

## **The Effectiveness of Metacognitive, Cognitive and Social Listening Strategies on Private University Freshman Students' Listening Achievement, Self-Awareness and Social Interaction: A Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

Enhancement of undergraduate students' listening skills through listening strategies brings a lot of benefits because listening plays very important roles in communication for students at the university level. This study was an attempt to find out how three listening skills: metacognitive listening strategies (adapted from Vandergrift 2004), cognitive and social listening strategies (partly adapted from Oxford, 2006) could enhance undergraduate students' listening skills. Thirty undergraduates from a university in Thailand participated in this study. The research instruments were lesson plans, pre-and post-test, questionnaires, reflective journals and video clips. The results showed that majority of the participants gradually enhanced their listening skills. The result of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test in terms of listening achievement. Participants obtained a very high score of the social listening strategy followed cognitive and metacognitive strategy. They also obtained high scores from social interaction based on the context studied. The result of the study implied that social interaction should be seriously investigated to see if it had the great impact on listening strategies.

**Keywords:** *listening skills, listening strategies, metacognitive, cognitive, social, enhancement*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Role of English**

English is widely regarded as an essential tool for the globalized community. People from different backgrounds and races are using it to communicate with each other around the world. It is really necessary that, without English competency, they will have only a limited space to explore. English has become such an important weapon that it has been considered as a global language. Why does English play such remarkable roles that people around the globe are struggling to learn? The answer is because they want to be connected with other people and they do not want to be isolated on this earth. This is why the government of many countries all over the world is trying to raise their own people's awareness of English influence particularly in the areas of education, career, and information and technology.

English is being widely used as an essential apparatus for education around the world. Every level of education around the globe is using English as media in their areas of studies. Whether in the kindergarten, secondary school, high school, and university, all students are working hard on English language acquisition process by participating in many kinds of activities such as testing, training, and evaluating courses. It looks as if, without English abilities, students will not achieve their goals in education or their future careers.

English is widely used as an essential appliance for careers. In this regard, English plays an important role as a passport, especially for the undergraduate students. Once they graduate from universities, they are strongly expected to be able to apply their language skills in their jobs. If not, they will be in uncomfortable positions to hunt for their favourite jobs since many jobs require language competency, particularly in listening and speaking skills. So, when they want to get a secure job with high benefits, they need a strong command of English to facilitate their job recruitment.

English is widely used as an essential tool in the era of information and technology. As Vandergrift (2007) said that a lot of data available on the Internet are presented by using English as media. In this regard, people who want to access big data on the Internet are required to possess English ability to a certain extent. Otherwise, they will not be able to interpret aural and visual information correctly. This is why they need good language skills to explore big piles of data on the Internet.

Finally, English plays such important roles for many groups of people that they have to absorb English and apply it in their daily communication, education, and future careers. Whether you are students, workers, or business administrators, you are required to use it in your communication. For the non-native speakers of English, to be able to connect with other people beyond their own native languages is generally seen as golden opportunities to open the doors to explore new world, culture, and way of lives.

## 1.2 Teaching English in Thailand

English has been introduced to the Kingdom of Thailand in the reign of King Rama III (1824 -1851) by an American missionary (Pornnapit, 2014). Because of many factors such economy, foreign relation, and politics, it has been adopted by a group of elites in Thai society and spread to other regions since then. Because of social changes, some Thai people went to further study abroad and brought back knowledge and technology to renovate our education system. Since then, English has been integrated to education and adopted as the second language that Thai students have to study.

To be successful in teaching English in Thailand, the old teaching method (a more passive one) has to be changed. The old one has been replaced by a new model, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This change was officially enacted in the 1999 National Education Act. This new model is probably appropriate for the context of teaching English in Thailand because it has some prominent features; learners' interaction in the target language, learning from authentic materials, having more opportunities to be involved in the target language, and linking inside and outside of the classroom's activities (Nunan, 1997). This model has been adopted by schools nationwide.

