategy training**

Much research has documented that learning strategies instruction helps facilitate the process of second/foreign language learning. As Oxford (1990, p. 12) says, "strategy training helps guide learners to become more conscious of strategy use and more adept at employing appropriate strategies". Holec (1995, as cited in Rodgers, 2000) declares that the best way to make sure learning takes place is to teach learners to learn, that is to help them to carry out the different steps which make up the learning process. If strategies instruction is properly carried out, it will definitely help language learners to become more actively involved in their own learning process, which enables them to take on greater responsibility for learning (Chamot & Rubin, 1994). When learning strategies instruction is introduced into language class, and if teachers are able to show students how to take charge of their own learning process, many learners will benefit (Chamot & Rubin, 1994; Ho, 1993). Once students have developed an awareness of learning strategies, they can make an "invaluable contribution to the classroom" (Nunan, 1991, p. 163).

Mendelsohn (1994) and Chamot (1995) have argued that listening teachers can and should teach learners listening strategies. Although there are not many studies carried out in listening strategy instruction, the evidence shows that "instruction in strategies can help students to capitalize on the language input they receive, and to improve their performance on listening tasks" (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 171). Vandergrift (1999) also points out that the use of listening strategies can make the process of

listening become more relevant and interesting for the students. A recent study by Zarrabi (2016) proved that listening strategy training resulted in a significant improvement in metacognitive awareness of listening strategies among the participants of different learner types and this was likely to help learners manage their listening process effectively.

### **2.3. Research on listening strategy training**

Some studies on the instruction of listening strategies for students have been found from the literature. Interest in listening strategy training emerged with the work of Thompson and Rubin (1996, p. 133) who carried out a classroom-based longitudinal study in order to test the hypothesis that “systematic instruction in the use of a range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies will result in improvement of listening comprehension” (p. 333). The subjects – students enrolled in a required third-year Russian language course at The George Washington University – were randomly assigned into an experimental group with strategy instruction and a control group with no strategy instruction. The two groups had three 50-minute classes a week, used the same course materials, and followed the same syllabus. All the subjects received roughly 15 hours of the same video instruction in an academic year. However, the lesson plans for the treatment group focused on listening strategies (metacognitive and cognitive strategies), while the plans for the control group concentrated on using the content of the videos as the basis for classroom activities. The treatment group was taught by an experimental teacher and the control group by a control teacher. The time spent on each group was also different: The experimental group received lessons for two years, whereas the control group only received lessons for one year. Pre-tests and post-tests were used as one of the measures of improvement in listening comprehension. It should be noted that the two pre-tests (a video comprehension test and an audio comprehension test) were used again as post-tests. The listening portion of the Comprehensive Russian Proficiency Test was also used as an additional measure of improvement. The results demonstrated that subjects who received strategy instruction improved significantly over those who were not given such training on the video test. On the other hand, the audio test results were not significantly different. There were two explanations for this failure: First, the audio test did not match the type of strategy training provided; Second, many items in the audio test were not directly related to the video kinds taught.

Graham, Santos, and Vanderplank (2011) conducted a study focusing on the relationship between strategy use and listening performance when explicit strategy instructions were not given. Participants in this study were 15 low-intermediate learners of French from four schools in England who were preparing to take the Advanced Subsidiary examination. At the beginning and the end of a 6-month period, the students were given two different recordings on the same topic. The aim of this was to measure the students’ listening proficiency. In order to elicit the strategies used, the researchers gave the students four different recordings on different topics during six months and asked them to listen and write everything they had understood. The students had the total freedom of controlling the tape recorders, which allowed them to pause and rewind

the tape if they wished. The strategies used in completing the tasks were closely related to the task set. In fact, the students were asked to approach the listening tasks in whatever way they preferred because the researchers would desire to see how the students performed the tasks in the absence of listening strategy training. The students were later guided to verbalize how they were going about comprehending the text and answering the questions. The data showed that without listening strategy instruction, there was little improvement in proficiency among the students after six months, except for four improvers. The study also indicated that the learners had a highly individual nature of strategy use, but they did not develop the strategies appropriately because of the lack of strategy instruction.

Another study conducted by Zhang (2012) aimed to find out the connection between listening strategy instruction and improvement in learners' performance. In this study, two entire classes of 56 non-English major sophomores at Shandong Economic College were assigned as the experimental group and the control group. The strong point of this study was that all the subjects were administered a pre-treatment questionnaire through which the researcher could identify what listening strategies the subjects had known and used and whether they were aware of those strategies or not. A list of strategies was then worked out and used for the training. During the 15-week course, both groups of subjects followed the routine syllabus in which they were asked to complete a series of three different types of listening tasks. The subjects in the experimental group also received listening strategy training in which the strategies were incorporated into regular classroom activities rather than taught separately. In addition to this, 12 subjects from the two groups were selected to provide data in the form of a verbal report which served to decide whether the training was reliable and valid. Data obtained from the pre- and post-test listening tasks showed a positive relationship between the increase in the use of strategies and task performance. The verbal report also indicated that strategy instructions helped with students' listening comprehension.

