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Use of Metacognitive Approach to Improve EFL Listening Comprehension

استعمال منهج ما وراء المعرفية في تحسين فهم المنطوق في الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية

Sohila Mekhoukh¹, Said Keskes²

¹MCB, Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University-Setif 2, Faculty of Letters and Languages,
Department of English Language and Literature, s.mekhoukh@univ-setif2.dz

² Professor, Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University-Setif 2, Faculty of Letters and Languages,
Department of English Language and Literature, s.keskes@univ-setif2.dz

سهيلة مخوخ¹، سعيد كسكاس²

¹ أستاذ محاضر، جامعة محمد أمين دباغين سطيف 2، كلية الآداب واللغات، قسم اللغة والأدب الإنجليزي،
s.mekhoukh@univ-setif2.dz

² أستاذ التعليم العالي، جامعة محمد أمين دباغين سطيف 2، كلية الآداب واللغات، قسم اللغة والأدب الإنجليزي،
s.keskes@univ-setif2.dz

Corresponding author: Sohila Mekhoukh, s.mekhoukh@univ-setif2.dz

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Abstract

The present study investigates the effect of process-based metacognitive listening instruction on EFL learners' listening comprehension performance. The study follows a mixed-method quasi-experimental case study design. It is conducted with 72 upper-intermediate undergraduate third-year students at the English Department of Setif-2 University during the academic year 2018-2019. Participants are divided equally into a control group (36) and an experimental group (36). A placement test, pre/post-listening tests, pre/post-students' listening questionnaires, and a post-reflection survey are used for data collection. Outperforming the control group, the experimental group's listening comprehension improved for the poor listeners, whose anxiety decreased, confidence, self-efficacy, and strategy use increased. Furthermore, participants with high language proficiency were among the high achievers, and they showed more metacognitive listening awareness as they already used effective listening strategies unconsciously.

Keywords: EFL listening comprehension; Listening strategies; Metacognitive awareness; Metacognitive approach; Process approach

ملخص

تبحث الدراسة الحالية في تأثير تدريس الاستماع عن طريق منهج عملية ما وراء المعرفية على أداء طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في فهم المنطوق. اتبعت الدراسة منهج الطريقة المختلطة والتصميم شبه التجريبي لدراسة حالة. أجريت الدراسة مع ٧٢ عينة ذوو مستوى فوق المتوسط من طلبة السنة الثالثة ما قبل التدرج في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية جامعة سطيف ٢ السنة الدراسية ٢٠١٨-٢٠١٩. تم تقسيم المشاركين في الدراسة إلى ٣٦ مجموعة تحكم، و ٣٦ مجموعة تجريبية. تم استعمال اختبار تحديد المستوى، اختبار الاستماع قبلي و بعدي، استبيان للطلبة قبلي و بعدي، و استطلاع فكري بعدي. تفوقت المجموعة التجريبية على مجموعة التحكم، حيث تحسن أدائهم في فهم المنطوق وخاصة الطلبة ضعيفي المستوى، قلقهم انخفض، ثقتهم بالنفس، كفاءتهم الذاتية، و استراتيجيات السمع زادت. إضافة إلى ذلك، المشاركون ذوو المستوى اللغوي العالي كانوا أكثر كفاءة في الاستماع، و أظهروا وعي أكبر فيما وراء المعرفية كما أنهم يستعملون استراتيجيات سمع فعالة منذ البداية دون وعي بذلك.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فهم المنطوق في الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ استراتيجيات الاستماع، الوعي ما وراء معرفي، منهج ما وراء معرفي، منهج العملية

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening is a mental activity that is less about passive reception and more about active strategic engagement. It is a crucial skill for learning and communication.

