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College-Level ESL Students' Metacognitive Strategies for Mastering the IELTS Listening Course

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Abstract: Many language students struggle with listening because it's essential to communicate. This research aimed to examine how ESL students used metacognitive strategies to improve their listening comprehension while preparing for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). In this study, semi-structured interviews were utilized as a research tool to explore how chosen participants employed metacognitive strategies to improve their listening comprehension in preparation for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Ten undergraduate students were interviewed for this study; they had all participated in an intervention program to teach them metacognitive strategies for improving their listening. We recorded and transcribed the semi-structured interviews and used a coding system to analyze the data. Although most people of average intelligence engage in metacognitive regulation when presented with an effortful cognitive task, the results of this study suggest that some people are more metacognitive than others, implying that metacognitive strategies give a viable solution for acquiring appropriate skills in the listening component. Successful academic performance is typically associated with high levels of metacognition. Students were open to the new methods and gained self-assurance due to their improved ability to study independently. Therefore it also had a favorable effect on their learning habits. Using metacognitive tactics to help students of all skill levels improve their English listening is an area with much-untapped promise

Introduction

Many language students struggle with listening because of its inherent difficulty (Arnold, 2000; Goh, 2000). According to Graham's (2006) research, students rank listening as the talent they have the least confidence in. He suggested that students had trouble perceiving what they heard during listening, mainly when the speaker babbled, which caused them to miss what were ostensibly important phrases (Graham, 2006). Since the early education and upbringing of Malaysian students took place in a wide variety of vernaculars, it stands to reason that they would have some difficulty mastering English as a second language. According to Hiew's (2012) research into the challenges that Malaysian students face while learning English at the secondary school, college, and university levels, one of the most common is difficulty understanding teachers and lecturers because of their rapid speech and unfamiliar vocabulary. The "learner's learning method, teacher's teaching method and approach, and syllabus and lesson plan" also contributed to students' difficulties comprehending course material (Hiew, 2012). It was also found that most Malaysian educational institutions need more effective techniques for teaching English as a second language. Lim (2013) found a similar trend in her study of English language schools in Malaysia, arguing that a more nuanced approach is required to teaching the language rather than the currently prevalent one of rote memorization.

The current approaches to teaching English as a second language in Malaysia must be critically examined, and new possibilities for teaching the language should be investigated. This research aims to shed light on whether or not ESL students can successfully implement metacognitive knowledge and methods to improve their listening abilities.

Studies have shown that many Malaysians trying to acquire English as a second language have difficulty doing so, with many needing help with their listening comprehension (Hiew, 2012).

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Purpose of the Study

This research aimed to examine how ESL students used metacognitive strategies to improve their listening comprehension while preparing for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). As listening to oral text provides authentic input of the language in communication, this allows for an in-depth understanding of its effects on students' performance in the IELTS listening section, which can help them acquire appropriate listening skills that can improve comprehension and fluency.

Research Question

1. How do ESL students feel about applying metacognitive Strategies to the IELTS listening module?

Literature Review

"Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to review their progress, accomplishments, and future learning directions" (O'Malley et al., 1985). Benefits to one's and language development have led many to advocate for using metacognitive methods in the listening process. Multiple studies have found benefits to employing metacognitive methods while listening (Wenden, 2001; Chamot, 2005). Students can better tailor their time studying a foreign language with the help of metacognitive methods, which also aids their development as practical students. According to Vandergrift and Goh (2012), "pedagogical procedures that enable learners to increase awareness of listening process by developing richer metacognitive knowledge about themselves as listeners, the nature, and demands of listening, and strategies for listening" is what they mean when they talk about metacognitive instruction.

Metacognitive education has become more popular over the past almost two decades as a means of improving listening skills and outcomes. Evidence from the field of education suggests that teaching students to reflect on and adjust their learning processes, known as metacognition, can improve their language acquisition. Goh (2008) similarly argues that metacognitive training can help students develop a heightened sense of awareness and a more compelling listening process, which are crucial for developing effective tactics. Pressley (2002), weighing in on the requirement for such metacognitive teaching, argues that students need sustained exposure to direct explanation, modeling, and guided practice to use suitable methods across various situations. Language students can be given a variety of formats in which to get education in listening metacognition. According to Mendelsohn (1998), one method is to engage in a sequence of tasks designed to foster the application of methods for planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's comprehension of a specific listening text.