The review of research on listening strategy training shows that strategy instruction has a positive effect on learner performance on listening tasks. The gain scores (between the pre-tests and post-tests) served as a measure of improvement. The experiment conducted by Thompson and Rubin (1996, p. 333) suggested that "the use of video in listening comprehension facilitates information processing". However, there were implications that time spent on strategy instruction should be longer, strategies taught should match the test types, and the level of difficulty for the post-test should be considered. It should be noted that this study concentrated on the effects of strategy training (the gain scores) but did not focus on the process (the ways individual learners handled the listening tasks and tests using, or not using, strategies learned). Also, the different length of time for instruction between the two groups (two years for the experimental group and one year for the control group) is an uncontrolled variable that may invalidate the study. The study by Zhang (2012) used the verbal form to explore learners' insights about their performances and what strategies they used. Nevertheless, the data obtained were used to measure the validity and reliability of the study rather than to understand the process in which the learners did the listening tasks. As for the study by Graham, Santos, and Vanderplank (2011), it is obvious that the absence of

explicit strategy training resulted in little improvement in students' performance. This is also an example of how listening is not taught in normal, non-intervention classrooms.

The literature apparently shows that there is a dearth of research on listening strategy training which aims at having an insight into the process by which learners use strategies to handle their listening tasks. Thus, the current study was intended to examine whether the use of audio materials (not videos) together with explicit listening strategy instruction enhanced English majors' listening comprehension or not. In addition, the study would explore how learners of different abilities applied the strategies taught in performing listening tasks.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Subjects**

Fifty-two first-year English majors at Dalat University from two entire classes participated in this study. Most participants had studied English for seven years previously, but some had only studied for three years in high school. It should be noticed that these students were rarely exposed to listening activities during their time studying English. Therefore, the study was conducted with the assumption that the students had never been instructed in any learning strategies to perform listening tasks. It goes without saying that these participants, including males and females, were not equal in their English proficiency.

#### **3.2. Methodological tools**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data because the study was actually a "process-product" one (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 44) which focused not only on the product (the difference between pre-tests and post-tests) but the process (the ways learners deal with strategies taught) as well. The classroom process was described by the use of a think-aloud task combined with observations and interviews, and then compared to the learning outcomes in the form of test scores. Therefore, a quantitative method was used to measure the performance of the learners (to find the answer for the first question), and qualitative methods were employed to help the researcher understand the process which learners would go through in the strategy training. The data collected were a diversity of numerical information, prose descriptions, and interviews as a result of the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

#### **3.3. Procedures**

##### *3.3.1. Treatment*

As mentioned above, two entire classes were chosen to serve as the experimental group and the control group in the study. At Dalat University, where the study was conducted, it was impossible for the researcher to break up the classes to have

randomly-assigned groups for the reason determined by Anda (2007, p. 87) that the use of a sample of randomly-selected individuals may create “a disruption for the teacher and an interference with the students’ coursework that may disadvantage them relative to non-selected peers”. The experimental group received strategy training in addition to the listening tasks, while the control group had listening tasks only and did what they normally do to fulfill the tasks. The subjects in the two groups had the same time of day for instruction (usually in the morning) and study periods of the same length (three 50-minute periods/week). Both groups used the same materials and listened to the same audio tapes in the same sequence. The listening strategies included in the training were four metacognitive strategies (advance organization, selective attention, directed attention, and comprehension monitoring), three cognitive strategies (inferencing, prediction, and fixation), and two social strategies (clarification and cooperation). The strategies were selected and instructed in the way that they were compatible with the listening tasks in the materials. During one 15-week semester, the experimental group received strategy training for about 15 – 20 minutes every week, and they used the rest of the time to apply strategies learned in performing listening tasks and tests. They were instructed on how to use listening strategies and tactics for approximately four hours for the whole semester. However, the strategies were not taught separately from the listening tasks; they were integrated into regular classroom activities. Normally, in each section, one or two target strategies were introduced and described, including a detailed explanation of how and why the strategies work. This was followed by strategy application practice.

### *3.3.2. Administering pre-test and post-tests*

The learners were informed about the pre-test and post-test they would take in the study. Prior to the beginning of the instruction, learners in both groups were given the same pre-test of listening comprehension under consistent conditions. The 30-minute test included fifty multiple choice questions divided into five sections. The test questions require learners to demonstrate their skills in listening for the main idea, as well as for specific information and for listening “between the lines”. After 15 weeks of instruction, the pre-test was used again as the post-test for all participants. In order to complete the test, learners had to use two metacognitive strategies (advanced organization and selective attention) and two cognitive strategies (inferencing and prediction) for all the sections. No social strategies were used under the test conditions. The subjects in the experimental group were classified into low- and high-ability learners based on the results of the pre-test. In addition, the subjects had to take four mini- and midterm tests as a compulsory component to pass the course. The results of these tests showed that there was almost no movement of low- and high-ability learners between the two groups.

The main reason why the pre-test was used as the post-test was that it was impossible for the researcher to design the same test with the same format, content, and level of difficulty without help from native speakers, particularly in making the test recordings. As a matter of fact, the researcher had to use the same textbook for every class of the same course. This textbook had only one final test focusing on testing



learners' listening skills and listening comprehension. However, in the very first meeting, participants were asked to do the test without any instructions from the teacher and they did not see the test again until four months later after the treatment. Due to the lack of instructions in the pre-test and the length of time between the pre-test and post-test, it was assumed that the participants did not remember the content of the test and this would not pose a threat to the validity of the experiment.