Moreover, listening is usually done quickly, and accurately without much thinking in the mother tongue (L1), but it is usually less automatic, and more controlled in foreign language listening (L2) (Field, 2008)¹. For

that reason, L2 listening is complex and challenging, because the spoken language is ephemeral and tangible (Siegel, 2014)ⁱⁱ. English as a foreign language (EFL) is even more difficult because its spelling is not phonetic and is a stress-timed language. Another fact about listening is that it is the first skill to develop in L1, but the last to be developed in L2 (Siegel, 2014). People often go to school to learn how to read and write, but not how to listen. Since L1 listening is acquired naturally and not taught in schools, so is L2 listening. Therefore, it is unsurprising that listening has been overlooked in L2 teaching and research. Thus, there is a controversy about whether L2 listening should be caught or taught (Goh, 2014)ⁱⁱⁱ.

The process approach, traditionally used in writing instruction, is a modern approach to listening instruction. It is a broad term that emphasizes stages of pre-, during- and post-listening activities and involves scaffolding learners' experiences, using teacher modelling (Field, 2008)^{iv}. It is about targeting behaviours normally used by successful listeners, which can be learned through models of listening comprehension (Field, 2008). The latest trend in the process approach is the metacognitive approach, which is not simply a strategy-based instruction that entails the use of listening strategies per se, but it is a model of listening instruction that requires three types of metacognitive knowledge; person, task, and strategy (Cross, 2015)^v. Thus, this paper focuses on metacognitive process-based EFL listening instruction.

According to a focus group discussion with EFL students at the English Department-Setif 2 University, students seem to lack effective listening strategies as

they are not taught how to deal with their listening difficulties. Likewise, according to an informal discussion with teachers of oral expression, teachers still teach listening traditionally where listening success is judged on getting correct answers, while students act as eavesdroppers.

Therefore, this study aims to discover how process-based metacognitive listening instruction can improve EFL learners' listening comprehension performance by considering the students' different listening proficiency levels. This study tries to answer the research question: How does the process-based metacognitive listening instruction affect EFL learners': a) listening comprehension? b) metacognitive awareness? c) strategy use? d) affective factors' level?

2. Selected Studies on Metacognition and Listening

Studies done on the effect of metacognitive instruction on L2 listening comprehension success are many. To mention but a few, Goh (1997)^{vi} explored the beliefs and knowledge of 40 ESL learners about their listening processes through diary-keeping. Over ten weeks, students reflected on their listening experiences, strategies, and challenges, which were categorized into person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategic knowledge. The study found that students became highly aware of their learning processes and the factors influencing their listening comprehension, demonstrating the effectiveness of diary-keeping as a tool for developing metacognitive awareness.

Goh and Taib (2006)^{vii} conducted a small-scale study on young learners to investigate the impact of metacognitive listening instruction. The results showed that

participants, especially less-skilled learners, gained greater confidence and awareness of listening demands. They also developed strategic knowledge to address listening difficulties, highlighting the benefits of metacognitive instruction for younger learners.

Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010)^{viii} examined the effects of teaching L2 learners how to listen using the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ). The experimental group showed significant progress in listening performance, with less-skilled learners benefiting the most. Stimulated recall sessions further confirmed increased metacognitive awareness and strategy use among participants.

Cross (2011)^{ix} studied the effects of metacognitive instruction on listeners of varying proficiency levels. Pre- and post-test results revealed that less-skilled listeners improved significantly, while more-skilled listeners showed minimal gains. This suggests that advanced learners already use metacognitive strategies, making the instruction more beneficial for lower-level learners.

Bozorgian (2012)^x investigated the relationship between metacognitive strategy instruction and listening performance. While learners' listening skills improved significantly after the intervention, their metacognitive awareness did not change notably. The study also found that participants used cognitive and metacognitive strategies during listening tasks, though awareness of these strategies remained limited.

Selamat and Sidhu (2013)^{xi} (2013) examined the impact of metacognitive strategy training on Malaysian university

students' lecture comprehension. The findings revealed that students frequently used strategies like mental translation and directed attention but struggled with planning and evaluation. Those who used metacognitive strategies more often scored higher on listening tests, indicating a link between metacognition and academic success.

