

EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS LISTENING SUPPORT TO ASSIST THEIR LISTENING STRATEGIES

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Abstract: *This study examined the listening supports that assist students' listening strategies. The listening supports include topic preparation, vocabulary instruction, repeated input, and question preview. It also investigated the strategies that EFL students used in response to various listening supports. This research involved 99 EFL University students in Indonesia. The results showed that the most frequently chosen type of overall listening supports was topic preparation, while the least useful form of support was question preview. Furthermore, all of the types of listening support accommodate their cognitive listening strategies. The findings were generally consistent with the results of some previous studies in this area. This study gives some recommendations for further research.*

Keywords: *EFL students, EFL context, listening strategies, listening support.*

INTRODUCTION

Considered listening as a challenging skill in English as Foreign Language (EFL) Class, students might face listening difficulties, such as they are unfamiliar with the topic. Students' topical or background knowledge is considered as the internal factor in listening comprehension (Renandya & Widodo, 2016). Due to the listening process, the students should use linguistic, situational cues, and their expectations about new input to arise schemata. Schemata will become a guiding structure for comprehension, or the new input will be either discarded or modified if the schemata do not match the information. Having a lack of background knowledge of the topic contributes to listening difficulties (Wang & Fan, 2015; Hamouda, 2013). As a result, the activation of prior knowledge is essential for the improvement of students' comprehension to be in tuned with what they will listen to the upcoming sounds. Familiarization with background knowledge facilitates students' comprehension (Sadiqhi & Zare, 2006; Huang et al, 2015). Therefore, assisting the students to make connections to their previous knowledge plays an important role to build their mental framework that is linking information into new materials based on what they heard.

Although this problem is still occurring, it is necessary to stimulate the students to build their awareness of the listening problems to become efficiently and effectively overcoming obstacles that occur during the listening process. One of the most important ways to facilitate students to achieve successful listening is using effective listening strategies (Namaziandost, et al, 2019). Listening strategies are alternative ways used by students to cope with the listening difficulties to get a vivid picture of the input. However, during the process, students frequently forget to apply strategies, inability to apply strategies, and ineffective use of strategies take account into the challenge for comprehending the listening (Hamouda, 2013). Considering these obstacles, listening strategies are a crucial part to improve listening comprehension. As a consequence, if the students forget and unable to use listening strategies, the students will not become autonomous by applying listening strategies during the listening process whereas listening strategies should be internalized as part of learning to assist listening well. However, even though the students are aware of the listening strategies use, it has a probability of being wrong in using the appropriate strategies. By doing so, the students have not enough to make their sense of skill and personal knowledge to achieve effectiveness in ways of learning and create meaningful input. In other words, listening strategies are very important to boost their language learning and to scaffold the students' lifelong learning on their own (Nguyen and Terry, 2017).

Regarding to listening strategies, there are six types of listening strategies that can be used by the students. These strategies will accommodate them to choose the appropriate one based on the relevant task. The six major groups of listening strategies are cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies (Oxford, 2003). Each strategy has different classifications in which the EFL students may have different preferences in performing these strategies. By applying listening strategies, it contributes a series of possibilities to assist the students in comprehending the listening. Encouraging the students to use listening strategies can be the solution for improving students' listening comprehension (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Meanwhile, EFL students might have different preferences in using listening strategies. Listening strategies that were frequently used by the students are cognitive strategies (Bao, 2017; Kassem, 2015; Huy 2015). It can be concluded that they tend to use their schemata to facilitate the meaning of certain words by using their native language to assist their listening comprehension. In addition, related with listening strategy, some researches reveal that there is significant correlation between listening strategies and listening comprehension (Kassem, 2015; Yulisa, 2018). It can be implied that the students can use the listening strategies to be able to use both top-down and bottom-up processing and to employ their cognitive skills into the listening task. Associating information with one's existing cognitive structures and use various listening strategies are keys to succeed the comprehension (Brown & Lee, 2015). Consequently, students should be aware of the existence of listening strategies and they should encourage their use especially in pre-listening activity as cognitive strategy by offering a series of possibilities or alternatives to help them in listening comprehension.

To help the students develop their listening strategies, pre-listening activity takes account into success to build up their schemata before starting the listening task. This process evokes the students to provide sufficient context to match what would be available in real-life and to create motivation. It would not be fair for the students to straight into the listening task without introducing the topic or types of activities that they are going to do. Therefore, the students become conscious of the purpose of the upcoming listening input, so they will get vivid picture that they are going to be listened.