### *3.3.3. Think-aloud task*

As mentioned earlier, the pre-test and post-tests just provided the outcome of the strategy training, but they did not focus on the process in which learners respond to strategies taught. Therefore, in order to know what process learners had gone through and to increase the internal validity of the study, a think-aloud task was employed, which required the subjects to perform a listening task and "to verbalize about his performance while he is doing it" (Ahmed, 1989, p. 5). The think-aloud task was performed three times during the treatment with the experimental group: The first was done after the first five weeks of the treatment, the second was after 10 weeks, and the last was towards the end of the treatment. The participants were asked to perform a listening task (which asked them to use a specific listening skill) and then were told to verbalize in English or Vietnamese, or both, about what strategies they used, or what came to their mind, while they were doing the listening task. The learners were also asked to say if the strategies they applied were successful (that is whether the strategies helped them to fulfill the listening task) or not. However, the learners were not asked to say what they thought verbally, but to write it on a piece of paper which was then collected when they finished the task.

### *3.3.4. Observational process*

To supplement the data from the think-aloud task, the learners' behaviour was observed while they performed listening tasks in the classroom. Also, observational data were used as a form of compensation for the missing information from the think-aloud data. The researcher chose to be a participant observer to collect the data as the teacher gave the researcher the privilege of being a natural observer in her classroom as well. The subjects in the experimental group were observed so that the researcher could see if they could, or could not, apply strategies they learned in performing listening tasks and how the low-ability and the high-ability listeners handled the strategies. The data were recorded in the form of field notes and marked with the date, time and under what circumstances they were made.

### *3.3.5. Interviewing process*

A series of interviews with three successful and three unsuccessful listeners was conducted in each group right after the pre-test to check if the learners knew anything about learning strategies or strategy training. This was also a way to help the researcher evaluate students' knowledge about learning strategies. After the post-test, the same six respondents in the control group were asked how they performed the tasks and tests.

The researcher also desired to know whether these learners, themselves, developed any learning strategies through a semester of study despite not being taught. For the experimental group, three effective and three less effective, listeners were chosen for interviews. These learners were asked if they could apply the strategies they learned in performing the listening tasks and tests and how they handled them. They were also asked to give comments about their learning progress, and their reflections and feelings related to the learning process. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, not in English, for two reasons: Firstly, the interviewees were freshmen whose level of English proficiency was not high. If they had to answer questions in English, they might not have expressed their ideas as well as they might in Vietnamese; Secondly, talking in Vietnamese allow them to feel more relaxed and they could express themselves more precisely. The “recursive model of interviewing” (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995, p. 80) was used to ask questions of the informants. This was intended to enable the researcher to direct the research process from the interaction in the interviews and made the respondents feel comfortable and talk more. The interviews took place over two days after each test (four days all together) and lasted for half an hour for each section. The participants were interviewed individually. In collecting the data generated in the interviews, tape-recording was not used because the interviewees might feel uneasy being recorded, which might affect what they really wanted to express. The researcher took notes and used her memory to collect the data.

### *3.3.6. Methods of data analysis*

To measure the performance of the experimental group and the control group, the scores of all participants in both groups were averaged after the two tests. The t-test was then used to compare the means of the pre- and post-tests in each group to see if there was any statistically significant difference between the means. The data from the think-aloud task, the observations and the interviews were analyzed to discover if strategy training benefited both effective and less effective listeners and how learners applied the strategies presented in the training. To make the data in the field notes and from participants’ verbalization manageable, the technique of *annotating* (Baxter, Hughes, & Tight, 1996) was used, which allowed the researcher to take marginal notes, underline/highlight the important ideas, and to add her own interpretive comments to the materials.

Regarding the interviews, the answers from the respondents in the form of managed data were compared, analyzed and summarized. This was combined with what was found in the observations and think-aloud task to help the researcher come to a conclusion for the questions.

## **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Strategy training results**

The descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-tests (Table 1) show that there is a difference between the means of the two tests for both the experimental and control

groups. For the experimental group, the mean pre-test score is 5.5538 and the mean for the post-test score is 7.4077, compared with 5.9692 and 7.3077 for the control group. It is clear that the mean post-test score is higher than the mean pre-test score for both groups.

**Table 1. Control and experimental group statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CG.PRE	5.9692	26	1.1644	0.2284
CG.POST	7.3077	26	1.2977	0.2545
EX.PRE	5.5538	26	1.4370	0.2818
EX.POST	7.4077	26	1.4394	0.2823

Note: CG.PRE: Pre-test of control group; CG.POST: Post-test of control group; EX.PRE: Pre-test of experimental group; and EX.POST: Post-test of experimental group.

The result from the t-test also reveals that there is a significant difference between the two tests for both groups with  $p = 0.000$  (Table 2). This confirms that there is progress in listening comprehension for the participants in both groups. However, for the control group, the standard deviation of the pre-test (Table 1) (1.1644) is lower than that of the post-test (1.2977), which shows that there is unequal progress among the participants.

