

**THE USE OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE LISTENING
COMPREHENSION AMONG FORM SIX STUDENTS**

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**Title: THE USE OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effect of explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies in enhancing students' listening comprehension. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design was used to find out students' improvement and perception in using metacognitive strategies to monitor their listening comprehension. 90 Upper Sixth Form students were selected to participate in this study and they were divided into three groups: two experimental and one control group. The treatment in the form of explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension was given to the experimental groups while the control group was taught using the non-metacognitive product-based method. The pretest and posttest results were analysed using the paired t-test and the questionnaires were analysed using frequency counts and percentages. The Null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected indicating that there is a significant difference in the scores obtained by students treated with explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies compared to the non-metacognitive product-based method. The results derived from the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire(MALQ) used after the pretest and posttest revealed a better level of metacognitive awareness among the experimental group after the treatment. The semi-structured questionnaire elicited positive responses from students who used metacognitive strategies to monitor their listening comprehension. Explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies can help teachers to provide students with a self-regulating tool to monitor their listening comprehension.

**Tajuk: PENGGUNAAN STRATEGI METAKOGNISI UNTUK MENINGKATKAN
KEBERKESANAN KEFAHAMAN MENDENGAR DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR
TINGKATAN ENAM**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini telah dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti keberkesanan strategi metakognisi sebagai panduan untuk kefahaman mendengar. Kajian kuasi-experimen ini bertujuan untuk menyelidik kesan pengajaran strategi metakognisi secara eksplisit di dalam bilik darjah terhadap pencapaian pelajar dalam kemahiran kefahaman mendengar. Seramai 90 pelajar Tingkatan 6 Atas telah dipilih untuk menyertai kajian ini dan mereka dibahagikan kepada tiga kumpulan; dua kumpulan eksperimen dan satu kumpulan kawalan yang telah menjalani ujian pra dan ujian pos. Kumpulan eksperimen telah diberikan instruksi eksplisit mengenai strategi-strategi metakognisi yang dapat mengawal selia kefahaman mendengar manakala kumpulan kawalan diberikan pengajaran bukan-metakognisi yang berorientasikan hasil pembelajaran. Skor ujian dianalisa menggunakan Ujian t berpasangan yang menghasilkan dapatan bahawa hipotesis nol (H_0) ditolak yakni membuktikan bahawa instruksi strategi metakognisi di dalam pengajaran pembelajaran dapat meningkatkan kemahiran kefahaman mendengar para pelajar. Dapatan dari soal selidik yang mengkaji tahap kesedaran metakognisi responden (MALQ) selepas ujian pra dan pos memberikan maklumat mengenai peningkatan tahap kesedaran metakognisi di kalangan kumpulan eksperimen. Hasil soal-selidik separa-berstruktur menunjukkan bahawa respons pelajar adalah positif terhadap penggunaan strategi metakognisi. Strategi metakognisi sekiranya diajar secara eksplisit dapat membantu guru memberikan panduan kepada pelajar untuk mengawal selia kefahaman mendengar dengan lebih berkesan.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND TERMINOLGY FOR QUANTITATIVE STUDY

μ	Population Mean
t_{α}	Critical value for t (alpha)
df	Degree of Freedom
H_0	Null Hypothesis
H_1	Alternative Hypothesis
SD	Standard Deviation
p	Probability Value

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The listening skill is crucial in the development of one's proficiency in any language as listening is the key that unlocks the communication pathway of a language. Listening is the first communication skill one acquires because we respond to sounds as early as even when we are in our mother's womb (Beebee & Redmond, 2011). Kurita (2012) pointed out that listening comprehension is at the heart of language learning. Therefore, listening is an essential skill which develops speaking and often influences the development of reading and writing skills when learning a new language. Substantially, only through listening one is able to respond orally or in written form.

However, listening is not an easy skill to be acquired as it demands a host of active information-processing intertwined with background knowledge and language proficiency. Therefore, teaching listening skills is one of the most complex tasks for

any ESL teacher. This is because successful listening skills require the usage of effective strategies. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) stated that learners are seldom taught how to approach or manage listening as despite numerous listening activities conducted in the classrooms, learners are still left to develop their listening on their own without explicit instruction from their teachers. This may be due to the reason that teachers themselves are unsure of how to teach listening in a principled manner (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Therefore, it is rather frustrating for these teachers because there are no rules in teaching listening as in grammar and comprehending listening becomes worse if students already have problems dealing with the language competency.

In this study, the researcher aimed to find out the effectiveness of instruction on metacognitive strategies in helping these students comprehend listening texts. The study will be able to help students develop effective listening skills that are vital in learning a second language as listening to authentic use of language and monitoring understanding of aural input not only improves competency but also enhances effective communication in the target language.

