

Investigating English Listening Strategy Use of Middle School Students

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Abstract

In recent years, research on learning strategies has become the new domain in the area of the second language acquisition (SAL). In view of the above, the study based upon the definition and classification of O'Malley & Chamot and Oxford, discusses the condition of junior students' listening strategies use and the impact on listening understanding. Through this research, we can see that the students with better listening score are better at self-supervising, training and listening techniques. I suggest that teachers should encourage and train the students to use the listening strategies to improve their ability. The final goal is encouraging students to self-evaluate and self-direct, and lay the foundation of life-long learning.

Keywords: Meta-cognitive strategies; Cognitive strategies; Social/affective strategies; Junior school students.



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1. Introduction

1.1. The Importance of Listening Strategies

Listening is the core communicative activity and the foundation of any other language skills. The quality of listening teaching directly affects students' language reception, basic language skills training and the cultivation of practical ability. Thus, listening strategies in language learning has a special role. According to the American foreign language teaching experts WM Rivers and MS Temperly's statistics, listening occupied the proportion of communication activities as high as 45%. Krashen's input hypothesis think that the most basic way for learning the language is to understand the language input, and listening is the most important channel to understand the input language (Krashen, 1985). So we can see the importance of listening strategies. Improving the foreign language learners' listening comprehension ability effectively, has become issues of concern in foreign language teaching area. Many foreign language teachers and researchers have done a lot of research on this subject, and have different degrees of discovery and many unique insights. All of which have greatly promoted the reform and development of listening teaching.

1.2. A Brief Analysis of Student's Needs

Education must be based on the development of students, *Ordinary Junior School English Standards* point that: "junior school students should be suitable for their own learning characteristics of learning strategies, and according to their own learning needs to constantly adjust the learning strategy". Teachers should be based on different teaching content and different ability students to guide students to form a variety of learning and inquiry way.

Teaching students to learn and optimize the learning strategies, has been regarded as the current education sector to improve learning efficiency and reduce the burden of learning, and a reliable guarantee to improve the quality of teaching in large area, also lay the foundation for students to follow development and potential ability. Cultivating students' self-learning ability, cannot do without the guidance of teachers. Teach students to learn methods, so that they master the learning methods and learn to analyze the problem, the way to solve the problem at the same time. In addition, listening occupied the proportion of junior school entrance examination for 20%, so listening have a certain impact on the development of students.

1.3. Research Questions

This study aimed to identify listening strategies of English learners in an EFL context using a sample of students from a NO.1 middle school in Yichang, Hubei. On the basis of the analysis of the theoretical foundation, the research questions are put forward to guide the following data analysis and results. They will be discussed in detail in the section of results and discussions. The present study addressed three research questions as follows:

- (1) What type of listening strategies does the subjects under investigation use in English listening?
- (2) Are there any differences in listening strategies use between high score group and low score group?
- (3) What is the relationship between English listening strategies use and listening achievement?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Definition and Classification of Listening Strategies

Mendelsohn defines listening as "the ability to understand the spoken language of the native speaker" (Mendelsohn, 1984). Obviously, this definition has a very clear purpose of communication. O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper think that listening is a positive, conscious process. Listeners rely on a variety of strategic resources to meet the task requirements, while obtained the clues to build meaning from the upper and lower and existing knowledge. From their knowledge of listening, we can easily outline the following basic features: Listening is a process of interpretation, listening is a positive and an interactive process, listening can both take the bottom-up and top-down processing. Its characteristics show that listening can be improved by training. Moreover, interaction means that listening and speaking are inseparable, they are intertwined with each other.

Listening strategies is actually a learning strategies. The so-called learning strategies, refers to the learners in the process of learning or using language taken the thinking and behavior activities, divided into three categories: meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social / affective strategies. Meta-cognitive strategy refers to the action taken by the learner to plan, monitor, evaluate and to promote the smooth completion of a certain learning activity. It is the measure taken by the learner to carry out self-management. Cognitive strategies have a direct relationship with the learner's learning tasks. It involves dealing with input information, such as restatement, contextual reasoning, association and other strategies. Social/affective strategies refer to the learners to promote the completion of a learning task to cooperate with others, or control their own emotions, remove the tension and so on. English listening strategies are based on learning strategies as a theoretical framework. It's a kind of learning strategy, and it refers to the mind and behavior in the listening process.