**Table 2. Control and experimental group test statistics**

Paired differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	CG.PRE - CG.POST	-1.3385	0.7327	0.1437	-1.6344	-1.0425	-9.315	25	0.000
Pair 2	EX.PRE - EX.POST	-1.8538	0.7747	0.1519	-2.1668	-1.5409	-12.202	25	0.000

In contrast, the standard deviations of the pre- and post-tests for the experimental group are similar (1.4370 and 1.4394), which means the participants in this group progressed equally through the treatment. It is apparent that learners in the experimental group were more involved in the learning process than those in the control group. Moreover, the difference in the observed gain scores of the two groups (Table 2) (1.3385 for the control group and 1.8538 for the experimental group) is quite clear, which means that the learners in the experimental group outperformed those in the

control group. Even though the researcher had no means to measure if the difference in gain scores was significant or not, she was supported by the observational process in which she noticed that at the beginning of the treatment the two groups were not equivalent in proficiency; that is, the experimental group was at a lower level of English proficiency than the control group. Therefore, it can be concluded that explicit strategy training has a positive effect on learners' performance. This is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Nikoopour, Moakhar, and Esfandiari (2017) who found that explicit, integrated strategy instruction was effective in improving learners' listening comprehension. The result also confirms the conclusion from the study by Graham, Santos, and Vanderplank (2011) who claimed that when there is an absence of listening strategy training, there is little improvement in the learners' listening proficiency. It is therefore suggested that listening strategies should be taught explicitly to enhance the efficiency of strategy use.

#### 4.2. The ways learners handled strategies

The data from the think-aloud task, the observational process, and the interviews show that learners in the experimental groups knew how to use, and did use, a variety of strategies taught in performing listening tasks. Table 3 shows the data taken from the think-aloud tasks, which illustrate the percentages of learners who used particular strategies and the strategies they used.

**Table 3. Experimental group applied strategies**

Kind of strategies	Strategies applied	Number of learners using strategies		Percentages	
		High-ability learners	Low-ability learners	High-ability learners	Low-ability learners
Metacognitive	Advance organization	11	15	100.0%	100.0%
	Selective attention	11	13	100.0%	86.6%
	Directed attention	7	1	63.6%	0.6%
	Comprehension monitoring	8	5	72.7%	33.3%
Cognitive	Inferencing	7	2	63.6%	13.3%
	Prediction	11	12	100.0%	80.0%
	Fixation	9	10	81.8%	66.6%
Social	Clarification	11	7	100.0%	46.6%
	Cooperation	4	15	36.6%	100.0%

As we have seen, there is a greater percentage of high-ability learners using all strategies. This finding is supported by the results of Hsueh and Liu (2008) which showed that more proficient listeners have the ability to use a wide variety of strategies to understand the listening texts. The following parts of this section present the ways learners handled listening strategies in the course.

#### 4.2.1. Pre-listening

It is clear that all the participants used advance organization for their listening comprehension. This is confirmed by what was observed in the classroom. When students were asked to perform a listening task, before they listened, they read the question to identify the purpose of listening. Some students reported that once they could identify the listening purpose, they decided what to pay attention to in order to find the answer (strategy of advance organization). For example, Loan wrote: *“I read the question [What are they talking about?] and I knew that I was going to “listening between the lines”. Then I decided that I needed to pay attention to keywords and tried to infer the right picture”*.

Similarly, most learners could use prediction to guess the contents from the title or topic before listening (100% of high-ability students and 80% of low-ability students). This was reported by Hoa as follows: *“I looked at the first pair of pictures and then saw the differences between them. I thought that they might talk about the number or the relationships of the people in the two pictures”*.

#### 4.2.2. While-listening

There is not a big difference in the percentages of effective and less-effective listeners (100% and 86.6%, respectively) in using the strategy of selective attention. Subjects knew that they had to pay attention to specific parts of the language input. This is because of the fact that once they could identify the listening purpose in the planning stage, they found it easier to focus on certain aspects of the input. A more skilled listener, Binh, reported: *“While I was listening, I tried to identify the number of people in each picture. I didn’t need to pay attention to other information such as “I’ve been married for 20 years...” Specially, I had to pay attention to the gender of the people like boy or girl, father or mother, etc. Then I can have the answer.”*

However, while most successful listeners reported that this strategy helped them to find the correct answers for the questions, the less effective listeners said that even though they tried hard to pay attention to specific information, they did not always have the right answers. This is the case of one low-ability student, K’Je: *“I knew that what I needed to do was to listen for the job. I heard something “star clock” [store clerk] but I didn’t know what job it was. I knew that part was where I could find the answer. I didn’t need to pay attention to other things.”*

It is obvious that the low-ability learners knew how to use selective attention during listening, but they could not answer correctly due to their low level of English

proficiency. This phenomenon is explained in the study carried out by Vahdany, Akbari, Shahrestani, and Askari (2016, p. 388) that even though both more-skilled listeners and less-skilled listeners employed the strategy of selective attention when listening to the text, advanced learners tried “to get in the frame of mind to understand English” and intermediate learners “had comprehension difficulty due to the speed of speaking and could only focus on certain parts of the text”.