The findings can also give valuable insights for teachers who have difficulties in teaching the listening skill. Teachers can help students monitor their own listening and be responsible for their learning and achieving their goals pertaining to listening comprehension evaluation.

Besides, the findings of this study can also help education policy makers to address the importance of listening skills and convince them to include a listening comprehension component in public examinations starting from the primary or lower secondary level of education rather than the sixth form or pre-university level.

This chapter highlights the background, statement of the problem, rationale of the study, research questions to be addressed by the study, implications of the study, the limitations of the study and the definition of terms that will be used in the thesis.

1.2 Background of the study

While listening, a student may realise that he or she may not understand what is being said. At this point, many students give up or get caught up in a monologue trying to translate a specific word in their mother tongue. Some students may lose their self-confidence and may conclude that they are not able to understand spoken English well and would feel frustrated. According to Vandergrift and Goh (2012), apart from having to deal with anxiety, learners also face the challenge of not knowing how to listen when they receive an aural input.

Fujita, 1985 as cited in Berne 2004, identified six factors involved in listening comprehension:

- a) self-confidence;
- b) focus/search for meaning;
- c) recall notes (mental and/or written);
- d) attention to form, self, and others;
- e) active participant;
- f) prior experience and language study.

The above factors need to be addressed by teachers in the listening classroom in order to produce effective listeners of the target language. These factors make listening instructions more meaningful and achievable. The listening skill is a complex skill that needs to be developed consciously (Vandergrift, 2002). Teachers need to find a way to engage learners' metacognition in teaching listening (Vandergrift & Goh 2012).

Although listening comprehension is a vital component, this skill has been overlooked and neglected by most teachers. According to Vandergrift and Goh (2012), the development of listening receives the least systematic attention from teachers and instructional materials. Despite its importance, listening has been labeled the forgotten language art for more than 50 years because it is rarely taught in elementary classrooms (Tompkins, 2002 as cited in Swain, 2004).

In the Malaysian context, ESL students rarely give importance on how to listen and comprehend effectively. Thus, when these students pursue their studies to Form Six or the pre-universities, they have difficulties doing the (800/1) Listening paper in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET).

According to the findings of a survey conducted locally by Mohana & Shamara (2012), none of the teachers interviewed perceived listening as an important and essential skill at the tertiary level. Both teachers and students gave negative feedback on the significance of listening in the classroom and 30% of the teachers emphasised more on reading and writing skills which are given more marks in the MUET test.

1.2.1 The Malaysian University English Test (MUET)

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) had been introduced in 1999 to resolve the deterioration in the standard of English language among Malaysian students. Although these students are exposed to the language for 11 years both in primary and secondary schools, some of them still lack the proficiency that is required of them at the tertiary level. Thus, they fail to perform academically as most of the references and resources available are in the English language.

The MUET test is a standardised test almost like the international English examinations, for example the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL-USA) and the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS-UK).

The main objective of MUET was to "bridge the gap in language needs between secondary and tertiary education" (Malaysian Examination Council, 2001 as cited in Mohana and Shamara (2012). Mohd. Faisal Hanapiah (2002) stated that The Ministry of Education revamps its policies to arrest or reduce the declining standard of English among the students. It is hoped that by introducing the MUET test, students can meet the standard of language proficiency required at the tertiary level. Obtaining a minimum Band 1 in the MUET test is a prerequisite for university

entrance. However, the bands required depend on the courses offered and the requirements of individual universities.

The MUET test comprises 4 main components according to skills distributed in 4 sets of paper: 800/1 Listening, 800/2 Speaking, 800/3 Reading and 800/4 Writing. The format was slightly revamped in 2007 which resulted in an inclusion of short-answer responses in the Listening paper and a replacement of the summary question with interpretation of information on a specific non-linear stimulus in the Writing paper.

As shown in Table 1.1 it is very clear that extra emphasis is given to the Reading and Writing components compared to the Listening and Speaking components which carry only 15% of the total score respectively.

Table 1.1. The MUET Components

	Paper	Duration	Weighting
MUET comprises four components: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The duration and weighting of each component are as follows:			
Paper Code			
800/1	Listening	30 minutes	15%
800/2	Speaking	30 minutes	15%
800/3	Reading	90 minutes	40%
800/4	Writing	90 minutes	30%

(Source: Malaysian Examinations Council, 2006)

Table 1.2 shows a specific breakdown of the 800/1 MUET Listening paper where the candidates have to answer 20 questions pertaining to information transfer, short answers and also multiple-choice.