Metacognitive techniques attempt to self-regulate language acquisition by using a pre-existing understanding of cognitive processes, including planning, monitoring, and assessing. Metacognitive techniques for listening are self-monitoring and self-regulating actions that pay attention to both the procedure and the outcome of the listening process. The ability to judge the cognitive demands of a listening task, the awareness of when and how to employ a specific cognitive listening strategy in response to text difficulty, situational constraints, and the listener's cognitive abilities are all examples of these skills (Baker & Brown, 1984).

The number and labeling of metacognitive processes is a contention amongst educational scholars. The mechanisms involved in metacognitive control are variously referred to as "executive control" (Kluwe, 1987), "encoding" (Davidson & Sternberg, 1998), and "metacognitive monitoring" (Nelson et al., 1994). Flavell (1979), Kluwe (1987), and Nelson and Narens (1990) all agree that metacognitive monitoring entails recognizing the characteristics of a current mental state or emotional activity. In other words, the process reveals insights about one's cognitive activities and states and how they are changing, being maintained, or ending (Flavell, 1979; Kluwe, 1987; Nelson & Narens, 1990). According to research by Son and Schwartz (2002), monitoring can be broken down into a "meta-level," where encoding is managed, and an "object level," where retrieval is managed. The object level involves internalizing information about the external world and reflecting on and evaluating it. Self-monitoring and self-regulation, first stated by Nelson et al. (1994), include the mental processes of planning, guiding, and evaluating one's behavior. From a different vantage point, Davidson and Sternberg (1998) define one's internal state as recalling past experiences from

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long-term memory. It is looking for data related to knowledge learned in actual or present situations (Son & Schwartz, 2002).

Monitoring and evaluating one's performance in order to retrieve knowledge is what metacognitive control is all about. As Otero (1998) and Hacker (1998) point out, we employ monitoring and evaluation to keep tabs on our mental and emotional processes. They explain that evaluation involves searching for and analyzing pertinent knowledge stored in long-term memory, while monitoring involves reviewing ongoing thinking.

The term "executive monitoring" was coined by Cooper and Boyd (1996). Four steps are involved: recognition, analysis, synthesis, and the ability to articulate knowledge. The first step is to find explanations for the designs, facts, and challenges that have been presented. The second step is asking questions that aid in analysis and synthesis or in probing, mapping, thinking, and investigating if the knowledge is novel. By opposing and comparing, for instance, the third process establishes links (Cooper & Boyd, 1996).

This involves a refusal to accept information at face value and an increased capacity for synthesis, generalization, individualization, and the incorporation of new information into preexisting frameworks and practices. The final step involves putting one's knowledge into words clearly and straightforwardly. It involves being aware of how one's behaviors at any given moment reflect one's thoughts. It includes skills like summarizing, paraphrasing, comprehending the essence of a problem, demonstrating and mapping concepts, and presenting a problematic subject in straightforward terms.

According to Nelson et al. (1994), meta-level thinking processes improve object-level cognition (Nelson & Narens, 1990). To illustrate their agreement, Son and Schwartz (2002) state that students can use metacognitive control to turn study strategies on and off or alter the conditions, operations, and standards in a cognitive structure that explains learning. Monitoring and assessment, according to other experts (Flavell, 1979; Kluwe, 1987; Hacker et al., 1998), serve the same purpose by receiving information acquired from memory and external situations—this data illuminate options for improving one's mental and emotional health. An individual's state of knowledge, knowledge about the world, the standard for evaluation, and the individual's methods for the present aim are all conveyed through the monitoring process. Quality is judged by "retrospection" and the use of evaluation criteria (Kluwe, 1987) or standards (Hacker et al., 1998). Metacognitive processes serve as synthesizers, analysts, and connectors, according to the research of Kluwe (1987) and Cooper and Boyd (1996).

These researchers emphasize metacognitive processing at both the high and low levels of cognition. High-level processes analyze, synthesize, generalize, and integrate the internal cognitive and emotional states and external information and experience. In contrast, low-level processes search the cognitive and affective states and external conditions. Regulatory procedures benefit from the data collected through monitoring and evaluation.

Further explanation of the role of regulation processes in decision-making is provided by Kluwe (1987), Davidson and Sternberg (1998), and Borkowski et al. (1990). According to Kluwe (1987), there are four distinct categories of governing choices: processing capacity, processed items, processing intensity, and processing speed. Deciding on one's "processing capacity" requires time, energy, and focus. Decisions about "what is processed" involve making and evaluating choices about specific processing methods.