The biggest difference noticed is in the use of the strategies of directed attention and inferencing. With directed attention, successful listeners realized that they should concentrate on the input and continue listening in spite of problems. Besides, they knew that they needed to use context clues, key words, and knowledge about the world or about English to infer the answer. Here is an example from Thao’s report: *“At first I heard “toppings”. I wondered what “toppings” meant. But I didn’t stop. I continued to listen. And then I could hear “mushrooms, onions, extra cheese”. Oh, it was the picture of the pizza.”*

In contrast, from what was observed in the classroom, the low-ability learners usually stopped listening and tried to think hard about a specific word/phrase they could not understand and worked on that for a while. As a result, they missed the rest of the input and could not find the answers for the questions that followed. This was also observed by Goh (1998, p. 139) who argued that low-ability listeners hardly use the strategy of directed attention because of “their preoccupation with difficult words and ideas”. In the following example, K’Je reported how she had difficulty with one word and how she quitted listening: *“I heard something like “co-ri” [curry]. I didn’t know what it meant. I wrote it on the paper and tried to figure out what word it was. But I couldn’t. Then I realized that they were speaking so fast. I quitted.”*

Similarly, when the researcher observed low-ability students performing the task of gap-filling, she noticed that they hardly used their knowledge of English to help infer the answer. For example, with the sentence “.....was your .....to San Francisco?” after the word “your” Hoang put the word “cheap”. Obviously, he did not know how to use his knowledge of English to get the correct answer. This is because less effective listeners fail to use appropriate strategies for different phases of listening, which is the result of their “limited metacognitive knowledge about selecting appropriate strategies for the task” (Chamot, 1995, p. 18).

Another cognitive strategy that most subjects could apply while they were listening is fixation. With this strategy, learners were instructed to repeat or memorize the sounds of unfamiliar words or complete phrases so that these could be dealt with later. However, effective and less-effective listeners had different ways of applying this strategy. As instructed, good learners wrote down the sounds of the words/phrases and continued to listen. After listening they tried to process those sounds and figured out what words/phrases they were. These learners reported that this strategy could usually help them to find the answer because while they were listening, they had no time to think carefully about those sounds, but they could do this after they finished listening. Meanwhile, when poor listeners heard a word/phrase they did not understand, they also

repeated the sounds, but they did not continue to listen and tried to process those sounds right away. As mentioned above, this is due to the lack of directed attention in these learners. That is why in most of these learners' reports, they complained that fixation could not help with their listening comprehension, and it made them slower in the listening process.

During listening, the subjects also knew how to use the strategy of comprehension monitoring. In using this strategy, the subjects would check and confirm how well s/he understood the input during listening. Thirteen participants (including high- and low-ability ones) reported that they used this strategy to help correct their interpretation. For example, Thi, who heard someone talking about his family was aware later that her interpretation was inaccurate: *“At first I heard “two children”, but then I heard he said “Terri.....oldest, ..... Rachel .....is twelve, .....my son Peter” so I thought he must have three children.”*

This seems to be in line with the findings of the study conducted by Kazemi and Kiamarsi (2017, p. 154) who also reported that the learners knew how to check and correct their understanding while they were doing the listening tasks. They stated that this strategy was used more frequently by advanced learners who appeared to be “more able to verify continually and correct their comprehension while they are listening.” In the present study, however, Loan, a successful listener, claimed that this strategy was useless if the listening task was easy; that is, she did not need to use it for easy tasks. Therefore, the match between strategies and the type of task should be considered.

#### 4.2.3. Post-listening

Two social strategies (asking for clarification and cooperating with partners) were taught during the treatment. The data yielded interesting information about the use of these strategies among high- and low-ability learners. As can be seen from Table 3, 100% of effective listeners used the strategy of clarification. This reveals that good learners are always eager to learn, asking questions to verify their understanding. The researcher observed this fact in her classroom and saw that good learners usually asked her to play the recording again so that they could confirm their answers. When they still were not sure about what they had heard, they asked the teacher to explain. It was also noticed that these learners often asked better listeners for clarification as well. In contrast, only half of low-ability learners asked for clarification after listening. From what was observed, these learners wanted to listen again to make sure about their answers but they did not ask. This may be due to the fact that they were not confident and had an inferiority complex about their listening skills. In the interviews, when asked why she did not use this strategy, An, one low-ability informant, said that she did not dare and was afraid the other students would laugh at her. Another explanation for the reluctance to employ this social strategy is given in a study by Serri, Boroujeni, and Hesabi (2012, p. 847) who said that “the sympathy that should be existed between the learners and the teacher is not enough”. This should be taken into consideration when the strategy is taught in the classroom.

In contrast, all low-ability learners used the strategy of cooperation after listening. The researcher saw that they liked to compare answers with their partners when they finished listening. It goes without saying that these learners feel more relaxed working with their partners in pairs than with their teacher or with the whole class. However, although these learners used this strategy quite often, they reported that the strategy did not help them much with their listening skill. They said when they exchanged ideas and compared the answers, they still wanted to keep their own ideas (what they could hear). Similarly, good learners also said that they did not see the usefulness of this strategy in improving their listening skill. When they were sure about the answer, they did not have the need to work with their partners to compare information. As a result, they did not use it very often after listening. In the interviews, Thao said that she did not want to use this strategy because she wanted to form the good habit of working independently, which would be good for her in the exam. It is apparent that this strategy was not useful for students in improving their listening skill.