When English has become a compulsory subject in Thai education system around the country, the outcome of teaching and learning method depends on the landscape of the country and social status of each family. The children who are from rich families and live in the center of the towns tend to have more advantages in terms of learning performances than those living in rural areas. Though the Ministry of Education of this country dedicated a big sum of money to upgrade English teacher abilities, English education in this country still looks hopeless in terms of English performances. This is noticeably seen from the result of English subject from the ONET score (Ordinary National Educational Test).

Finally, English study is no longer a strange issue for Thai people. In fact, it is forcefully embedded in our daily communication. Though English has been introduced to the circle of education, business, and society for a long time, the output is still not proved successfully. Why teaching and learning process of English language cannot fulfil Thai expectation, we probably have to reconsider many factors influencing the way we teach or study this language. There might be a mistake with either teaching method or our attitude toward learning and applying this language. This needs further investigation to find appropriate methods that we can use to achieve our goal in learning this demanding language.

### 1.3 Teaching English in Higher Education

English teaching at this level embraces four language skills like in other phases. Every institute still enjoys teaching English courses as individual or integrated skills. Many institutes usually combine listening and speaking skills as a course and reading and writing skills as another course. For listening and speaking, students learn how to practice listening and how to have conversations. For speaking skill, students practice their conversations with the teachers or their peers. For the listening skill, students perform by listening to CD or watch movies from the Internet and evaluate their listening ability by choosing the best answers that respond the questions. For reading and writing parts, students gather information from their texts and write sentences or paragraphs based on the direction specified. This type of language learning has been exploited to the present time.

Teaching English at the tertiary level needs more emphasis because, once students complete their education, they have to join the workforce to build their families and social status. Many students studying at this level are expected to be breadwinners of the family and upgrade their own social status in the future. To achieve their goals, they need valued-added skill, English communication, to expedite their processes. Two communication skills; listening and speaking, can ease their need. Without appropriate language abilities, they may fail to struggle in the battle because students spend most of their class time engaging in listening. So, at this stage of education, students badly need to improve listening skill to prepare themselves for job recruitment.

At the debut of the full-time employment, students must possess a strong command of English. This is a big concern among the administrators of each university. This anxiety can be seen in the policy of many academic institutes regarding graduation criteria to force students to pass language competency test or the exit exam. In this regard, their language proficiency must be good enough to survive outside of the campus. They are expected to able to communicate perfectly with four skills of English especially the first impression skills; listening and speaking.

Students with good listening skill are having more advantages when they perform in classrooms because good listening skill can facilitate their learning environment. It is very vital because it can provide correct input for the learners. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin. Additionally, good listening skill helps students be more productive. Tyagi (2013) said that students with good listening skill can communicate effectively, experience a few mistakes in their sending and receiving of messages and improve personal relationships with their classmates.

Finally, students at the tertiary stages need English communication skills at the level that can be instantaneously utilized in the job recruitment. So, their English skills

need to be gradually trained by the time that they complete their programs. Among four language skills, listening is often regarded as the most urgent skill that students need improvement because they have to deal with a plethora of information approaching them by listening before speaking in the workplace. That is why conducting a study on the topic of enhancement of undergraduate students' listening skills by using listening strategies needs to be investigated.

#### 1.4 Context of Teaching English at Rangsit University

Rangsit University freshmen's English background varies in different faculties and their language background can be mainly grouped into two groups; intermediate and pre-intermediate levels. To see which classes they are fit in, students have to submit their ONET scores (Ordinary National English Testing) upon the registration date. If they have English scores of 21 points up, they can join the pre-intermediate courses. Lower than that, they are required to enroll in preparatory courses. It is noticeably seen that majority of the students belong to the first group.

The teaching and learning processes are very similar to the methods that students used to experience in their high schools. There are two groups of integrated English skills; listening and speaking, and reading and writing. Additionally, students are actively encouraged to practice their language skills by listening to CDs, speaking with their partners or teachers, reading from textbooks, and practicing writing tasks. Freshman students at this university have more opportunities to practice their language skills outside of the class time. This is because the university offers them learning devices that can facilitate their learning. However, the results of their exam are still not impressive.