An and Shi (2013)^{xii} explored the effectiveness of metacognitive listening instruction based on predicting, planning, monitoring, evaluating, and problem-solving. They found that advanced learners benefited more than low-ability learners, showing greater motivation and autonomy. The study also highlighted a connection between metacognitive teaching and learning motivation.

Bozorgian (2014)^{xiii} revisited the role of metacognition in developing EFL learners' listening skills. The results showed significant improvement in listening performance but no notable change in metacognitive awareness or strategy use. This suggests that while metacognitive instruction enhances skills, it may not always increase awareness.

Rahimirad and Zare-ee (2015)^{xiv} investigated the impact of metacognitive strategy instruction on Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy. The study found that the instruction significantly boosted learners' confidence in listening comprehension, despite being time-consuming. This highlights the value of metacognitive teaching in fostering self-efficacy.

Dimassi (2016)^{xv} compared traditional and metacognitive listening instruction methods. The results showed that the metacognitive approach was more effective in raising metacognitive awareness and

improving listening performance. The study emphasized the importance of metacognitive strategies in L2 listening pedagogy.

Simasangyaporn (2016)^{xvi} explored the relationship between self-efficacy and listening proficiency among Thai EFL learners. While self-efficacy did not improve significantly, listening comprehension did, particularly for less-proficient learners. The study also found that participants frequently used strategies like hypothesis formation and word identification.

Bouzar (2017)^{xvii} conducted a longitudinal study on Algerian EFL learners, focusing on the effects of metacognitive strategies. The results showed improvements in listening performance, metacognitive awareness, motivation, and autonomy. This study highlighted the long-term benefits of metacognitive instruction.

Assadi (2018)^{xviii} examined the impact of metacognitive instruction on EFL learners' listening awareness and performance. The results showed significant improvements in both areas, with learners reporting reduced stress and increased confidence. The study emphasized the importance of teaching listening as a process rather than a product.

Maftoon and Fakhri (2020)^{xix} explored the effects of metacognitive strategy instruction on intermediate EFL learners. The findings revealed significant improvements in both listening performance and metacognitive awareness. The study concluded that process-based metacognitive instruction is an effective approach to enhancing L2 listening skills.

Mansouri (2020)^{xx} studied the impact of metacognitive instruction on Algerian EFL teachers and students. The results showed improvements in self-efficacy and listening

proficiency, particularly for students in the experimental group. However, there was no significant relationship between teachers' and students' self-efficacy.

The current study adopts Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) metacognitive pedagogical framework, incorporating emotional temperature charts and authentic listening materials. It examines the effects of metacognitive instruction on listening comprehension, awareness, strategy use, and affective factors like self-efficacy and motivation. A reflection survey complements quantitative data to explore these affective dimensions further.

3. Methodology

This study is a quasi-experimental research and follows a mixed-method approach. It is a case study of 72 third-year undergraduate BA classes majoring in English. The non-random sampling technique was used with two pre-existing groups designed by the administration, and divided into a control group (CG) and an experimental group (EG). The study was conducted at the Department of English and Literature, Setif 2 University, during the 2018-2019 academic year. Using the same audio recordings, CG had traditional teaching, EG had the intervention. Both groups were homogeneous in terms of language proficiency which was upper-intermediate (B2), age (19-24), and gender (26% males, 74% females). Listening proficiency was tested according to the pre-listening test. Participants were divided into 46% low-achievers and 54% high-achievers.

