

## LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TEACHERS FOR LISTENING SKILL

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**ABSTRACT:** EFL listening skill is one of the four language skills that is important to every language learner. The importance of the listening skill in learning a foreign language may help language learners to understand speech in a foreign language. The purpose of the study was to explore the listening strategies that EFL undergraduate students teachers used in three English study programs of three public higher education institutions in Sumatra, Indonesia. 604 EFL undergraduate students teachers from three higher education institutions who passed in listening subjects participated in the study. This study used a quantitative method with a survey approach. In analyzing the data, researchers used SPSS to find out the reliability and Microsoft Excel to describe the percentage and frequency of listening strategies that EFL undergraduate students teachers used. There were three categories of listening strategies that were investigated in this study. They were the metacognitive strategy, the cognitive strategy, and the socio-affective strategy. The findings of this study indicated that most of EFL undergraduate students teachers tended to use metacognitive strategies to increase the students' listening skill. Meanwhile, based on gender, most of the female students were likely to use metacognitive strategies and the male students seemed to use cognitive strategies to improve their listening skill. The findings of the study suggest that in order to acquire an acceptable listening skill, all parties including lecturers, should provide students with sufficient learning materials that encourage the students to prepare for the lectures.

**KEYWORDS:** language learning strategies, listening strategies, listening comprehension

### 1. Introduction

Listening has an important role in communication, especially in a foreign language classroom. Listening is a process during which students must understand grammar structures and vocabularies to acquire the meaning from the communication (Mianmahaleh & Rahimy, 2015). Additionally, Rivers (1984) states that listening has 30% to 40% position in communication. According to Feyten (1991), in daily communication, people spent 45% of time in listening, 30% in speaking, 16% in reading, and only 9% in writing. However, it seems that the listening skill gets less attention than the other skills in language learning. Teachers do not want to spend more time to pay attention to the listening skills to increase the students' ability in listening (Mianmahaleh & Rahimy, 2015). Also, according to Chelli (2013), although listening has a vital role in language learning, it is ignored from other skills in language learning. Although the ignorance of the listening skill in learning a foreign language may prevent language learners from understanding speech in a foreign language, which may finally make learners confused if they cannot comprehend what people intend to express, there may be other factors that influence on their comprehension, including the learning strategies in listening. Listening strategies help students in language input and also to get success in learning language (Vandergrift, 1997). The learning strategy is the strategy or technique that is used to learn something. According to O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, and Kupper (1985), there are six types of learning strategies

including memory, metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, affective, and social strategies.

The importance of the learning strategies in listening has been part of a number of studies such as Teng (1998), Hung, Teng, and Kuo (2002), Wen-sheng (2007), Chulim (2008), Yang (2009), Jou (2010), Bidabadi and Yamat (2011), Birjandi, and Rahimi (2012), Wathajarukiat, Chatupe, and Sukseemuang (2012), Al-Alwan, Asassfeh, and Al-Shboul (2013), Bidabadi and Yamat (2013), Chelli (2013), Ghoneim (2013), Ratebi and Amirian (2013), Afshar and Hamzavi (2014), Nowrouzi, Shim, Zareian, and Nimehchisalem (2014), Ying Lin and Ni Gan (2014), Amirian and Farahian (2014), and Mianmahaleh and Rahimy (2015). For example, a study done by Amirian and Farahian (2014) found that using listening strategies (metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies) has contributed to increase the ability of students' comprehension in learning. Nevertheless, it seems that many studies on the English listening strategies are from other countries, studies on the English listening strategies used by Indonesian undergraduate students' teachers seem to be rare. The purpose of this study was to examine the English listening strategies used by EFL undergraduate students' teachers to cope with listening problems so they can achieve the target language in three English study programs in three public higher education institutions in Sumatra, Indonesia, particularly, the types and frequency of listening strategies that the students used. To achieve the purpose of the study, we attempted to answer three questions: (1) What types of listening strategies do EFL undergraduate students' teachers in three English study programs in three public higher education institutions in Sumatra, Indonesia use to cope with listening problems? (2) What are the common strategies (frequency) that EFL undergraduate students' teachers use to cope with listening problems? and (3) What are the different listening strategies between male and female students' teachers use to cope with listening problems?