The language skill that students see the most challenging to learn is a listening skill. Students in the pre-intermediate courses which are considered the majority of students often complain that listening skill is the biggest obstacle followed by speaking, writing, and reading. The reasons that they lament are; the fast speech delivery, they are not familiar with the sounds, they are not good at grammatical structures, they have limited vocabularies, and they do not have time to think about it. They also complain about speaking skill. What they mention as problems are very similar to the listening one. However, they do not speak much about reading and writing as they have plenty of time to practice.

Rangsit University has a high expectation to improve its students' listening and speaking skills. This can be clearly seen in the policy of the university to promote internationalize learning environment by increasing teaching and learning by using English as media by 5 percent every year. More importantly, the university has employed many methods to improve students' listening and speaking skills as noticeably seen in P2A (Pathway to ASEAN), English Camps and Speech Contest. All in all, the university would like to promote its students' language proficiency before they graduate from their programs.

In conclusion, Rangsit University has introduced all measures to enhance students' language competency, but it has not achieved its goals especially with listening and speaking skills. However, it never gives up its commitment to producing well-qualified graduate students to serve Thai society and the world. As previously mentioned, the researcher would like to conduct a study on the topic of enhancement of undergraduate students' listening skills through listening strategies; metacognitive, cognitive, and social

listening strategies to find an appropriate method to enhance students listening abilities to serve the university commitment.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

One of the compulsory subjects that freshman students have to study is foundation English. They have to study because it can ease their learning environment and improve their class performances. Upon registration, they are required to enroll in English foundation courses. They have to study language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among four English skills, listening is generally regarded as the most difficult skills for them. This is clearly seen from the results from the listening quizzes collected for last 3 academic years. Among students who took the listening tests on the subject of listening and speaking classes, their average scores were only 61.87 percent. Students who obtain this level of the average score are considered the majority of the freshmen. This can be presumed that many of them still struggle with listening difficulties while studying in the classrooms.

From the researcher's teaching experiences, freshman students usually considered listening part as the most confusing activities. This results from the nature of this skill which the students did not have time to regulate listening processes. Here are the summaries of their grievances against listening exercises; (1) audio files were very fast, (2) they had a limitation of vocabulary, (3) they were not familiar with the sound, and (4) they could not concentrate on what they were listening to. From all above-mentioned problems, some freshman students give up their hope to improve their listening skills and grow a sense of anti-English for the whole life.

From all of the listening obstacles mentioned, the researcher would like to conduct a study on the topic of enhancement of undergraduate students' listening skills by using listening strategies namely metacognitive, cognitive, and social listening strategies to enhance their listening skills. This is because the researcher would like to investigate if three listening strategies can influence students' listening skills. Additionally, the researcher would like to see if three listening strategies can affect students' listening achievement, self-awareness of strategies used, and social interaction based on the context studied.

### 1.3 Literature Review

Metacognitive listening strategy means processes that guide listeners to achieve their goals in listening tasks. Goh (2009) said that metacognitive listening strategy referred to each person's awareness of thinking and learning. Vandergrift (2010) said that metacognitive listening strategy meant listening activities that led listeners to succeed in listening practice in the use of four keywords; predicting, monitoring, evaluating and problem-solving. Oxford (2006) said that metacognitive listening strategy referred to actions which went beyond purely cognitive tools and provided a way for listeners to manage their own listening process.

The metacognitive listening strategy can benefit practitioners in many different ways. Anderson (2002) said that students aware of this strategy would know what to do when they didn't know what to do and they had a listening strategy to seek or think of what they needed to do. Chamot (2008) said that when listeners developed metacognitive listening strategy, they were more likely to plan what to listen to, monitor their own activities, figure out solutions to problems confronted, and evaluate themselves when they

finished their tasks. Zhang (2012), Birjandir (2012) and Lui (2008) said that listeners with a high level of metacognitive awareness would be able to regulate and direct their own listening style and employ it to boost their performances.

