LEARNING STRATEGY EMPLOYED BY EFL STUDENTS IN A LISTENING COMPREHENSION CLASS

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Abstract

The present study was a case study undertaken to investigate the learning strategy employed by an EFL student and improvement of his listening comprehension. Participant's learning strategy was measured by Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire and Strategic Listening Interview (SLI). The participant's listening comprehension skill was measured by an EFL listening comprehension test. The result of SILL questionnaire was calculated and analyzed to determine the most dominantly applied learning strategy. It was triangulated to the result of SLI, whereas the result of listening comprehension test was linked to the learning strategy. The findings revealed that the higher the level of strategic listening score the student obtained, the higher the score he attained on the listening comprehension test and vice versa.

Keywords: learning strategy, SLI, SILL

A. Introduction

Listening is becoming significant skill and no longer neglected in the teaching of English in Indonesia after the introduction of the 2004 English Curriculum as well as the establishment of the Standard of Content (Depdiknas, 2006). Listening skill is either developed and taught in the implementation of 2013 curriculum. The students of both senior high school and vocational senior high school are demanded to master English skills including listening skill in order to pass the National Exams (UN).

In the tertiary level, the needs of mastering English particularly listening skill, grammar, and reading skill can't be repudiated any longer. College students either from English department or vocational education are required to achieve 500 TOEFL score or 500 TOEIC scores to graduate. Therefore, students majoring English or EFL students are demanded to improve their listening skill effectively through autonomous extensive listening.

Listening comprehension is found to be among the most difficult tasks for the learners of English as second or foreign language due to several reasons. First, most students are not familiar with the listening material produced by native speakers. Second, the listening section is not only testing students' listening comprehension but also their understanding of spoken language within sociocultural, discourse, pragmatic and strategic competence. Third, listening also becomes troublesome encountered by EFL students regarding their lack of knowledge about learning strategy to cope their listening difficulties. Thus, teacher should explore and guide students to employ learning strategy in listening activities. Students should also be exposed to the comprehensible input within a continuum of spoken texts to process the information from the aural recordings.

Listening involves making sense of spoken language, normally accompanied by other sounds and visual input, with the help of our relevant prior knowledge and the context in which we are listening (Schmitt, 2002). Listening is an active process of selecting and interpreting information from

auditory and/or visual clues. Listeners remember the beginning of the sentence while proceeding to the end. They retrieve the patterns and meanings of words from the memory and work out the relationship of the sentence to its context from information in their memory. They store the meaning of the sentence in their memory so that they can recall it second or years later. In this sense memory is involved in all aspects of the processing of the sentence.

Within listening activities, students usually try to translate the meaning of words that they have heard. Moreover, most of the students are directly brought up to the questions within the listening test. Therefore, students tend to limit themselves in applying learning strategies during the listening tasks regarding their lack of knowledge as well as anxiety while listening to the test materials. In this case, the learning strategies are highly recommended for EFL students to cope their listening difficulties and reduce anxiety as well.

This paper is directed to explore learning strategy employed by EFL students in listening comprehension class. In this case study, the researcher also would like to investigate why EFL student applies a certain listening strategy and how the learning strategy employed by EFL student improves his listening comprehension. The result of this study is expected to provide thick and rich descriptions about the learning strategy employed by EFL students in listening activities.

B. Research Questions

The study is an attempt to find out the learning strategy employed by EFL student dealing with listening comprehension. The research questions are formulated as follow:

1. What strategy does EFL student apply in learning listening comprehension?
2. Why does EFL student apply a certain learning strategy in listening activities?
3. How does the learning strategy employed by EFL student improve his listening comprehension?

C. Review of Related Literature

This chapter reviews the underlying theories of the present study as well as research reports that deal with learning strategy and improvement of listening comprehension. First, models of listening comprehension are discussed deliberately. An extensive discussion about the theory of learning strategy is also presented to give a comprehensive overview of the relationship between cognitive process & knowledge and listening skills & meta-cognitive processes in the perspective of teaching and learning listening, since they are directly related to the problem of the study. Finally, a brief discussion is given to the pedagogical implications of applying learning strategy to improve listening comprehension

1. Models of Listening Comprehension

There are three main approaches of listening comprehension including bottom-up, top down, and interactive processing. Bottom up processing involves piecing together the parts of what is being heard in a linear fashion, one by one, in sequence. In bottom up processing, listeners always have to do some bottom-up processing of what they hear at the acoustic level for example discriminating between different but similar sounds (Brown, 1990) in order to facilitate subsequent top-down strategies.