By applying pre-listening activity, various forms of listening supports have a valuable role to play in pre-listening activity. It is used for accommodating the students in listening comprehension. Providing students with knowledge or contextual support can orient them to what they will listen to and direct their attention to the task rather than having them to listen aimlessly. The listening supports that can be used in teaching listening are vocabulary instruction, topic preparation, questions preview, and repeated input.

Vocabulary instruction is learning particular vocabulary before listening task begins. There were significant differences among pre-listening task, which is vocabulary instruction during the pre-listening activity has positive impact on low and intermediate students (Chang & Read, 2006; Molavi & Kuhi, 2018). Another research, based on teacher's perspective, conducted by Li & Renandya (2012), claim that the teacher often teach some words to the students before beginning the material, so the students' comprehension will not be impeded by particular terms. In other words, recognizing the negative effect of unknown lexical terms, the students will be hard to perceive listening materials. Second, providing and/or activating prior or background knowledge is another kind of listening support that has been used alone or along with other supports or strategies in listening tasks. If the topic of a text is in accordance with the listener's knowledge, it will be much easier to understand than a text with a topic that the listener knows nothing about (Buck, 2001).

Topic preparation groups outperformed the other participating groups (Rouhi, et al, 2014). This type of listening support gives sense between giving general ideas that are relevant to topic and specific detail information in order to answer the listening task. The opportunity to learn about the topic beforehand can increase students' confidence and reduce their anxiety in listening process. Third, previewing question supplies relevant information that orients the students' attention in the right direction. Before listening task begins, question preview gives useful clues about the content and affect their listening strategies. Consequently, question preview may affect comprehension positively by focusing the attention or supplying information about the text (Sherman, 1997). Preview of questions group had significantly better performance than studying new vocabularies and control group on listening comprehension test (Ehsanjou & Khodareza, 2014). Last, repeated input provides more processing time and clarifies of the syntactic forms that employ repetition for students. This condition gives opportunity to them to make the information clearer and more comprehensible. Hearing and processing a text a second time may utilize different comprehension skill (Buck, 2001). During listening process, students sometimes fail to catch something that mostly happens in target language use situation. This condition affects their ability to make inferences to bridge the comprehension gaps that is fundamentally important in listening. Hence, if texts are to be played only once, repeating input is often a good idea that aids comprehension.

Reflecting on the research above, many of them investigated the effectiveness of using particular listening support. Yet, another research focused on the teacher's perspective that is quite significant to know students' perspective towards listening support. Furthermore, previous research showed that all forms of listening support influenced students' use of strategy (Chang, 2008). However, there is still limited research concerning the strategies used by EFL students and how they adjust them in response to various listening support. Hence, there might be hidden potential for discovering which kinds of listening support can assist students' listening strategies and to what extend listening support can employ their listening strategies. Different perspectives will determine particular listening support that can facilitate their listening strategies. Thus, this research is aimed at finding out the students' perception towards the listening support

(i.e. vocabulary instruction, topic preparation, question preview, and repeated input) that can help them in listening strategies and the reason for choosing particular listening support based on listening strategies theories.

Taking the issue above, appropriate listening support applied in pre-listening activity can facilitate the task by making clear the purpose and specific detail in listening, so the students can construct their interpretation by bringing out their existing knowledge to understand the speaker's meaning. However, the students might have preferences in choosing their listening support to assist their listening strategies. The strategies involve the ability to monitor the learning situation and to respond to it when needed. Students who equip with appropriate skills and strategies will concern about their awareness of how and when they use the strategies to learn something more successfully. Hence, the research questions can be formulated in the following questions:

1. What types of listening supports that can help the students to enhance their listening strategies?
2. What is/are the reason(s)?

METHOD

This study used a survey research design to find out students' perceptions towards listening support in helping their listening strategies. The participants of this study were 99 university students who are from the English department. A random sampling technique was used to select the participants.

To obtain the data, a questionnaire was used as the instrument. The questionnaire consists of two items. The first item was a multiple choice in which the participants chose one answer based on provided options, namely topic preparation, vocabulary instruction, repeated input, and question preview. This item was aimed at discovering listening support that can assist the students in pre-listening activity according to theories Sherman (1997) and Buck (2001). Meanwhile, the second item was aimed at finding out the students' reasons for choosing listening support. The reasons were based on listening strategies by Oxford (1990) which were then adapted in Lee Huynh Thanh Huy (2015). There were 23 reasons: memory listening strategies (Reasons 1-3); cognitive listening strategies (Reasons 4-11); compensation listening strategies (Reasons 12-13); metacognitive listening strategies (Reasons 14-17); affective listening strategies (Reasons 18-21); and social listening strategies (Reasons 21-23). In answering this item, the students selected the provided reasons by giving a checklist.