#### **4.3. Benefits of strategy training**

The data collected from the think-aloud task and interviews reveal that both effective and less effective learners benefited from strategy training. For example, most subjects said the two strategies of advance organization and prediction helped them prepare better for the listening tasks and made them actively engage in the tasks. Besides, all six respondents in the experimental groups said the strategy use helped develop their listening skills. One low-ability listener, Uyen, said that at the beginning of the course, she did not know how to listen and the strategies helped her a lot. It was also reported that strategy use helped increase learners' confidence and reduced language anxiety throughout the course. This fits Chamot's claim that learning strategies "are linked to motivation, and increase learners' sense of self-efficacy or confidence in success" (Chamot, 1995, p. 15). In addition, some good listeners stated they were more aware of their thinking process when listening. It is clear that the primary purpose of the study, which is to help facilitate listening, turns out to motivate students to think about their learning process as well. This affirms Cohen's statement that "the ultimate goal of strategy training is to empower students by allowing them to take control of the language learning process" (Cohen, 1998, p. 70).

#### **4.4. Learners' repertoire of listening strategies**

The interviews conducted after the pre-test for both groups indicate that all less-effective listeners knew nothing about strategies. There were only two good listeners (one in the experimental group and the other in the control group) who said that they had learned about listening strategies before (in IELTS and TOEIC courses). Two good listeners in the control group said that they did not know the names of the strategies, but they often used them in performing listening tasks. In addition, during the process of observation, the researcher found that more proficient students usually took notes of key words and then used the notes to answer the questions. It should be noted that the strategy of note-taking was not taught, but was developed by the students themselves. This confirms the results of Kazemi and Kiamarsi (2017) which showed that one of the



highly-preferred listening strategies intermediate and advanced learners use is note-taking. As a consequence, it is suggested that note-taking should be taught to learners in order to help develop their listening strategies and improve their listening comprehension. Another strategy the good learners used without being taught was elaboration or use of prior knowledge. This is evidence that learners not only could apply strategies taught in performing learning tasks but also use or develop their own strategies. As a result, teachers should consider what strategies students already have and use and raise students' awareness of their own strategies.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

With the positive outcome of this study, teachers are recommended to incorporate strategies for listening in their classrooms. Teachers should discover what strategies students already use for listening comprehension and help students be aware of the wide range of learning strategies available to them. When teaching strategies, teachers should tell students the names of targeted strategies and explain why, when, and how to apply what kinds of strategies to what types of listening tasks. Teachers should teach students how to choose appropriate strategies for a specific listening task as well as for specific phases of the listening process. This practice should be repeated on a regular basis so that students can form a habit of using strategies in their learning. As a result, students can monitor their own learning process and become more independent and responsible for their own studying, not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom when teachers are not with them. Moreover, it is important that students should be encouraged to transfer the strategies from task to task and to combine different strategies to perform a particular task.

The present study attempts to discover if listening strategy training has a positive effect on learners' performance. What clearly emerged from the study is that strategy instruction facilitates the process of learning and benefits both low- and high-ability learners. The findings of this study also reveal that learners can apply an array of strategies in performing listening tasks, which has a good influence on their listening comprehension. Moreover, strategy use makes learners become more involved in the learning process and helps them build confidence in their studying. There is a need, as a result, to raise learners' awareness about listening strategies that they can use in simple, as well as complex tasks, which then can help to increase their autonomy in learning.

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## APPENDIX 1: LEARNING STRATEGIES, THEIR DEFINITIONS AND CORRESPONDING TACTICS

*(Most are adapted from Goh's (1998 & 2002) models and Vandergrift's (1997) paper*


Learning strategies	Definitions	Tactics	
Meta-cognitive strategies	Advance organization	Identifying the objectives of a listening task and/or proposing strategies for handling it	Reading through the question/task to identify the listening purpose; Asking oneself what s/he is going to listen for; Deciding what strategies can be used
	Selective attention	Deciding to attend to specific aspects of language input or situational details that assist in understanding and/or task completion	Listening for gist; Listening for familiar words or key words; Noticing the way information is structured; Listening for repetition; Paying attention to meaning in groups of words; Not concentrating much after the part where the answers are given to the question
	Directed attention	Deciding in advance to attend in general to the listening task and to ignore irrelevant distractors; Maintaining attention while listening	Continuing to listen in spite of difficulty; Avoiding distraction; Concentrating hard on the input
	Comprehension monitoring	Checking, verifying, or correcting one's understanding at the local level	Noticing possible errors in inferences and confusion or incoherence in different parts of the interpretation; Noticing when a reasonable interpretation has taken place
Cognitive strategies	Inferencing	Using information within the text or conversational context to guess the meanings of unfamiliar language items associated with a listening task to predict outcomes, or to fill in missing information	Use contextual clues; Use familiar content words; Use knowledge about the world and/or English; Paying attention to speakers' tone and intonation
	Prediction	Anticipating the next part of a text (such as a word, a phrase, or an idea)	Predicting the contents from the title of topics before listening; Anticipating details in the next part while listening
	Fixation	Paying close attention to one small part of the spoken text in order to understand it	Searching for the spelling or the meaning of the word; Repeating or memorizing the sounds of unfamiliar words or complete phrases so that these could be processed later

Social strategies	Questioning for clarification	Asking for clarification, verification, rephrasing, or examples about the language and/or task	Asking the teacher; Asking for the recording to be played again
	Cooperation	Working together with someone other than an interlocutor to solve a problem, pool information, check a listening task, model a language activity	Asking someone who knows the word; Asking a friend or a person next to you


**APPENDIX 2: PRE- AND POST-TEST**

**Section 1:** Look at the pictures. What do they show? Listen. What are the people talking about? Choose the correct picture.