Thirdly, the "processing intensity" choice involves "the frequency, the time allocation, and the strategy shift or modification" when completing a task. The fourth kind of decision concerns the need for rapid action, such as selecting additional cognitive operations or eliminating intermediate processing steps.

Individuals engage in both deliberate and automatic forms of regulation and decision-making in the realm of metacognition in response to the findings of monitoring processes. People's problem-solving and question-answering tactics, according to Reder and Schunn (1996), are guided by metacognition. However, Kluwe (1987) disputes this, saying that decisions do not solve problems but rather identify how they can be addressed. As a result, such a decision might not prompt regulatory action.

This research used a theoretical framework that included Flavel's metacognition and Goh's particular metacognitive tactics for teaching ESL students to listen. Students would be better able to adopt proper listening skills, if not improve them if metacognitive tactics were integrated into the learning process. Metacognition, as defined by Flavell (1976), is "knowledge about one's cognitive processes and products or anything related to them," including the qualities of valuable information for learning. Individuals use

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metacognitive techniques to regulate and verify that cognitive tasks (such as text comprehension) have been completed successfully. These procedures, which include organizing and monitoring cognitive activities and checking their consequences, help to govern and oversee learning. Flavell created a model of metacognitive monitoring based on his findings, which contained the following four categories of phenomena and the links between them: (1) metacognitive knowledge; (2) metacognitive experiences; (3) tasks or goals; and (4) tactics or activities.

In contrast, Goh emphasizes the positive aspects of education and the part that students of a second language play in developing their listening skills. It considers how students' listening abilities evolve: novice listeners to a second language (L2) must devote many attentional resources to processing words in speech streams. However, as their proficiency grows, perceiving aural input and interpreting meaning becomes more automatic.

Methodology
1. Produce
   a) The researcher needs the selected responder to have specific characteristics or qualities. Hence convenience sampling is employed in this study.
   b) In this study, the researcher employed a non-probable sampling strategy to pick a sample of ESL students who are representative of the whole population. Due to the need to consider respondent characteristics, this study used a non-probabilistic sampling strategy.
   c) Ten participants from the control group were randomly selected for the interviews. All participants were made aware of the interviews' goals and given complete anonymity. False names were used in place of real ones. Respondents signed a permission form acknowledging that they had been informed that they could stop participating in the study at any moment and that the researcher did not have the power to force them to stay on board.
   d) In order to get reliable information, we used open-ended questions during the interview. Finally, it should be emphasized that prior to each interview, respondents' permission was requested (Buchstaller & Khattab, 2013). After the interviews, the audio was transcribed word-for-word to be analyzed.

2. Semi- Structured Interviews
In this study, semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method. The semi-structured interviews aimed to collect ground-level information from the sampled participants about the metacognitive strategies they employed to hone their IELTS listening skills. As a result, the interview framework was adaptable to get a good look at the respondents' actual beliefs.

Since the researcher needed to comprehend how the students utilized relevant metacognitive strategies, he undertook the interview independently. Interview questions focused on students' metacognitive methods; therefore, hearing their responses was crucial.

Semi-structured questions were used so that researchers could better understand respondents' unique perspectives. They described qualitative research as having the primary goal of discovering and examining respondent-based insights, opinions, and thoughts grounded in personal experience and situations. This study's primary goal was to investigate respondents' experiences and perspectives while utilizing metacognitive methods in learning to listen; therefore, it is essential to employ semi-structured questions involving the research participants.

3. The innervation
The intervention was delivered by teaching students how to improve their thinking. Students were given directions, and then a guided listening lesson was given utilizing metacognitive tactics, in which the instructor "thought aloud" about the strategies they would use before, during, and after the listening activities. The students were then guided through the process using metacognitive tools, with frequent opportunities for dialogue and clarification.

The researcher used the IELTS syllabus to pull activities and lecture notes for teaching and mastering listening. The researcher consulted Achieve IELTS 2, Second Edition, for this study's intervention. This book was chosen to ensure the reliability and validity of the selected exercises because qualified IELTS examiners authored it. Daily conversation, public speaking, academic discussion, and

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academic lecture were the primary foci of the exercises because of the importance of these settings in developing practical listening skills. The duration of each activity was roughly 2–6 minutes.