Table 1.2. 800/1 MUET Listening Components

Listening (800/1) No.	Item	Description
1	Weighting	15%
2	Duration	30 minutes
3	Number of texts	5
4	Basic criteria for text selection	Length, level of complexity (content and language), text type
5	Possible genres	Lecture, briefing, talk, discussion, interview, telephone conversation, announcement, instructions, advertisement, news, meeting, documentary
6	Number of questions	20
7	Possible question types	(i) Information transfer (ii) Short-answer questions (iii) 3-option multiple-choice questions (iv) 4-option multiple-choice questions
8	Skills tested	As in the test specifications

(Source: Malaysian Examinations Council, 2006)

These questions are divided into three parts; Part 1 comprises a non-linear text where information acquired through listening is transferred onto the graphic organizers or charts given, Part 2 is a listening comprehension text with multiple choice questions while Part 3 comprises 3 short listening texts or excerpts where students are required to give short responses.

Table 1.3 shows the MUET test specifications pertaining to Listening Component assessment objectives that are required to be fulfilled in the listening tasks evaluated.

Table 1.3. 800/1 MUET Listening Test Specifications

Candidates are assessed on their ability to comprehend various types of oral text of varying length and level of complexity (content and language).

Assessment will cover the following:

(i) knowledge

- recalling information
- recognizing main idea
- recognizing supporting details

(ii) comprehension

- deriving words, phrases, sentences from context
- paraphrasing

(iii) application

- predicting outcomes
- applying a concept to a new situation

(iv) analysis

- understanding language functions
- distinguishing the relevant from the irrelevant
- distinguishing fact from opinion
- drawing inferences
- identifying roles and relationships

(v) synthesis

- following the development of a point or argument
- summarising information

(vi) evaluation

- appraising information
- making judgments
- drawing conclusions
- recognising and interpreting speakers' views, attitudes or intentions

(Source: Malaysian Examinations Council, 2006)

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The listening component, although representing a small percentage compared to its reading and writing counterparts, is undeniably an important skill to master. However, students have difficulty in responding to this paper due to a lack of proficiency and poor listening skills. According to Mohana and Shamara (2012), reports on the MUET results indicate that beginning 1999 to 2007, less than 1% of the candidates had achieved the highest score of Band 6 while more than 50% had only achieved the two lowest bands of competency. The same can be said for the results produced in 2009 and 2010 as more than 50% of the candidates managed only to score the two lowest bands in all the components including the Listening components.

According to the overall analysis of the MUET 2009 and 2010 results as reported by the Malaysian Examination Council, the overall performance of students in all the components had declined (refer to Appendix B1 & B2). As reported by the examiners, the lack of or poor listening skills is one of the main reason why the MUET candidates performed badly in their listening comprehension paper (Malaysian Examinations Council 2009 & 2010).

Having been a Form Six teacher for more than ten years, the researcher had been aware of her students' problems in answering the listening comprehension questions in the MUET test. Most students give up or feel threatened when they fail to comprehend oral texts. They give up listening and hope to do better in other components such as reading and writing in order to perform well in the MUET test.

Furthermore, a small survey which she conducted prior to the study showed that the Form Six students selected for the survey had poor metacognitive awareness when faced with the listening comprehension task. The researcher used a questionnaire, namely, the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) which was adapted from Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghodatari (2006) (refer to Appendix C1). The same questionnaire was also used in this present study and detailed information about this survey will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The results of the MUET test supported by the findings of the survey prompted the researcher to investigate the effect of explicit instruction on metacognitive strategies in improving students' listening comprehension skills through this study.

1.4 Rationale

The MUET test is essential in overhauling pre-university students' language proficiency and also their ability to use the language to gain more knowledge at tertiary level. According to Lee (2004), the MUET test was introduced to establish the importance of English language in the era of globalisation to produce highly scientifically and technically competent workforce. Although the listening component represents only a small segment from the overall MUET test, it is a vital skill to be mastered in order to aid students in their academic success at the tertiary institutions.

Listening comprehension is a complex mental skill that requires listeners to interpret orally delivered texts. Effective listening goes beyond merely hearing that is just an unconscious biological process. Listening actively requires cognitive processing of the message pertaining to the listening material delivered. According to Vandergrift (2012), listening is still "difficult to describe". However, researchers advocate effective use of strategies by listeners to understand aural information. This is very essential in second language learning as without effective listening strategies, students' listening becomes challenging, problematic and ineffective (Medelsohn 2006). Students may fail to comprehend the oral texts because they lack metacognitive strategies that can be useful to process the information presented in these texts.

According to Carrier (2003), the high school students in the United States who are learning ESL, leave school and register for content subjects that are taught in English. The failure to comprehend oral input leads them to fail or drop out of colleges due to low achievement in their respective content courses conducted in English. Similarly, according to a local study on English language needs conducted by

Shahrier and Anton (2010), most undergraduates placed listening skill as the least important skill (2%) needed to aid them in their studies compared to other skills. Therefore, more attention should be given on the instruction of effective listening strategies such as metacognitive strategies in the ESL classrooms to establish the importance of listening skills.