After the data were obtained, they were analyzed. The first step was coding the collected data from the questionnaire. The data were simplified and summarized based on two categories: preferences of choosing listening support and the reason for selecting the listening support based on listening strategies theories. The second step was displaying the students' responses in form of a table and it was presented using percentage. Therefore, the data from the questionnaire were calculated quantitatively and presented in form of ranking.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study, the students were asked to fill out the questionnaire in item number 1, which was listening support that could assist their listening strategies. Their responses are related to EFL students' perceptions towards listening support on strategy use. The purpose was to find which listening support was chosen the most and the least by the students. Based on the questionnaire answers in item number one, it was found that 41 students (42%) chose topic preparation, 21 students (22%) aired their view of repeated input, 20 students (20%) preferred vocabulary instruction, and 17 students (17%) selected question preview. To get a vivid picture, see Figure 1.

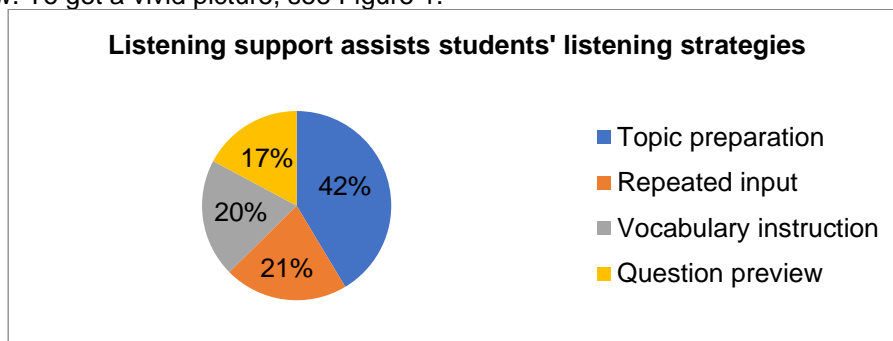


Figure 1. Listening Support Assists Students' Listening Strategies

Figure 1 shows that topic preparation got the highest response as listening support to utilize their listening strategies. This finding is consistent with Rouhi et al (2014), who stated that topic preparation is one of the most effective strategies the students employed in listening instruction. It provides and activates students' background knowledge since listening support has been used along with other supports or strategies in listening tasks. In doing the listening task, the students are demanded of having background knowledge to compensate for the deficiency resulting from insufficient linguistic knowledge. Consequently, background knowledge facilitates listening comprehension (Huang et al, 2015). Thus, if students have a schema of a particular topic, they will be able to process the information and achieve better comprehension in listening. This is supported by research that revealed the effect of prior knowledge in the comprehension test. Research conducted by Chiang and Dunkel (1992). It indicated that Chinese EFL students scored higher when they listened to familiar-topic lecture than unfamiliar-topic lecture. In other words, the prior knowledge the listener has about the topic of the content, the easier it is for them to comprehend the input and retain general points of information.

On the other hand, the question preview was the least listening support that was chosen by the students. This is in line with the result of research conducted by Rouhi et al (2014) which concluded that the previewing question group was not able to perform better than the topic preparation and repeated input group. Even though the questions gave useful clues about the content, students require adequate reading skills to understand the questions and or the options. If the items contain unfamiliar grammatical structure and difficult vocabulary, the students may not benefit through question preview. As a result, previewing the questions might have a facilitating effect on comprehension for higher proficient students, but, for lower proficiency students, preview questions will be beneficial if the students may need additional support (Chang, 2006).