## 2. Theoretical Constructs

In learning a language, learners need a technique, strategy, or tactic to success in the learning process of a language. Language learning strategies make learner become competent learners (Oxford, 1990, 2003). According to Bidabadi and Yamat (2013), learning strategies have contributed to success in language learning. O'Malley et al. (1985) divide the learning strategies into six types including memory strategies referring to the way students manage their ways in learning while cognitive strategies refer to the way students determine the limitation of knowledge. For metacognitive strategies, they define as how students manage their ways in learning while compensation strategies refer to the way students determine the limitation of knowledge. For affective strategies, O'Malley et al. (1985) define it as students' feelings while social strategies refer to the way students learn by involving the others. In this study, the researchers focused on three types of listening comprehension strategies consisting of metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies (Vandergrift, 1997). In metacognitives, learners plan the strategies, monitor, and evaluate strategies in understanding the task (Vandergrift, 1990). Meanwhile, Bacon (1992 as cited by Nowrouzi et al., 2014) stated the types of metacognitive strategies are pre-listening strategy, while-listening strategy, and post-listening strategy. According to Nowrouzi et al. (2014), pre-listening strategy is the learners' preparation for listening through manipulating the environment, focusing attention, applying advance organizer, selecting attention, and deciding to think in English. While-listening strategy is the learners focus on monitoring their listening and attract their attention. Post-listening strategy is the evaluation of their understanding in listening and also trying to find out what they should do to help their listening comprehension. Vandergrift (1997) stated that cognitive strategy is the specific way from the students' self to learn the lesson, such as, they make the important notes or summarize, and try to find the meaning of difficult words to get the information from the speaker. Cognitive strategy is divided in two categories; they are top-down and bottom-up processing strategy (Nowrouzi et al., 2014). Top-down processing strategy refers to predicting what the speaker says by the signal given (Jou, 2010). In top-down processing strategy, the students guess the meaning from the topic and also make summary about what the speaker says while the bottom-up processing strategy is a process of understanding the meaning of sounds by finding out the meaning of words, the semantic content, and the syntactic level. Additionally, the social-affective strategy is divided into social strategy and affective strategy (Bacon, 1992 as cited in Nowrouzi et al., 2014). Social strategy refers to sharing the idea to others to get the comprehension while listening and the affective strategy refers to the learners' confidence during the listening process (Vandergrift, 1997).

## 3. Methods

The researchers used a quantitative method with a survey approach to investigate the listening strategies that EFL students used in listening subjects in three English study programs in three public

higher education institutions in Sumatra, Indonesia. The participants that were involved in this study were 604 EFL undergraduate students teachers in three English study programs from three public higher education institutions in Sumatra, Indonesia who passed the listening subjects. The participants were 450 female undergraduate students teachers and 154 male undergraduate students teachers. They were of different ages from 18 to 20 years old. In this study, the researchers involved one class of the second semester as the class to test the reliability of questionnaire. This study used a questionnaire as the instrument. In the questionnaire, there are four agreement scales (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). The questionnaire of this research was adapted from previous studies including studies of Cheng (2002 as cited in Jou, 2010), Oxford (1990); Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010). The statements in the questionnaire were related to the strategies of listening that students used in the listening skill. The strategies were divided into three categories, metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies where all of the items or statements were related to the strategies above. In collecting the data, the researchers followed some steps of collecting data. First, getting the permission from the dean of the faculty of teacher training and education, the head of the English education study program and lecturers. Second, the researchers gave the invitation letter and the informed consent form to the participants in this study. Additionally, the researchers gave brief explanations about this research to make them understand this study. The last was distributing the questionnaire. The researchers distributed the questionnaires to the participants that had been ready and had agreed to participate in this study. The researchers gave the participants 30-45 minutes to answer the questionnaire. To analyze the data, the researchers used SPSS to find out the reliability of the questionnaire. In analyzing the data of this study Microsoft Excel was used to find out the frequency of strategies that the students used in listening and also the differences between males and females in using the strategies in the listening subject.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

In this study, the reliability index (Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) was 0.909, meaning that the questionnaire was reliable to be distributed to the real participants. In the questionnaire, there are four agreement scales (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). This result applied only the “agree scale” of questionnaire.