**1**



**A**

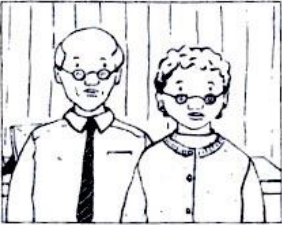


**B**



**C**


**2**



**A**

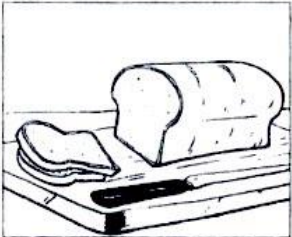


**B**




**C**

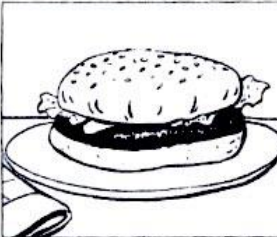
**3**



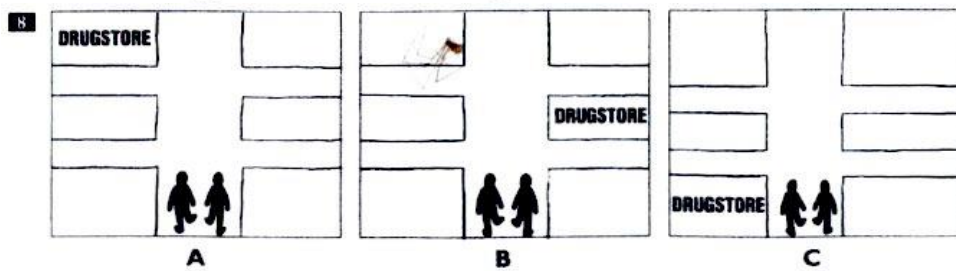
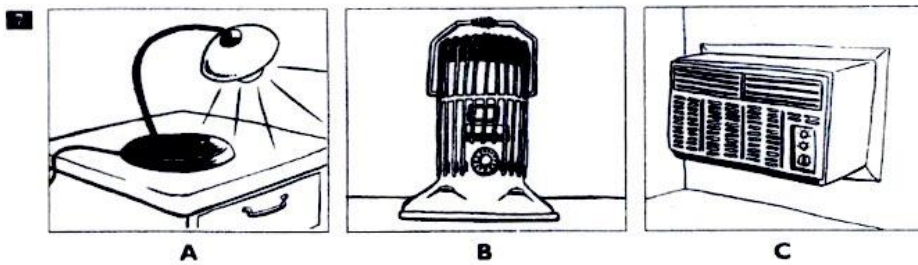
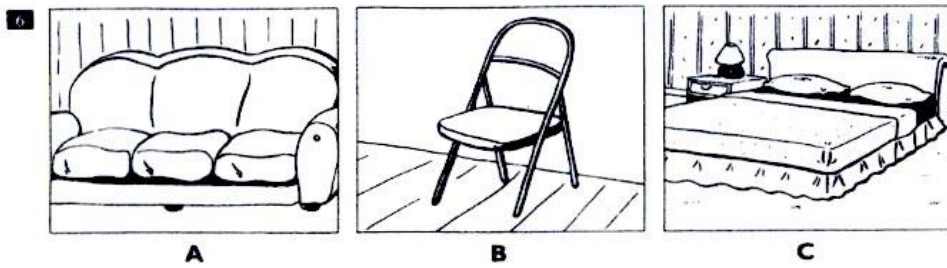
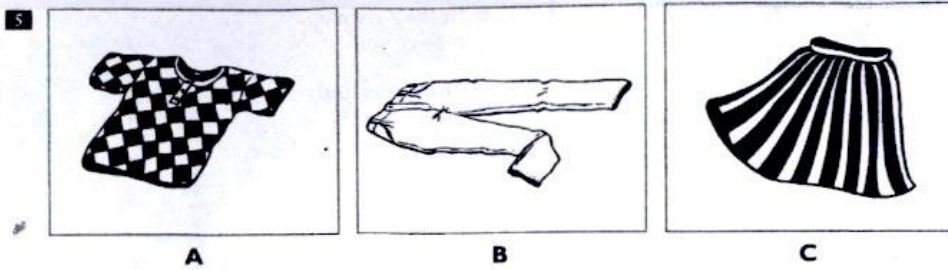
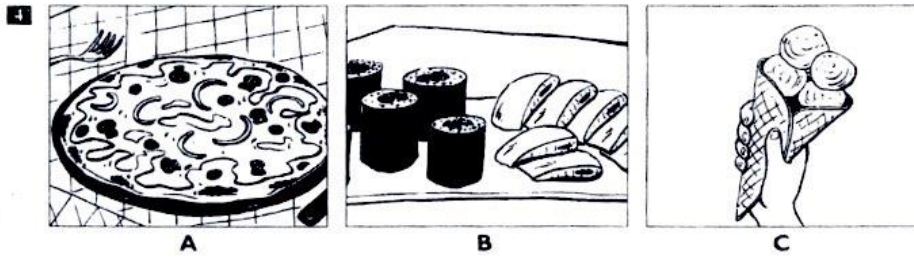
**A**



**B**



**C**



**Section 2:** You will hear people speaking. How would you reply? Read the answers below. Listen. Choose the best answer.