2.2. Previous Research on Listening Strategies

The empirical study of listening strategies in the West began in the 1980s. These studies included the definition and classification of strategies, discovery the differences between proficient and unskilled persons in use of strategies in listening comprehension, and the relationship between the use of strategies and listening test, and try to identify some of the strategies associated with the results (Murphy, 1985). The study of foreign language learning strategies began to show in exploratory research (O'Malley and Chamot, 1989) from the mid-1980s. These studies are based on the recognition that proficient people have some strategies that unskilled people lacked. However, due to the different objects and means of investigation, these studies did not come to the conclusive conclusion.

Since the mid-eighties, after Albright has suggested from a teaching researcher why learners cannot learn from teachers, the language teaching and the researchers began to pay attention to the learner's learning style, learning strategies and personal factors in the process of language learning from the subjective effect. Teng researched 51 low and middle level Taiwan undergraduates, and shows that good listener use more listening strategies than those of poor listeners, and the most commonly used in all 52 strategies is focusing attention and translation strategies; the frequency order of six types of listening strategies is compensation, cognition, metacognition, memory, social, emotional strategy (Teng, 1998).

Domestic research began in the early 1990s, some of them research on the difference between skilled and unskilled listeners in use of listening strategies (Wen Qiufang, 1995), there are also someone lies on the impact of background knowledge and the listening patterns and strategies (Liu Shaolong, 1966). However, the study of specialized listening strategies is rare. China from the early nineties have also appeared some article in the review of the learning strategy (Wu, 1994) and the emergence of the relevant experimental report, and explore the possibility of teaching listening strategies (Su Yuanlian, 2003). However, the focus of the study on learning strategies is generally based on the observation of the role of learning strategies in the overall process of language learning. It is rare to study the role of learning strategies in listening comprehension. Moreover, the above research focuses on the study of college students' English listening strategies, and there is little research on middle school students' English listening strategies.

All in all, the study in domestic or overseas is mainly based on the different levels of English for foreign language students, the research type is mainly cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies; and the experimental listening materials are very broad, including video and other audio-visual materials and multimedia materials; the type of listening studied is complete, including interactive listening and communicative listening; research has been involved in the use of strategies, the relationship between the chapter, the static research is more, and study of dynamic processes between listening strategies to language development process is less.

2.3. An Investigation of Junior Students' Listening Strategies Use

2.3.1. Purpose

The purpose of this survey is to investigate the use of listening strategies by junior students, and intend to understand the following aspects: What strategies are used in listening English? Does the listening strategy have any impacts on listening test scores? In the view of improving learners' strategic awareness, the research devotes to train and cultivate their self-control ability.

2.3.2. Participants

The respondents are the third grade junior students in No.1 middle school in Yiling District Yichang city where the author had the internship. Utilizing the mid-examination as an opportunity to issue 90 questionnaires, and withdraw 81 copies of valid questionnaires. And then divide the high score of 22 points and above, it is 40 students

in total; while 21 points and the following divided into low group (listening test's full mark is 30 points), 41 students in total. There are two reasons for choosing these students as the subjects: 1) Students have basically formed their own learning methods after year's English study. The findings of the investigation can reflect the actual situation more objectively. 2) The findings can help students cultivate the effective listening strategies so that they can benefit a lot in their continuous English study.