4. Data Collection

Ten participants participated in semi-structured interviews on week 12. These interviews aimed to get insight into the participants' experiences utilizing the taught metacognitive strategies to improve their listening skills. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions. In order to gather all of the data the study required, the researchers employed a probing strategy. All interviews were conducted with the participants' informed consent, and their audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the appropriate methodology afterward to yield detailed results. The participants in the semi-structured interviews were allowed to review their recordings to ensure the accuracy of their responses.

5. Data Analysis

Recordings and transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were made for this study. The importance of transcription in qualitative research cannot be overstated. The transcriptions served as a valuable resource for spotting these trends. Therefore, converting the audio recording into text is another critical step before analyzing qualitative data. Indeed, listening carefully to the audio records bit by bit to what the informants were expressing was exhausting, time-consuming, and required lots of patience and caution during the transcription process (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2011; Polio, 2012). The researcher had to repeatedly pause the audio player, rewind, and listen to the same dialogue several times before finally understanding what had been said. The researcher here was open to suggestions about applying metacognitive techniques to developing listening abilities.

Coding is not just a step in qualitative analysis; it is an ongoing process that begins during data collection, with the researcher considering the emerging categories as they form (Saini & Shlonsky, 2012; RÉvÉsz, 2014). The researcher in this study used the transcribed texts to generate themes using various standard methods and procedures. Accordingly, the researcher has used the frames of theme analysis in the medium of content approach to coding and the narrative discourse technique when interpreting the data (Newby & Schwemmer, 2014) to generate qualitative results in this study. These are the primary steps that authorized the researcher to access the transcribed data and extract the information needed to complete the study.

Coding is one of the etymological linkages used by variationists in applied linguistics to investigate the discourse-pragmatic aspects in either the writing or listening skills of ESL/EFL learners (Pichler & Hesson, 2016; Almor et al., 2017). The researcher used coding analysis in this study to support this assertion because it fits within social constructivist and action-oriented techniques, which offer a setting for assessing problems, contributing factors, and affective orientations toward ESL students. In this situation, the researcher could evaluate the discursive resources that were helpful for this study by using the coding analysis of the transcribed data.

Findings

The study's findings relied on interviews with 10 participants. Most respondents said they had never heard of metacognitive methods before, but they had heard good things about them and thought they would help them learn more effectively. It was also discovered that students felt that learning English was less complicated than they had previously encountered.

Most respondents said they first glance at the questions to determine what kind of music to expect. The identified themes and some of the replies are displayed in Table 1 (see appendices). They also mentioned that it was only possible to proceed with the job at hand if any section of the stage was present. Many see it as a construction brick, where each piece must be in place before moving on to the next. Most respondents also felt that the stages helped them in ways that are usually linked with learning independently without relying too heavily on others.

Most respondents noted an increased ability to listen, and many reported increased self-assurance due to overcoming previous obstacles to learning English. Respondents noted that the systematic method helped them organize their thoughts and better absorb the material since it provided a learning structure independent of the instructor and based on the learner's capacity. Positive experiences with the strategy led respondents to advocate for its use in education. The common threads that emerged included students consulting one another for solutions, turning to the instructor only as a last resort, and engaging in

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independent thought. The detected themes and some of the replies are shown in Table 2 (see the appendices).

Most respondents said they begin the evaluation process by analyzing questions and sections for improvement by assessing tests or sections. In contrast, some said they attempted skipping, and others concentrated on a specific method. They also said they would review the questions to figure out where they fell short and work to improve. The detected themes and some of the replies are shown in Table 3 (see the appendices). Many respondents agreed that reflecting on and analyzing their work was crucial to progress. Many people believe this is a vital technique since it enables learners to get to the problem-solving phase of the learning process.

The majority of respondents cited using questions to guide the listening activities as another way to hone listening skills. Some drawbacks, particularly those concerning the time commitment involved in learning and implementing metacognitive methods, were also highlighted. Many said it was tedious and required repetition to get the hang of the process. Many of them could analyze the audio's content as soon as it started playing. Therefore, their learning process could have slowed down.

Most replies emphasized the importance of problem-solving in developing better listening skills. One respondent said it was "perfect" because it "made me think on areas I should focus more on, for example, section 4, the most complicated part of the listening section." This reflects a more significant trend of respondents engaging in self-reflection and narrowing their attention to specific areas.
The ability to "look into" or reflect on one's listening practices was deemed "very important" by several participants.