Metacognitive strategies could help MUET students employ strategies to monitor their listening comprehension effectively so that they will be able to perform better in their MUET Listening component. Teachers should help students organise their thoughts, to activate appropriate background knowledge for understanding and to make prediction as a prerequisite for successful listening comprehension.

1.5 Research Question

The research questions set to underpin this study were as follows:

1. Will the scores of the posttest listening comprehension among the Form Six MUET students in this study show a significant difference from the pretest after the students are treated with the instruction of metacognitive strategies?
2. Will there be a difference in the level of metacognitive awareness after the treatments using metacognitive strategies?
3. How do Form Six students respond to the usage of metacognitive strategies as a tool to enhance listening comprehension?

1.6 Null Hypothesis (H_0)

There will be no statistically significant difference between the listening performance of students who are treated with the instruction of using metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension compared to the conventional method of answering listening comprehension questions. The same hypothesis will be used for all three groups involved in the study.

1.7 Alternative Hypothesis (H_1)

There will be a statistically significant difference between the listening performance of students who are treated with the instruction of using metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension compared to the conventional method of listening comprehension instruction.

1.8 Significance of the study

Teaching listening comprehension strategies may provide a new insight to the teaching and learning of listening comprehension especially among MUET students. The study can significantly contribute towards the enrichment of listening skills that are vital in ESL or EFL learning as the implementation of explicit instruction on metacognitive strategies would enable ESL teachers to guide students to listen critically and apply deep processing in monitoring their listening comprehension. These strategies would specifically be helpful to MUET teachers who are burdened by the problems of insufficient materials or methods for the teaching of listening. Moreover, most MUET students as reported in the pre-study were not exposed to the appropriate strategies that active listeners can employ to uncover the complexity within orally constructed texts.

The listening skill especially for listening comprehension is not given much emphasis in the public examinations and even school-based evaluation. Reading and writing skills are dominantly tested in these examinations while speaking (oral) tests are conducted for school-based evaluation in the secondary level. The challenge arises when these students are faced with the compulsory task of performing well in the MUET examination that requires them to sit for a listening comprehension paper. Consequently, these MUET students are in a dire need to find strategies that are geared towards comprehending listening texts similar to its reading comprehension counterpart.

According to Young (1997), a few empirical studies have been conducted to uncover the listening strategies used by second/foreign language learners. Murphy (1985) as cited in Young (1997) concluded in his study that the high achievers used their prior knowledge (“personalizing”), made guesses (“inferring”), and monitored their comprehension (“self-describing”) more often than did the low achievers. Vandergrift (1997) stated that, more and less proficient listeners employed different patterns of strategy use. While both more and less proficient listeners depended heavily on cognitive strategies, the main difference between the two groups lay in the much greater use of metacognitive strategies by more proficient listeners especially comprehension monitoring and problem identification. Yang (2009) indicates that one of the distinctive features differentiating successful listeners from unsuccessful ones is their use of metacognitive strategies and promotes the idea that metacognitive strategies should be included in the classroom instruction to produce successful L2 listeners.

The study was aspired to solve the problems of the MUET students and teachers by helping the students to engage in critical listening and employ self-regulated strategies so that they not only become skillful listeners of the language but also improve their proficiency in the language as listening to oral text provides authentic input of the language in communication.

Mohana & Shamara (2012) in their study on the washback effect of the MUET examination quoted Fullan (1993) as cited in Cheng and Curtis (2004), that teachers are under pressure to attain certain goals but given too little time to achieve them. Another study conducted by Lee (2004) claims that the MUET test cannot be used to improve students' proficiency as they have not learnt the language to use it but merely to take an exam. As a result undergraduates with lower bands 1 and 2 tend to obtain average and weak passes in their Preparatory English courses conducted by their university (Shouba & Kee, 2011).

Under such circumstances, as the findings of these studies have shown, teachers feel disempowered and the intended positive washback does not produce results. As a result, MUET teachers end up teaching MUET and not English as they are worked up in making high band achievers so that these students can be accepted in the local universities (Mohana & Shamara, 2012). The study can therefore help these teachers to produce skillful listeners of the language. Through the instruction of metacognitive strategies, teachers can produce students who even if they do not have complete control of their language, can fend for themselves in authentic communicative situations.

Apart from MUET teachers, the study can also be significantly feasible for other ESL or EFL teachers as effective listening is capable of taking their students a step higher in attaining proficiency in the language. Language acquisition is channeled through active listening of the target language. Active listening can be promoted using metacognitive strategies as students are not only exposed to the language as it is in its authentic setting but also able to respond effectively according to the discourse presented. The study, therefore, will be useful in helping to enhance the students' performance in the listening component in the MUET test. It can also help in reviving the importance of the listening skills that have been long neglected in order to promote better and richer language acquisition among ESL or EFL learners.