Table 1. The types of strategies that student teachers used to cope with the problems in listening

No	Strategies	Percentage
1	Metacognitive Strategy	60.5%
2	Cognitive Strategy	58.8%
3	Socio-affective Strategy	57.8%

The data showed that the metacognitive strategy was most frequently used by the students in the listening subject; it can be seen from the percentage of the metacognitive strategy (60.5%). The findings are in line with a study done by Bidabadi and Yamat (2011) who found that the Iranian EFL freshman university students more frequently used metacognitive than cognitive and socio-affective strategies.

#### 4.1. The Common Strategies that Students Used to Cope with the Problems in Listening

##### 4.1.1 Metacognitive Strategies

There are three categories of metacognitive strategies in this study. They are pre-listening strategy, while-listening strategy, and post-listening strategy.

Table 2. Pre-listening strategy

No	Statements	Percentage
1	I clarify the objectives of an anticipated listening task and/or propose strategies for handing it.	86.36%
2	Before listening, I prepare my mind to concentrate	63.83%
3	Before listening, I request myself to make progress	69.15%
4	Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to	29.79%
5	Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen	68.09%

The data showed that “*I clarify the objectives of an anticipated listening task and/or propose strategies for handling it*” obtained the highest percentage (86.36%) for the “agree scale” which is different from the result of the research that was conducted by Jou (2010) who found that most of the students prepared their mind to concentrate before listening. In this study, before joining the listening process, the students had a step or measure to get success to listening.

Table 3. While-listening strategy

No.	Statements	Percentage
1	While listening I do not understand if I am unfamiliar with speakers' accents	45.74%
2	While listening I will check what part of content I do not understand	64.89%
3	While listening I will double check again for my answer	61.70%
4	I am aware of my inattention and correct it while doing the listening test	57.45%
5	I try to listen for specific details to see whether I can understand them	71.28%

The data showed that “*I try to listen for specific details to see whether I can understand them*” got the highest percentage (71.28%) for the “agree scale”. It is similar to the finding of the study done by Chulim (2008), focusing on what participants listened to is the strategy that students used most. It showed that the students were worried about losing their focuses on listening, it caused them lose the point of what they listened.

Table 4. Post-listening strategy

No	Statements	Percentage
1	After listening, I think back to how I listened and about what I might do differently next time	50.00%
2	After listening, I think back to the quality of my strategy use (for example planning, drawing inferences) and about how I can do better next time.	65.96%
3	After listening, I reflect on my problems, such as the key words that I do not understand	70.21%
4	After listening, I evaluate how much I could understand	70.21%
5	I will write down the words I do not know after the listening test and look up the dictionary	45.74%

The data showed that “*After listening, I reflect on my problems, such as the key words that I do not understand*” and “*After listening, I evaluate how much I could understand*” got the highest percentage (70.21%) for the “agree scale”. It is similar to the findings of a study done by Jou (2010) who found that the students lacked of vocabularies because during the listening process they could not open the tools to help them cope with their problems. Also Lin's (2000) study indicated that the problems of lack vocabularies can be solved by the students through looking at the dictionaries.

#### 4.1.2 Cognitive strategy

There are two categories of the cognitive strategies in this study. They are bottom-up strategy and top-down strategy.

Table 5. Bottom-up strategy

No	Statement	Percentage
1	While listening I will notice the questions with who, how, when, where and what in the content.	52.13%
2	While listening I try to understand each word	43.62%
3	While listening I repeat words or phrases softly or mentally	43.62%
4	While listening I piece things together from the details	59.57%
5	I take notes of the main points and keywords	63.83%

The data showed that “*I take notes of the main points and keywords*” got the highest percentage (63.83%) for the “agree scale”. The result is in line with what Chelli (2013) found that most of the students used to take notes to help them remember about what the speaker said. Waththajaruhiat, Chatupe, and Sukseemuang (2012) also found that when students took notes, it made them remember and keep particular information longer.

Table 6. Top-down strategy

No.	Statement	Percentage
1	I listen for main ideas first and then details	68.09%
2	I predict or make hypotheses on the text by the titles	53.19%
3	I can guess the meaning based on the context	57.45%
4	I try to think in English instead of Indonesian	70.21%
5	I make guesses about the topic based on what has already been said	69.15%

The data showed that “*I try to think in English instead of Indonesian*” got the highest percentage (70.21%) for the “agree scale”. When the students learn English and think in English, it is a more effective way to get the meaning from the topic (Jou, 2010).