Metacognitive listening strategy composes key sets that can regulate and direct listeners' tasks and help them to achieve their goals in listening practice. Chamot (2008) said that, for successful listeners, they needed to plan their tasks, monitor and identify encountered problems, and evaluate themselves upon finishing tasks. Oxford (2006) presented three key sets of metacognitive listening strategy; (1) listeners need to center their listening, (2) arrange and plan their listening, and (3) evaluate their listening. Vandergrift and Vandergrift and Goh (2012) said that metacognitive listening strategy helped listeners to plan what to listen to, monitor the accuracy of the context, solve encountered problems and evaluate overall comprehension.

Low-and high-proficient listeners employ listening strategies differently when practicing listening tasks. Chattraporn (2011), Tithipat et al. (2013) and Chen (2009) said that high proficient learners orchestrated many strategies while practicing listening. On the contrary, low proficient listeners heavily relied on word-by-word translation. Meanwhile, High-ability students automated their listening processes by paying attention to strategies, low-ability listeners wasted a lot of time with linguistic backgrounds such as grammatical structures. High-ability listeners applied world knowledge and previous life experiences to enhance their listening activities, but low-ability students did not do that.

Cognitive strategies help listeners to master their listening skills. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) said that cognitive strategies referred to mental activities functioning precisely on incoming messages and exploiting the language to boost learning. The common types of cognitive activities are summarizing, guessing the meaning of words, phrases or short sentences from language context, and relating new messages to prior knowledge. Oxford (2006) said that, for the language learners, it was necessary to use cognitive learning strategies to learn a new language. A common function of cognitive learning strategies was to manipulate and transform the target language by the learners. It is typically considered to be the most well-known strategies for language learners.

The social strategy can help learners succeed in developing their listening skills. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Brown (2007) said that social strategy consisted of another person's interaction such as asking questions for clarification or explanation about the task and cooperating with peers to achieve learning goals. The learners need cooperation and give harmonization to others when they are studying in the classroom. Oxford (2006) grouped social strategies into three categories; (1) asking questions, (2) cooperating with others, and (3) empathizing with others. Here are the summaries of social strategies:

In summary, listening strategies can enhance students' listening skills because these strategies empower them to regulate and direct their own learning style. Following the process of metacognitive strategy, students can possess autonomy in listening. By applying cognitive strategy, the listeners can use their background knowledge to enhance their listening performances. Finally, the social strategy will support the way learners utilize the target language and give them more confidence when practicing listening skills.

## 2. Objectives

To assess the effectiveness of metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies in terms of listening achievement, self-awareness and social interaction based on the context studied.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1 Population

The population of this study was freshman students of Rangsit University. They registered in the academic year of 1/2017 in the course of ENL 101 (English for International Communication) with the total number of 1,699 students. And the researcher was assigned to teach 4 groups of this subject during this academic year. The random sampling method was utilized to select a representative group. The researcher used the lottery method which is generally regarded as the most primitive and mechanical way to select a study group. That was the researcher wrote their section codes on four small pieces of paper and placed them on a bowl and mixed thoroughly. After that, the blind-folded researcher picked numbered tags from the bowl. All the individuals bearing the numbers picked by the researcher are the subjects for the study.

Finally, the subjects of this study were a group of 37 freshman students enrolling in the course of ENG 101, English for International Communication, in the academic year of 1/2017. There were 34 female and 3 male students and their ages ranged from 18 to 26 years old. In order to relieve any anxiety during the treatment, the researcher informed students regarding rules of the study. They were told that they had the freedom to leave the study anytime and it would not affect their school grades. Therefore, because of some technical problems, 7 students left the study. So, the total number of the participants remained 30 until the end.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

1. There will be significant differences between undergraduate students' pre-and-post listening test scores at the level of  $\leq .05$ .
2. Undergraduate students will earn total average score of metacognitive, cognitive and social listening strategies at a high frequency level.
3. Undergraduate students will earn score of social interaction based on the context studied at least 80 percent.