2.3.3. Instrumentation

The tools used in this study are mainly two: one is the listening test paper, and the second is listening strategies questionnaire. The present listening strategies questionnaire was adapted mainly from the classification of learning strategies in the framework of cognitive theory proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), with reference to strategies used in listening (Oxford, 1990/2008). Because the current study indicates that listening comprehension process is in accordance with the description of general comprehension processes in the second language acquisition. The questionnaire of listening strategies includes 30 questions, and divided into three parts. There are eight questions about listening meta-cognitive strategies, and 14 questions about listening cognitive strategies, and eight questions of social/affective strategies.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1. Meta-Cognitive Strategies

Table-1. The Use of Listening Meta-cognitive Strategies

Item	The average score of high score group	The average score of low score group	The standard deviation of high score group	The standard deviation of low score group
1	3.80	3.12	0.93	0.86
2	3.63	3.07	0.80	0.71
3	2.95	2.39	1.14	0.91
4	3.48	2.44	1.12	1.01
5	3.23	2.61	1.01	1.10
6	3.33	2.20	1.10	1.04
7	2.95	2.59	1.07	1.01
8	4.05	3.29	1.02	1.10

Meta-cognitive strategies are programs for monitoring and assessing actions that learners take to improve their listening skills, and a series of self-management measures. From the item 1 and 2 of Table 1, we can see that two groups students basically have a clear listening learning objectives, and can focus on attention, but from the item 3 and 7, we can see that not enough attention have been paid to the development of English listening learning program, and the majority of students did not realize that through a variety of channels to practice English listening. From item 4, 5, 6 and 8, it was obvious to find that there were significant differences between the high group and low group students in use of listening strategies. High scores group students can actively explore their own English listening learning methods, and often contact the learned knowledge to understand the material, and hold a positive attitude towards English learning. Low score group students lack of confidence in learning, often cannot distinguish the different listening tasks, and lack of relevance and flexibility in use of strategies and skills, what's more, they usually not have the positive reflection and valuable evaluation after listening.

3.2. Cognitive Strategies

Table-2. The Use of Listening Cognitive Strategies

Item	The average score of high score group	The average score of low score group	The standard deviation of high score group	The standard deviation of low score group
9	3.55	2.39	0.95	0.82
10	3.75	3.15	0.92	0.84
11	4.00	3.12	0.81	1.04
12	2.00	1.51	0.84	0.70
13	2.13	1.80	0.98	0.83
14	2.90	2.07	1.02	1.07
15	2.95	1.85	0.92	0.94
16	3.45	2.71	0.95	0.94
17	3.68	3.32	1.15	1.11
18	2.63	2.07	0.91	0.97
19	3.58	2.85	1.05	1.07
20	3.53	2.63	0.97	1.12
21	3.55	2.78	0.84	0.87
22	3.75	2.95	0.83	0.94

Cognitive listening strategies include the strategy that make sentences as the unit of perception, grasping the main information strategy, reasoning strategy and memory strategy. Table 2 shows that the learners with poor listening ability are very deficient in listening cognition, and there is the great gap between the high group in the 9th item, and they often did not aware of the close relationship between speech, intonation and listening, and the law of language is also ignored. However the learners with better listening ability will choose to pay attention to the information they need, the main information, and through the reasoning or combined with the context and background knowledge, they can generate the scene of the incident, the identity or relationship, the speaker intention and their implication. In addition, they are more focused, and can effectively use notes, summary the contents of the list timely.

3.3. Social/Affective Strategies

Table-3. The Use of Social/Affective Strategies

Item	The average score of high score group	The average score of low score group	The standard deviation of high score group	The standard deviation of low score group
23	3.73	2.95	0.92	1.06
24	3.68	3.32	0.72	1.00
25	2.88	2.54	0.90	1.13
26	2.88	2.37	1.19	1.12
27	3.48	3.27	0.87	0.99
28	3.93	3.61	0.91	0.96
29	3.60	3.27	0.84	0.99
30	3.13	2.78	1.31	1.32

Listening strategies are mainly reflected the best listening effect, and learners take the initiative to cooperate with people, looking for opportunities to practice their own listening. Table 3 shows that the two groups are not very different in terms of communication, because students do not understand the importance of communication on listening, thus listening performance is difficult to achieve excellent. It can be seen that most of the students surveyed are rarely cooperated with other classmates, because of fear of losing face, and seldom asking the teacher in front of other students in listening activities. They prefer to control their own negative emotions, or encourage themselves when making progress, do not willing to ask others for help. This result is consistent with O'Malley and Chamot's view that language learners at the primary and intermediate levels are less likely to use social/affective strategies than meta-cognitive strategies and cognitive strategies.