A Metacognitive Teaching Framework by Vandergrift and Goh (2012) was adopted in this study, which is non-linear, non-cyclic, but sequential, in the sense that a cluster of strategies can be used at a time,

with a flexible shift from one strategy to another back and forth according to situational needs. The metacognitive approach entails raising metacognitive awareness including metacognitive knowledge and strategy use. It shows learners what to do before, during, and after listening. It focuses on bottom-up and top-down processes and gives importance to affective factors rarely investigated in the teaching of listening. The listening material is taken from zappenglish.com which is authentic and advanced. The treatment lasted for one semester, and 6 lessons of the most essential strategies were taught in the treatment:

As for the quantitative tools, the Oxford Quick Placement Test was used as a language proficiency test, a listening test (pre/post- self-designed 5-part achievement test), and a students' questionnaire (Pre/post, 4-part Likert scale) was soon administered after the listening test. Both tools were analysed via SPSS.28. The placement test was administered before the treatment. Soon after administering the listening test, a listening questionnaire was administered so that the participants could still remember the processes they went through. All tools were piloted and validated, and their reliability was tested through Cronbach alpha, especially for the listening tests and the questionnaires. Finally, an open-ended post-reflection survey was administered to the experimental group only as a qualitative tool and was analysed thematically.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results are in favour of EG, especially in listening and strategy use, which means that the intervention is effective. Process-based metacognitive listening instruction can improve EFL learners' listening

comprehension performance, strategy use, and affective factors level, precisely for low achievers in EG. Low achievers could benefit more from the intervention. The process approach can equally increase metacognitive knowledge, particularly for high achievers, as it can boost low achievers' positive use of affective factors according to qualitative data. Quantitative data failed to show progress in metacognitive awareness and affective factors' use. Qualitative data backed up the significant effect of the intervention and revealed more about affective factors and metacognitive awareness. CG did not show any progress but declined in the metacognitive awareness level namely for high achievers. The traditional approach is a failure.

According to descriptive analysis of quantitative findings in the post-intervention phase, EG had a significant improvement in listening test scores from $M=12.25$ to $M=13.65$ out of 20, while CG performance decreased a little from $M=12.00$ to 11.87. From statistical evidence, the process approach had a positive effect on students' performance, while the traditional approach proved to be less effective. As concerns the results of students with different listening proficiency levels, low-level EG students could improve their listening comprehension significantly. Using an inferential paired-sample T-test, they made considerable progress from $M=9.61$ in T1 to $M=11.86$ in T2, with $p=0.002$. This could explain that the process approach is more effective with low-ability learners in improving their listening comprehension skills, as they are the ones who really struggle and need help accordingly.

Results from the qualitative analysis

revealed that most participants expressed a notable improvement in their listening comprehension skills, and agreed to have a positive attitude and a high satisfaction towards the listening sessions. Similar results were found in many studies, to name but a few, Siegel (2014), Goh and Taib (2006), Cross (2011), Bozorgian (2014), Mansouri (2020) all found that metacognitive instruction does improve listening comprehension significantly.

EG had a significant improvement in metacognitive knowledge scores from $M=4.30$ to $M=4.34$ out of 6. Whereas CG's performance dropped a bit from $M=4.36$ to 4.22. This means that the process approach statistically had a better positive effect on students' level of metacognitive knowledge, and the traditional approach is indeed not efficient enough. Concerning the results of students with different listening proficiency levels, the EG low-achievers did not significantly improve their metacognitive awareness level. Using paired-sample T-test, results showed that their scores increased slightly but not significantly from $M=3.91$ in T1 to $M=4.06$ in T2, with $p=0.36$. This bit of the questionnaire analysis failed to show the participants' metacognitive awareness improvement. Similar results were found by Bozorgian (2012; 2014) and Mansouri (2020) who did not find any change in metacognitive awareness, too.

To cross-check this finding, results from qualitative analysis are needed to refute or confirm quantitative results. Contrary to the questionnaire results, findings from qualitative analysis of the reflection survey, showed that EG's more skilled listeners did increase their metacognitive awareness in the post-intervention phase, which is very

similar to the findings of Selamat and Sidhu (2013) in that skilled listeners used more metacognitive strategies. This can explain that metacognition is a significant predictor of listening comprehension success. Thus, the process approach does succeed at raising the students' awareness about metacognitive knowledge about listening, which may affect their listening comprehension performance. Some researchers found that metacognitive awareness increased after the intervention, such as Goh (1997), Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), Dimassi (2016), Bouzar (2017), Assadi (2018), Maftoon and Fakhri (2020).