#### 4.1.3. Socio-affective strategy

There are two categories of socio-affective strategies in this study. They are social strategy and affective strategy.

Table 7. Social strategy

No	Statement	Percentage
1	If I do not understand what someone says in English, I ask them to repeat what they said	58.51%
2	After listening, I ask my classmates or teacher the questions I do not understand	62.77%
3	I hope teachers can teach me more skills to improve my listening comprehension	59.57%
4	I ask others for feedback on how to solve my listening problems	63.83%
5	I practice listening and speaking in English with my friends.	52.13%

The data showed that “*I ask others for feedback on how to solve my listening problems*” got the highest percentage (63.83%) for the “agree scale”.

Table 8. Affective strategy

No	Statement	Frequency
1	While listening, I can keep calm and not be nervous	47.87%
2	I am confident in understanding the whole contents	47.87%
3	I encourage myself through positive self-talk	58.51%
4	I try to relax myself, breathe deeply, meditate, and clear my mind while listening.	67.02%
5	I try not to feel nervous as I listen to English	59.57%

The data showed that “*I try to relax myself, breathe deeply, meditate, and clear my mind while listening*” got the highest percentage (67.02%) for the “agree scale”. It means that most of the students needed calmness to make them concentrate on the while-listening process. It also helped them enjoy the listening, and get more focuses. Before they were in the listening process, they had deep breathing contributing the students to feel relaxed and increase the students’ self-confidence (Jou, 2010).

#### 5. The differences between male and female students using listening strategies

The following table describes the differences between male and female students teachers in using listening strategies.

Table 9. The differences between male and female students teachers in using listening strategies

o	Strategy	Gender	Frequency
		Female	61.10%

	Metacognitive Strategy	Male	58.78%
		Female	58.89%
	Cognitive Strategy	Male	60.90%
		Female	58.61%
	Socio-affective Strategy	Male	55.00%

The data showed that in terms of “*metacognitive strategy*,” 61.10% of the female students teachers chose for the “agree scale” while 58.78% of the male students teachers chose for the “agree scale.” In terms of *cognitive strategy*,” the data indicated that 60.90% of the male students teachers more frequently used the strategy while 58.89% of the female students teachers used the strategy in listening. Female students were more organized about what they should do, such as they planned something before listening, monitored while-listening, and after the listening process they evaluated what they had done while listening and what they did after it. Male students chose cognitive strategy, where they used their knowledge spontaneously to cope with the problems while listening without planning before listening. So, the conclusion is that there were different strategies used by female and male students teachers in their listening comprehension.

## 6. Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to explore the listening strategies that EFL undergraduate students teachers used in three English study programs from three public higher education institutions in Sumatra, Indonesia. The results of this study showed that most of the EFL undergraduate students teachers used the metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension. In addition, there were observed different strategies used by male and female EFL undergraduate students teachers. The female EFL undergraduate students teachers were most likely to use the metacognitive strategies, followed by cognitive and socio-affective strategies while male EFL undergraduate students teachers were most likely to use the cognitive strategy, followed by metacognitive strategy and socio-affective strategy.

Based on the findings of the research, the researchers suggest that in order to acquire an acceptable listening skill and to help EFL undergraduate students teachers to succeed in EFL listening, policymakers at faculty or program levels should provide students with sufficient facilities in terms of teaching materials. Also, they could cooperate with international agencies such as the British Council or other government and non-government organizations to provide students with a native speaker to teach English. The lecturers or teachers should not let their students only sit, listen and think during the classes, but they should encourage their students to prepare for the lectures before, while, and after the lectures. First, before the listening lectures, the lecturers should provide their students with a list of texts or teaching materials that the students should read in advance. It will help their students familiarize with the information they will hear. Additionally, it also gives students the opportunity to learn difficult vocabulary that may be used during the lectures. For while-listening, lecturers should encourage students to do several things such as selecting what is significant or useful, listening for the main idea, predicting, drawing inferences, summarizing, listening for specific details, recognizing cognates, recognizing word-order patterns, and developing their own note-taking style. For after listening, lecturers could recommend their students to talk about the lectures with their classmates, to make a mind-map of the lecture content, or to write a few sentences summarizing the main ideas.

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