Top down processing is in the converse of bottom-up: holistic, going from whole to part, and focused on interpretation of meaning rather than recognition of sounds, words and sentences. It is related to two types of schemata: content schemata and rhetorical schemata. The Interactive Process model (Park, 2004) shows how it takes both top-down processing coupled with bottom-up processing for comprehension to take place. Bottom up requires linguistic knowledge and top-down occurs when background knowledge is activated. If one or the other is missing, there can be compensation, though comprehension best takes place through the interaction of both.

2. Learning Strategy

About 1900s, language teaching stressed the importance of learning strategies. Many studies revealed that students will perform better if they use learning strategies appropriately. Learning strategies help training students to be independent and competent learners. Oxford (1990) argues that strategies are important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence.

In the *Concise Encyclopedia of Educational Linguistics* (1999), Oxford offers this definition: Learning strategies for second or foreign language learners are "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language." (p. 518)

One of the most comprehensive pieces of research on learning strategies was carried out by O'Malley and Chamot and colleagues in the 1980s. The final taxonomy which they came up with after several longitudinal studies consists of:

1. Meta-cognitive strategies: they have executive functions and include thinking about the learning process, planning for the learning, monitoring and evaluating the learning process
2. Cognitive strategies: they are utilized to directly manipulate the learning tasks at hand and are applied to specific tasks.
3. Socio-affective strategies: they have to do with interacting with others and
4. Affective control to help learn the materials. (Brown, 2007, P.134)

Another very popular and frequently used strategy inventory was developed by Oxford and proposed six different categories of learning strategies. Oxford used factor analysis to group strategies into the following: Cognitive, meta-cognitive, memory related, compensatory, affective, and social strategies. Originally, the SILL was developed for the Defense Language Institute in California as a way to measure the language learning strategies those students used (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995).

The current SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) provides an 80-item version for native speakers of English who are learning a foreign language and a 50-item version for ESL/EFL students. Students respond to a series of statements about possible strategy use by choosing one of the Likert-scale numbers, 1 – 5, with 1 representing "never or almost never true of me" and 5 representing "always or almost always true of me" (p. 4). The SILL has been translated into many different languages. Following are the six strategy groups with their corresponding subscales for the ESL/EFL 1990 version of the SILL:

1. Memory strategies, such as grouping, imagery, rhyming, and structured reviewing (nine items)
2. Cognitive strategies, such as reasoning, analyzing, summarizing (all reflective of deep processing), as well as general practicing (14 items).
3. Compensation strategies (to compensate for limited knowledge), such as guessing meanings from the context in reading and listening and using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning when the precise expression is not known (six items).
4. Meta-cognitive strategies, such as paying attention, consciously searching for practice opportunities, planning for language tasks, self-evaluating one's progress, and monitoring error (nine items).
5. Affective (emotional, motivation-related) strategies, such as anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and self-reward (six items).
6. Social strategies, such as asking questions, cooperating with active speakers of the language, and becoming culturally aware (six items). (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995, p.5)

3. Listening Strategy

Listeners make use of a variety of strategies to make sense of the incoming messages and compensate for their lack of knowledge especially in EFL contexts. Listening Strategies which are employed by language learners are relatively the same as general learning strategies discussed in the previous section.

Vandergrift (1997b) taxonomy is based on O'Malley and Chamot (1990, 137-139); Oxford (1990, 21); Vandergrift (1996). He proposed three types of strategies, metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective.

Field's (2008) taxonomy draws upon Dornyei and Scott and adapts their list of strategies to make them refer to listening strategies. Some new strategies have been added to his taxonomy of listening strategies involving:

1. Avoidance strategies: learner gets by without the missing or uncertain piece of input.
2. Achievement strategies: learner attempts to make maximum sense of what has been decoded.
3. Repair strategies: learner appeals for help.
4. Pro-active strategies: learner plans her behavior in away that might enable problems of understanding to be avoided. (Field, 2008, p.298)

D. Method of the Study
1. Research Design

The research design of this study is based on qualitative method by applying case study to investigate an EFL student's learning strategy in Listening Comprehension II. As a case study, only one participant called Musjid Almuttaqi, engages in this research. He studies at English Education department at STIT Maskumambang Gresik. He was selected as a participant since he has applied learning strategies and achieved the high SILL score at the first time the researcher conduct the survey by distributing SILL Questionnaire.

2. Procedure of Data Collection

In this study three types of data were collected: the student's learning strategy gained from SILL questionnaire, the student's listening strategy gained from the interview, the listening comprehension score gained from the listening comprehension test. The listening comprehension test was constructed by concerning on the reliability and validity.

3. Research Instruments

The survey of learning strategy was conducted by distributing SILL questionnaire. It is used to measure and analyze what kind of learning strategy was employed by the participant of this study. The scores of each strategy were counted and analyze which strategy was the most dominant. The interview was also conducted to find out the listening strategy and triangulate the strategy as well. The last instrument is the listening test which was designed to measure student's listening comprehension.