3.4. The Frequency Difference between High Score and Low Score Groups

Table-4. The frequency and difference in listening strategies

	The average score of high score group	The average score of low score group	The standard deviation of high score group	The standard deviation of low score group	Average Score	The rank of use frequency
Meta-cognitive Strategies	3.43	2.71	0.13	0.14	3.07	2
Cognitive Strategies	3.25	2.52	0.08	0.03	2.88	3
Social/affective Strategies	3.41	3.04	0.11	0.05	3.23	1

According to Oxford's frequency standard of using learning strategy, there is a certain correspondence between the average and the frequency of using strategies. (Oxford, 1990).

Table-5. The correspondence between the average and using frequency of the strategies

Average interval	1.0-1.4	1.5-2.4	2.5-3.4	3.5-4.4	4.5-5.0
The frequency of using strategies	Never	seldom	Sometimes	often	always

As shown in Table 5, the average number of meta-cognitive strategies is 3.07 in the high grouping students, the lowest of cognitive strategies is 2.88, and the averaged frequency of social/ affective strategies is 3.23, according to Oxford's learning strategies frequency using standard, all of which belongs to the range of Sometimes. The average number of sub-strategies under the meta-cognitive strategies is 2.71 in low scores group, and the lowest of the cognitive strategies is 2.52, the average of the sub-strategies under the social/affective strategies is 3.04, According to Oxford's frequency standard of learning strategy, they are also belongs to the range of Sometimes. In the listening comprehension process, whether high or low group students, they can use various types of listening learning strategies in varying degrees. But there was a significant difference in the frequency of strategies between the two groups of students.

Table-6. The average and frequency of each strategy

	Item	The average score of high score group	The frequency rank of high score group	The average score of low score group	The frequency rank of low score group
Meta-cognitive strategy	1	3.80	4	3.12	8
	2	3.63	10	3.07	10
	3	2.95	22	2.39	22
	4	3.48	16	2.44	21
	5	3.23	20	2.61	18
	6	3.33	19	2.20	25
	7	2.95	22	2.59	19
	8	4.05	1	3.29	4
Cognitive strategy	9	3.55	13	2.39	22
	10	3.75	5	3.15	7
	11	4.00	2	3.12	8
	12	2.00	30	1.51	30
	13	2.13	29	1.80	29
	14	2.90	25	2.07	26
	15	2.95	22	1.85	28
	16	3.45	18	2.71	16
	17	3.68	8	3.32	2
	18	2.63	28	2.07	26
	19	3.58	12	2.85	13
	20	3.53	15	2.63	17
	21	3.55	13	2.78	14
	22	3.75	5	2.95	11
Social/affective strategy	23	3.73	7	2.95	11
	24	3.68	8	3.32	2
	25	2.88	26	2.54	20
	26	2.88	26	2.37	24
	27	3.48	16	3.27	5
	28	3.93	3	3.61	1
	29	3.60	11	3.27	5
	30	3.13	21	2.78	14

In order to further discussion of students using strategies, the author listed the average number of strategies from high to low of the questionnaire. The results show that the highest frequency of the students in the high group is the eighth of the meta-cognitive strategies, the average is 4.05, which belongs to the "Often" in Oxford's range of frequently, which indicates that the high group students are active in English learning. The lowest frequency is the cognitive strategy of the 12th question, the average number is 2.00. The most frequent used strategy in low group students is the 28th of the social/affective strategy, with an average of 3.61, which belongs to the "Often" in frequency use range of Oxford. The lowest frequency is also the 12th of the cognitive strategy. The number is 1.51.

It is SPSS 19.0 that is applied to make the analysis of questionnaires, data were collected immediately after the test. An Independent-Samples T Test and a Paired-Samples T Test were employed to measure high group and low group differences respectively in order to find out whether there was a significant difference in listening performance between these two groups. As can be seen from Table 6, there is a significant difference between the high and low groups in using the listening strategies, but it is clear from the 12th that the majority of high and low group students do not have the habit of listening to English broadcasting, which is urgent to improve.