EG had a significant improvement in strategy use frequency from $M=2.69$ to $M=2.80$ out of 4. However, CG's performance went down slightly from $M=2.82$ to 2.79. It means that the process approach had a positive effect on students' listening strategy use, while the traditional approach was unsuccessful. As concerns results of students with different listening proficiency levels, the experimental group's low-achievers showed more improvement in strategy use. Paired-sample T-test results show that they made significant progress from $M=2.60$ in T1 to $M=2.77$ in T2, with $p=0.03$. That means that the process approach is more effective with low-ability learners in developing their use of listening strategies. These results are in line with findings from the post-reflection survey in which the participants mentioned different listening strategies they could learn alongside the process. In a similar vein, Mansouri (2020) found that EG showed more improvement in strategy use, while Simasangyaporn (2016) did not find any significant improvement in the participants' strategy use.

As for affective factors, there was no significant improvement for both groups namely in terms of group effect. EG's scores increased a bit from $M=8.03$ to $M=8.47$ out of 12, and the increase was significant in terms of time effect, but CG's scores increased insignificantly though from $M=8.28$ to 8.45 . One reason that can explain why the process approach does not show any effect here is the fact that affective factors are hard to measure quantitatively. Therefore, the qualitative analysis is hopefully going to back up the statistical results more in this respect. These results are very similar to that of Simasangyaporn (2016) who found that the intervention had no significant improvement in the participants' self-efficacy level. Statistical results of participants with low and high listening proficiency levels revealed that only EG low-achievers significantly improved their affective factors use. According to the paired-sample T-test, they progressed from $M=7.43$ in T1 to $M=8.08$ in T2, with $p=0.03$. Thus, the process approach is again more effective with low-ability learners concerning affective factors level. These results may indicate that students did not have a problem with affective factors from the beginning, and thus, their improvement was not significant. Once more, results from the questionnaire alone concerning person-related factors are not always that solid and need to be cross-validated from qualitative analysis of the post-reflection survey.

Unlike quantitative findings regarding the use of affective factors, qualitative results from the post-reflection survey pointed out that the less-skilled listeners expressed an increase in their confidence, self-efficacy, and motivation, and a decrease

in anxiety to listen. More skilled listeners, on the other hand, had a positive perception of the process-based approach but they expressed demotivation towards the listening class as they thought they did not need help or guidance in listening. These findings corroborate with previous studies such as that of Goh and Taib (2006) who found that less-skilled participants showed more confidence in task completion, while An and Shi (2013) asserted that intermediate students showed more motivation towards metacognitive lessons. This means that metacognitive listening instruction does increase motivation. For self-efficacy, Rahimirad and Zare-ee (2015), and Mansouri (2020) concluded that metacognitive strategy instruction does improve EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs in listening comprehension. Thus, metacognitive instruction does affect learners' affective factors positively.

5. CONCLUSION

As a concluding remark, this process-based metacognitive L2 listening instruction research is not just about improving the listening comprehension test scores. It is more about helping EFL listeners communicate effectively and confidently in real-world situations, by providing them with the necessary tools of decoding, meaning-building, and responding to spoken language automatically and autonomously. Interestingly, listening is important in improving learning and speaking alike. EFL students are not expected to speak a particular genre of speech without any prior aural exposure. Not to mention that it is not that easy to observe the way learners listen and the strategies they use to deal with the listening component, which makes it difficult for teachers to assess their learners'

listening difficulties, and how to solve them. Therefore, using the metacognitive approach in L2 listening classes makes the teaching process more explicit and direct in mainstream instruction.

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