Furthermore, reflecting on students' answers based on questionnaire item 2, the students gave the response to the reason(s) of selected listening support seen from listening strategies theory based on Oxford (1990). Their responses were depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. The Selected Listening Support

Listening support	Types of listening strategies						Total Percentage
	Memory strategies	Cognitive strategies	Compensation strategies	Meta cognitive strategies	Affective strategies	Social strategies	
Topic preparation	18.4%	33.7%	12.7%	13.3%	14.3%	7.6%	100%
Repeated input	12.2%	39.4%	10.1%	14.9%	17%	6.4%	100%
Vocabulary instruction	20%	34%	15%	11.8%	11.2%	8%	100%
Question preview	11.61%	37.5%	10.71%	21.43%	12.5%	6.25%	100%

It can be implied that, in general, all types of listening supports facilitated students' cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are used to manipulate elements from an oral text or apply a specific technique to the listening task (Vandergrift & Cross, 2018). Based on students' cognitive reasons, it can be inferred that applying different types of listening support can accommodate cognitive strategies, especially in making summaries, transferring to use knowledge from L1 to understand words, contextualization to place what is heard in a specific context, or focusing for main ideas then for details ideas to assist listening comprehension. Research conducted by Teng (1998) and Tang (2006) showed that transferring the spoken language into L1 in cognitive strategies was frequently used by the EFL Taiwanese students. Therefore, when students employ cognitive strategies in listening support, they are trying to make an inference and elaborate the input to arrive at successful listening. This inference plays on using the linguistic information to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, then, they will elaborate with their prior knowledge and relate it to aural input for predicting the outcomes to fill in the missing information.

However, social strategies became the least of listening strategies that can stimulate them in employing listening supports. Research also showed the same finding that social strategies were the least employed strategies (Serri et al, 2012; Manzouri et al, 2016). For this reason, the students may be shy to ask questions for clarification to others when something is not understood or asking verification when they want to check whether something is correct. Another reason is competition is strongly reinforced by the educational establishment, with schools often pitting students against each other in competition including language learning (Oxford, 1990). Although it might sometimes result in a positive desire to improve and do better than others, more often, it results in anxiety, inadequacy, and fear or failure. In contrast, if the

students can practice listening support that compensates for their social strategies, this condition leads to cooperation with peers in which there is an absence of competition and the presence of group spirit to encourage positive interdependence and mutual support.

Before considering the implication of this research, two limitations of the study are worth repeating. The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire. This fact means that knowing other possible reasons by crosschecking through other instruments, such as conducting the interview, is necessary to be administered. This may help to investigate further in describing the data that cannot be explained by numerical data, in turn, it will be more supported to interpret the finding. Although earlier researches have shown that topic preparation was more effective than other listening supports by conducting pre-test & post-test, and or conducting an interview based on teachers' perspective, yet, a questionnaire might be not enough to be used. Therefore, it is important to point out the consequence of employing other instruments to elucidate the results.

A second limitation of the study is the consideration of students' listening competence. In the present study, the participants were random sampling, thus, students' listening proficiency is needed to be considered because these conditions could affect their perceptions towards the listening support in aiding their listening strategies and the reasons in preferring selected listening support seen from listening strategies theory.

The two limitations mentioned above highlight the need for caution when interpreting the findings. Despite the limitations, based on the overall reported strategies, an interesting pattern was found and deserves attention. Most students aired the same views that all of the listenings supports benefit their cognitive listening strategies. This finding is somewhat comparable to the study by Xiao & Sidhu (2018), cognitive strategies assist students to process the information by rehearsing, organizing, and inferring. From this finding, we may conclude that the native language plays an important role in the processing of target listening. They tend to utilize the input they hear by using their native language when they do not completely understand it. Moreover, they use linguistic knowledge to group the known meaning of words and sentences to construct particular meanings. As a result, when exposing to listening support, they attempt to make connections using the words of input based on either their native language or their background knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the limitations and cautions mentioned, this study suggests that the findings have implications for teachers. It contributes to the literature as well as to the teachers by presenting listening support to assist students' listening strategies. The findings showed that topic preparation was more necessary for students in utilizing their listening strategies. Meanwhile, question preview was the least selected by them. Furthermore, surprisingly, all types of listening support; i.e., topic preparation, repeated input, vocabulary questions, and question preview facilitate students' cognitive strategies since they allow them to link their background knowledge to what the listening supports offered.

To respond to the listening support for helping listening strategies, further research is still needed to shed more light on the issues contributing to this area of research. Considering the limitation of the study, whether one type of listening support is more effective than others might depend on the differences in students' proficiency since the present study only focused on the EFL context. Besides, other types of listening support deserve further investigation. This might have possibilities for investigating this area that will have a significant result in assisting students as well as teachers in process of teaching and learning listening. Thus, teachers will be able to identify and offer various listening supports based on students' needs and students' levels to be able to encourage them to learn more effectively.

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