3.5. A Summary of Research Results

The survey shows that the use of listening strategies can help listeners to complete the listening comprehension process more effectively. There are differences in the three strategies of high and low group students, and the difference in cognitive strategies is the largest, followed by meta-cognitive strategies, and finally the social/affective strategies. In the use of these three strategies. High-level students are more likely to use them than low group students, in planning, reasoning, induction, and speculation (when high-level groups listen to the article, they focus on the overall not subject to temporary difficulties). However those of the low group, use the imagination and the translation of mother tongue more frequently (low group is more susceptible to mother tongue).

It can be seen from Table 4 and Table 5: (1) the mean average of meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, social/affective strategies is 3.07, 2.88, 3.23, which belongs to the "sometimes use" range, indicating that the students have mastered and use certain learning strategies, but the frequency is not high. (2) In the three types of learning strategies, the frequency of social/affective strategies is the first, indicating that most students can correctly understand the importance of listening in English learning and adjust their emotions appropriately during listening. The frequency of meta-cognitive strategies ranks the second, which shows that students generally cannot be autonomy to manage, monitor, evaluate their own listening and learning, learning is a little bit blind and passive. Cognitive strategies is the lowest one in frequency in the three strategies, in the range of sometime use.

However, in most studies, cognitive strategies are commonly used by learners, suggesting that this survey results are different with other studies.

4. Teaching Implication

4.1. The Implication of Meta-Cognitive Strategies in Teaching Listening

The questionnaire survey shows that the using meta-cognitive strategies in listening helps to improve listening comprehension. This strategy mainly includes thinking about the learning process, the development of the learning plan, the monitoring of the learning tasks, and the evaluation of the results. The training of metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension follows the teaching patterns proposed by Underwood: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening, which can instruct students to engage in mental activity to obtain correct listening comprehension.

Pre-listening strategies include identifying the characteristics and difficulties of listening learning and developing short or long-term goals. Then teachers should instruct students to prepare for listening and help establish learning goals. And help students understand the overview of the content they listen to, and encourage students to use the information provided to predict the content of the listening. While-listening strategies include teachers should train students ability to choose the main information, distinguish the primary and secondary one to guide students grasp the listening material from the level of the discourse, so as to understand the process of the discourse. Teachers should also teach students to listen while recording notes, such as abbreviations, charts, keywords and other methods to improve the understanding of listening materials. Post-listening strategies include directing students to self-monitoring and self-assessment. Teachers should encourage students to record their own problems encountered in the listening process, check whether they understand the material, and how much they understand, it is necessary to guide students to practice listening exercises after-school, and develop the study plan and arrange study time reasonably.

4.2. The Implication of Cognitive Strategies in Teaching Listening

Cognitive strategies are closely linked to learning materials which are adopted by learners for more effectively identify, understanding, maintain and extract information. In the activities of language learning, these cognitive strategies include four sub-items predictive association, grasping the main information, inference and memory methods, and each one has a specific sub-items: such as the use of background knowledge, target resources, sound appearance, speculation, repetition, categorization, association and generalization, etc (Vandergrift, 2003).

According to the cognitive theory, we know that the listener in the understanding, absorption of input information, they need to link the information entered with the information in brain or background knowledge. That is, the listener with the background knowledge, can quickly enter the listening state, take the initiative to use the background knowledge in the brain to decode the words, make up the new words, and the poor information caused by difficult words, so as to ensure the realization of overall understanding. Therefore teachers should pay attention to the introduction of cultural background knowledge, and broaden the students' eye. For example, before the listening class, teachers can arrange students to read some related materials to familiar with the relevant topics, and the richer subject-related background knowledge is, the higher listening ability will be, and there is the smaller the rate of understanding obstacles.

4.3. The Implication of Social/Affective Strategies in Listening Teaching

Social strategies are used by learners to communicate, and in order to ensure the smooth flow of communication, to ensure the transmission of information, and to try to maintain the communication when they encounter difficulties. According to the survey results show that students generally ignore the social/affective strategies. Listening teaching is a complex psychological process, listening comprehension process not only influences by students' own language ability, but also by many personal psychological factors.