4. Procedure of Data Analysis

There are some steps which are used to analyze the problems: (1) Collecting and analyzing the result of survey, (2) The data obtained from the survey are then coded and categorized on the basis of the criteria used in determining the most dominant learning strategy (3) Analyzing the result of listening test and link it back to the learning strategy applied by the EFL student during listening activities or test.

E. Findings and Discussion
1. Findings
a. Result of SILL Questionnaire

Table 1. Learning Strategy from SILL Questionnaire

No	Strategy	Performance Indicator	Total Score	Average score
1	Memory	Remembering more effectively	37	4.1
2	Cognitive	Using all your mental	53	3.8

		process		
3	Compensation	Compensating for missing knowledge	25	4.2
4	Meta-cognitive	Organizing & evaluating your learning	35	3.9
5	Affective	Managing your emotions	24	4
6	Social	Learning with others	21	3.5
	Total		200	4

As it is shown in table 1, the most dominant strategy employed by the participant or EFL student in this case study is compensation strategy (average score 4.2). It means that the participant tends to guess intelligently in listening and reading by using linguistic clues and other clues.

b. Result of Strategic Listening Interview

Table 2 depicts the use of listening strategy during listening tasks or activities including pre-listening, whilst listening and post listening. This data is obtained from the Strategic Listening Interview (SLI)

Table 2. Strategic Listening Interview

No	Stages of listening	Description		Remark
1	Pre-Listening	a.	Planning to accomplish the listening task	√ √
		b.	Connecting the topic of the text to prior knowledge or schemata	√ √ √
		c.	Guessing what to listen	
		d.	Preparing mental before listening	
		e.	Predicting the main idea of the text with the help of pictures and title	
2	Whilst Listening	a.	Using information within the text or conversational context to guess the meaning of unfamiliar language items in listening tasks	√ √ √ √ √
		b.	Listening for specific details	
		c.	Focusing on key information or main ideas	
		d.	Using visual images to understand and remember	
			information	
		e.	Taking notes of key information and important specific details while listening	
3	Post-Listening	a.	Check the listening answer collaboratively with peers	x √ √
		b.	Identifying the changes for the next time similar task	
		c.	Having reasons in using the certain strategy while listening	

As it is shown in table 2, the participant or EFL student in this case study applies listening strategy particularly by guessing and predicting the main idea and information from the recording by understanding the conversational context and the help of visual images to retrieve and store the information in his memory.

For post listening activities, the participant states that he would rather check his work or listening assignment to the teacher than to gain peer feedback. It not surprising since his social strategy score is lower than other learning strategies. He tends to predict and guess in term of applying compensation strategies in order to anticipate the listening difficulties and get the information to accomplish the listening tasks.

c. Result of the Listening Comprehension Test

The listening comprehension test was given to measure his listening competence or ability. The materials tested include vocabulary task, listening task for the main ideas and specific details, predicting, fill in gaps, and language awareness focusing on the grammar (the use of preposition). The participant achieved 89 score for listening comprehension test.

F. Discussion

The findings reveal that the most dominant strategy employed by the participant or EFL student in this case study is compensation strategy. It means that the participant tends to guess intelligently in listening and reading by using linguistic

clues and other nonlinguistic clues. This strategy is employed to compensate for limited knowledge, such as guessing meanings from the context in reading and listening and using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning when the precise expression is not known.

Oxford (1990) explains that beginners are not the only ones who employ guessing. Advanced learners and even native speakers use guessing when they haven't heard something well enough. When they don't know a new word, or when the meaning is hidden between the lines, they try to make inference to process the information.

The result of Strategic Listening Interview (SLI) also indicates that the participant in this case study is consistently using compensation strategy supported by memory strategy to improve his listening comprehension. It is also proved by his achieving 89 score which is good and satisfied for the college student.

This finding also support the previous study conducted by Chamot and Kupper (1989) that learners employing the strategies with greater persistence become more effective listeners and improve their listening comprehension.

G. Conclusion and Suggestion
1. Conclusion

Learning strategies for second or foreign language learners are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language.

When the EFL student employs compensation strategy supported with memory strategy, he can improve his listening comprehension. Since these strategies enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge. The compensation strategies can be employed through making inference by using

a wide variety of linguistic and nonlinguistic clues.

2. Suggestion

The pedagogical implications of this research can be beneficial to encourage both students and teacher to apply learning strategies. Learning strategies should be introduced and taught to EFL students to encounter their difficulties in language learning particularly listening comprehension. The strategy based instruction can be an alternative solution providing knowledge of listening strategy and use to EFL students. Thus, students are promoted to gain declarative knowledge (i.e. knowing about strategy), procedural knowledge (i.e. knowing how to use strategy), and conditional knowledge (i.e. knowing when and why to use strategy).

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