### 3.3 Research Instruments

All research instruments were designed to meet function of different tasks. After reviewing related literatures, the researcher had planned research instruments to serve different purposes of the study. This was considered as a time-consuming process because all research instruments had to be evaluated and approved by three language specialists. Three research instruments namely lesson plans, listening strategy questionnaire, and pre-and post-test were rated and evaluated by using IOC (Index of Item-Objective Congruence) Rovinelli and Hambleton(1977). The items with value of 0.5-1.00 were acceptable to be applied in the study. The items with the value of lower than 0.5 needed to be checked, verified, and corrected before the pilot test.

The pilot test took place at Rangsit University with a group of 35 students studying in ENL 101 (English for International Communication) in the academic year of S/2017. They studied the same subject and had the same English background with the target group. The researcher used a random sampling method by writing group numbers

on small pieces of papers and mixed them thoroughly to select this study group. Upon the commencement at the first week, the researcher informed them regarding the purpose and the objectives of the study and asked their permission to participate in the study. They were asked to sign a letter of consent followed by a pre-test and lesson 1. Lessons 2 to 9 were carried out from weeks 2 to 6. The post-test was also conducted on week 6.

### 3.3.1 Pre-and-Post Test

This instrument was designed to answer Research Objective 2 and Research Assumption 2. The purpose of this instrument was to assess students' achievement in terms of language competency before and after the treatment. The test was adapted from a commercial book in the teacher's manual. There were 24 questions with four multiple choices, worth 1 point each and it took 24 minutes to complete it. The range of the language was at the level of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) A2-B1, the language level expected by the Office of Higher Education Commission.

### 3.3.2 Questionnaire

This instrument was designed to answer Research Objective 2 and Research Assumption 3. The purpose of this instrument was to assess students' self-awareness regarding the use of three listening strategies namely metacognitive, cognitive and social. There were 18 items classified as follows: metacognitive listening strategies from items 1-11, cognitive listening strategies from items 12-15 and social listening strategies from items 16-18. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1= Almost-ever, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Usually, and 5 = Almost Always.

### 3.3.3 Students' Journals

This instrument was designed to answer Research Objective 2 and Research Assumption 3. The purpose of students' journals was to write their reflections on what listening strategies they used when encountering listening problems in their listening processes. They were required to write their reflections immediately after they finished each lesson.

### 3.3.4 Clips

This instrument was designed to answer Research Objective 2 and Research Assumption 4. The purpose of the video clips was to assess students' listening skills (passive skills) through their conversations (productive skills). Students in pairs were required to record their conversation clips based on what they had listened to after each lesson. The marking criteria were on their fluency, coherence, and pronunciation.

## 4. Results and Discussion

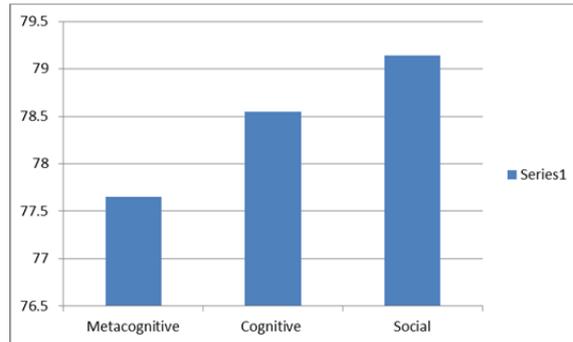
### 4.1 Summary of the Major Findings

In the regard to the students' post-test scores higher than that of the pre-test, all participants performed well in this context and fulfilled their goals in listening achievement since all of their scores in the post-test were higher than those in the pre-test. Since the probability (p) values or the Sig. (2-tailed) was lower than (.05), it could be assumed that there was a significant difference between the pre-and post-test.