First of all, cooperative learning is a learning method in which learners communicate with each other. Teachers can rely on common goals, common rewards, sharing materials, assigning tasks, and other ways to achieve the dependence (Ellis, 1994). In the classroom teachers should use variety of teaching organizations, and give students more group discussion and speech opportunities. Secondly, teachers should pay more attention to the asking way and conversion skills in the classroom. For different levels of students the corresponding question should be mentioned, which is conducive to the students more active participation in teaching, and help them establish self-confidence. Finally, the teacher should choose the appropriate difficulty and speed listening material, only students can understand, the increase confidence will be in the success experience, and to avoid the situation of "more listen more afraid.

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Appendix Questionnaire in the Language of English

A Survey of English Listening Strategies for Junior Middle School Students

Dear students:

Hello, thank you for your attention and support to this questionnaire. This survey aims to know the use of English listening strategies for junior school students. The questionnaire is anonymous and the information you have filled out will be used only for academic analysis and research purposes, without any individual disclosure or for other purposes. Please write down your answer in "-----" and hit "√" after the option abcde! Thank you!

1. Personal profile

Grade ----- listening test scores -----

2. The use of English listening strategies

Please play "√" after the option abcde, from a to e, representing five levels respectively, full scores are 5 points. a = fully compliant b = basic match c = sometimes meet d = does not meet basically e = totally does not meet

(1) Listening Metacognitive Strategies

- | | | |
|---|--|-----------|
| 1 | I have a clear English listening learning goal. | a b c d e |
| 2 | I can focus on language learning and ignore distracting things. | a b c d e |
| 3 | I often develop an English listening program. | a b c d e |
| 4 | I actively explore suitable English listening learning method. | a b c d e |
| 5 | I often contact the known knowledge to better understand the material. | a b c d e |
| 6 | I pay attention to the pronunciation, grammar and other aspects of the error to improve the listening. | a b c d e |
| 7 | I try to practice English listening through a variety of channels. | a b c d e |
| 8 | I have a positive attitude towards English and English listening learning. | a b c d e |

(2) Listening cognitive strategies

- | | | |
|----|--|-----------|
| 9 | I am reading aloud after class to improve my voice and tone. | a b c d e |
| 10 | In listening study, I am thinking actively. | a b c d e |
| 11 | In listening study, I am good at having a selective point of mind, paying attention to the key part. | a b c d e |
| 12 | I listen to English radio in order to improve my listening comprehension. | a b c d e |
| 13 | I often learn some English cultural background knowledge. | a b c d e |
| 14 | I can listen to the contents of the list, and organize and summarize it. | a b c d e |
| 15 | I pay attention to the law of language and learn by analogy. | a b c d e |
| 16 | When I use English I can be aware of the error and correct it. | a b c d e |
| 17 | If necessary I understand English with Chinese knowledge. | a b c d e |
| 18 | For the expansion of the vocabulary I read some English books. | a b c d e |
| 19 | In the course of listening, I infer, guess or associate. | a b c d e |
| 20 | I often use reasoning, induction and other means to analyze and solve the problem. | a b c d e |
| 21 | During the listening period, I can quickly understand the meaning of listening materials. | a b c d e |
| 22 | I can use the original information to guess the meaning of the new project and predict the results. | a b c d e |

(3) Social / Affective Strategies

- | | | |
|----|--|-----------|
| 23 | According to the speaker's expression, gestures, tone, etc. I can understand the conversation. | a b c d e |
| 24 | In the communication, I focus on the expression of meaning. | a b c d e |
| 25 | I can overcome language barriers and maintain communication. | a b c d e |
| 26 | I often work with others to communicate. | a b c d e |
| 27 | I can aware of the speaker's feelings or thoughts. | a b c d e |
| 28 | I can properly deal with mistakes to encourage myself. | a b c d e |
| 29 | I am able to overcome anxiety while listening. | a b c d e |
| 30 | According to the speaker's expression, gestures, tone, etc. I can understand the conversation. | a b c d e |

Thank you for your help and support, thank you!