9. A I'm Chris.  
B No, I'm not.  
C How about you?
10. A The music was really good.  
B Yes, I like it.  
C Do you think so.
11. A Yes, it is.  
B Yes, they are.  
C Yes, I am.
12. A No, I'm not.  
B No, I like them.  
C No, I don't.
13. A They're younger.  
B Yes, they are.  
C She's older.
14. A Good idea! I'll cook.  
B Yes, we do.  
C Where do you want to go?
15. A It's not really good, huh?  
B Great! I love Mexican food.  
C Here you go. Keep the change.
16. A I do.  
B I never play basketball.  
C I think so.
17. A People sometimes buy TV guides.  
B Because they like it.  
C I think they watch it for entertainment.
18. A Yes, I woke up.  
B I had breakfast.  
C Around 7.30.

**Section 3:** Read the sentences below. You are about to hear people having conversations. Listen. Complete the sentences with the best answers.

19. He needs to call  
A 214-2961.  
B 241-2961.  
C 214-6291.
20. The number is  
A (212) 555-4236.  
B (555) 212-4236.  
C (202) 555-4236.
21. They're talking about  
A ice cream.  
B coffee.  
C candy.
22. They're talking about  
A a hamburger.  
B yogurt.  
C soup.
23. She goes out to dinner  
A after work.  
B during the week.  
C on weekends.
24. He listens to the radio  
A at work.  
B in his car.  
C at home.
25. They're talking about  
A a desk.  
B a bathtub.  
C a sofa.
26. She  
A is going with him.  
B thinks movies are boring.  
C doesn't want to go to bed late.
27. They both liked  
A the acting.  
B the funny parts.  
C the music.
28. The computer store is  
A three blocks from the gas station.  
B next to movie theater.  
C across from a drugstore.

**Section 4:** Read the sentences below. You are about to hear people speaking. Listen. Complete the sentences with the best answers.

- |                           |                                   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 29. Sally and Robert have | 34. It's a                        |
| A two girls.              | A closet.                         |
| B three boys.             | B dresser.                        |
| C one girl.               | C sofa.                           |
| 30. The final score was   | 35. It's a                        |
| A Bears 68, Tigers 48.    | A bathtub.                        |
| B Bears 88, Tigers 68.    | B toilet.                         |
| C Bears 48, Tigers 68.    | C shower.                         |
| 31. Karen's wearing       | 36. First he                      |
| A a tan shirt.            | A takes a shower.                 |
| B sneakers.               | B eats breakfast.                 |
| C socks.                  | C watches TV.                     |
| 32. Bill's wearing        | 37. She reads the paper after she |
| A a plain tie.            | A watches TV.                     |
| B dark pants.             | B gets home.                      |
| C a striped shirt.        | C had dinner.                     |
| 33. It's a                | 38. The Life Science Center is    |
| A pot.                    | A on a corner.                    |
| B microwave oven.         | B next to a bridge.               |
| C stove.                  | C just past the gift shop.        |

**Section 5:** Read the sentences below. You are about to hear people speaking. Listen. Complete the sentences with the best answers.

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 39. The man has          | 45. A <i>corsi</i> is a                       |
| A three boys.            | A table for eating.                           |
| B two girls and a boy.   | B heating system.                             |
| C two boys and a girl.   | C type of bed.                                |
| 40. Pete is              | 46. When people use a <i>corsi</i> , they sit |
| A in nursery school.     | A near the door.                              |
| B in high school.        | B on comfortable chairs.                      |
| C in junior high school. | C around a table.                             |



41. The winning teams were  
A the Falcons and the Eagles.  
B the Falcons and the Panthers.  
C the Eagles and the Panthers.
42. The Bears lost by  
A 5 points.  
B 15 points.  
C 20 points.
43. On Fridays, the man doesn't  
A work all day.  
B need to wear a suit.  
C go to the office.
44. He likes Friday because  
A he does more work.  
B he meets new friends.  
C he feels better.
47. The woman eats dinner  
A as soon as she gets home.  
B after she watches the news.  
C after she takes a walk.
48. She listens to music after  
A her walk.  
B reading.  
C 10 p.m.
49. The movie the man saw was  
A a musical.  
B a love story.  
C an action film.
50. He thought the movie was  
A boring.  
B violent.  
C interesting.

### **APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (AFTER THE POST-TEST)**

1. Could you apply the strategies trained when you performed the listening tasks and test? What strategies did you use before/during/after listening and for what questions? How did you handle them? Did you use (a strategy)? Why not?
2. Do you think listening strategies could help improve your listening? How could these strategies help? What strategies are the most useful in your opinion?
3. Do you think you have had any progress in listening? What do you think about your improvement?
4. How did you feel when you could perform a listening task?
5. What did you think about the course in general?

**APPENDIX 4: OBSERVATIONAL SCHEME**

Strategies used	Pre-listening		While-listening		Post-listening	
	Good listeners	Poor listeners	Good listeners	Poor listeners	Good listeners	Poor listeners
Advance organization						
Selective attention						
Directed attention						
Comprehension monitoring						
Inferencing						
Prediction						
Fixation						
Questioning for clarification						
Cooperation						