Tests	N	M	S.D.	T	df	Sig
Pretest	30	19.53	2.933	-4.722	29	.000
Posttest	30	21.47	1.871			

**Table 4.1:** Paired Samples T-Test Showing Significant Differences between Participants’ Pre-and-Post Listening Test Scores

In the regard to participants earning an average score of three listening strategies at a high-frequency level, all participants performed well and earned their average scores as indicated in this hypothesis. It was noticed that the scores on the part of social listening strategy outperformed other two strategies. It was assumed that collaborative learning environment might influence their scores since they had opportunities to exchange information with other students.



**Figure 4.1** The Descriptive Statistics Showing Participants Earning Total Average Scores Metacognitive, Cognitive, and Social Listening Strategies at a High-Frequency Level

In the regard to social interactions, participants performed conversations well and they earned high scores in this part. Since the probability (p) values or the Sig. (2-tailed) was lower than (.05), it could be assumed that there was a significant difference in the social interaction based on the context studied. It might be possible that the time frame of 40 minutes was an appropriate period for them to regenerate conversations after they had listened to each topic.

Score	Number of Lessons	M	SD	T	Sig
Average percentage	9	88.4411	5.27474	50.301	.000

**Table 4.2** One-Sample T Test Showing Participants Earning Scores of Social Interaction at Least 80 Percent

#### 4.2 Discussion

All participants had their post-test scores higher than those the pre-test because they exploited listening strategies during taking the tests. This was because they planned and directed attention to the topics, monitored the accuracy of the text, evaluated the listening processes, and solved their encountering listening problems. This was to prove that students could succeed in listening practice once they learned listening strategies and applied to their activities consistently. This was in response to the studies conducted by Borhany et al. (2015), Gebre et al (2015), and Moradi (2012) which confirmed that university students who exposed to strategy training could be outperformed in their listening tests.

Among three listening strategies, participants reflected their awareness of social strategy at a high-frequency level. The fact was that this group of the students enjoyed talking and asking other students and teacher for clarification during the treatment. So, when reflecting on their awareness of using strategies, they recorded that social strategy could help them in the listening processes. However, this finding disagreed with the studies by Ping and Hui (2017) who conducted a research on the impact of listening strategies with vocational students in China and Huy (2015) who conducted a search on the strategy used in Vietnam. They both said the social listening strategy was not the best choices of their students.

The social interactions as seen in the video clips showed the effectiveness of their listening practice. Students in pairs regenerated conversations based on the context that they listened to during the listening practice. It is possible that this type of listening practice is probably revealing the new era of teaching listening and speaking classes especially in the countries where English is not a native language. Relying on a close relationship, they could present themselves without disturbances of anxiety or cultural backgrounds.

## **5. Conclusion**

English plays important roles in the globalized community as many people adopt it as their tools in communication. To communicate across cultures effectively, people need to understand media to interpret incoming messages. The most popular channel is widely used is English communication especially for the people who need further investigation of something in new dimensions. In this scenario, Thai education has adopted English as a compulsory subject in hope to promote a new aspect of the education system. Therefore, teaching and learning by using English as media have become a norm of Thai education since then.

Listening skills are regarded as the most indispensable skills for university students since they have to confront with a plethora of incoming messages in the forms of listening. Whether winning or losing in the university contexts, good listening skills can regulate their performances. To achieve in listening activities, students need a lot of drilling and this process usually takes a lot of time. But students should struggle to do it as the benefit of good listening can influence their education and future career.

Finally, the result of the study showed another dimension of strategy perception which was never seen before in other studies. The social strategies played important roles in the success of students' performances. That means, in the teaching and learning of foreign language classrooms, instructors should pay more attention to the social strategy as it can support the way we teach foreign languages to the non-native speakers. Not only listening skills, the social strategy can facilitate the growth of other skills too. Just think of an English learning class with students working collaboratively to find an answer to a particular problem by raising their hands, this is a good moment to prove that social strategy can function effectively in foreign language classes. So, future studies should concentrate on the role of social strategy toward the success of learning foreign languages.

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