The detected themes and some of the replies are displayed in Table 4 (see the appendices). Many respondents cited teachers as a source of direction, saying they would consult with instructors to determine why they were struggling with listening. After receiving guidance from their instructors, they will implement strategies to enhance their listening abilities.

When asked how they put metacognitive methods into practice, most respondents said they do so in the recommended order of steps. The detected themes include the need to better focus on or improve the results obtained and the occasional skipping of the sequence or a portion of the processes involved. Respondents reported having trouble if they deviated from the prescribed order when addressing the first theme, "improve the results." Some examples of comments include, "I will do them according to the sequence because it is difficult for me. If I skip one process, I normally will be lost, and that is it, my scores will drop," and "because if I do not follow it by sequence, I find it difficult to apply this strategy when listening...."

Table 5 (see the supplementary materials) displays the themes and some of the collected responses. Many people think that to better their listening skills; they need to go through the steps of metacognitive methods in the order in which they are presented.

Applying the described methodologies in practice led to findings that suggested an overall improved approach to planning, monitoring, assessment, and issue-solving. All parts are treated with more order, with foresight before instructions and retrospective analysis of work done. Most responders said they go at the questions ahead of time to get a sense of what they will be hearing. Reviewing and critiquing one's progress in tasks and lessons with a peer is integral to monitoring and evaluation. Finally, most respondents undertake some post-task reflection to identify areas for improvement throughout the problem-solving phase.

Discussion

Finding the right words in English can be difficult in a country as culturally diverse as the United States, especially regarding language. Methods that tap into students' skills and potentials, rather than those based on traits relative to student profiling, such as local norms and practices, are needed to help students learn a foreign language rather than simply adapting an existing curriculum. This happens frequently in Malaysia due to the country's plethora of spoken languages, dialects, and vernacular forms of communication. Many discoveries that hint at the high potential of utilizing a metacognitive strategy approach in listening were discovered in research on the application of metacognitive methods to ESL learners at the L2 level.

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Although most people of average intelligence engage in metacognitive regulation when presented with an effortful cognitive task, the results of this study suggest that some people are more metacognitive than others, suggesting that Metacognitive strategies present a viable solution for acquiring appropriate skills in the listening component. Those who can better assess and control their cognitive processes are more likely to achieve their goals. The good news is that people can learn to control their thoughts more effectively. Metacognitive training is typically integrated into existing educational frameworks.

Their level of metacognition influences students' ability to apply and maintain cognitive strategies (Carr et al., 1989; Al-Ghazo, 2016). The most effective methods of metacognitive instruction involve giving students information about how their brains work (to be used as metacognitive knowledge) and experience applying these ideas and assessing their effectiveness (to foster metacognitive regulation).

Many interviewees stated that their confidence and drive to master listening skills had increased after employing metacognitive methods, indicating that this was a fragile area for Malaysian ESL learners. The respondents also agreed that listening is the most difficult ability to master. This may be because students in Malaysia view hearing as a challenging activity. Therefore, they must put in extra effort to practice and test their listening comprehension.

Interview data shows that interviewees see using metacognitive tactics to improve their listening comprehension as more critical than it is. Most participants said they used similar tactics from each process to improve their listening comprehension. For instance, many assessments focused on techniques for planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and assessing performance. Evaluating Strategies and Monitoring Strategies were mentioned frequently by respondents.

Despite interviewees' knowledge and belief in the usefulness of numerous tactics, many needed help to implement them or give up too soon successfully. This lends credence to studies conducted with secondary and tertiary students that found "less instructive guidance [in metacognition] is more effective for students" (Dominowski, 1998). Incorporating metacognitive methods was not necessarily related to instructors' views of relevance, as evidenced by specific findings of strategies adopted implicitly in teaching, i.e., without expressing their relevance or otherwise. The findings support the claims made by Littlewood (1999, 2000) and previous research by Robbins (1996) and Barnhardt et al. (1999) that learners' motivation and independence improve when they have experience with metacognitive knowledge and the use of strategies. Students successfully applied these four strategies while studying English as a second language, giving them the motivation and self-assurance to direct their education. The lessons they have learned from these successes will teach them to view future setbacks, weaknesses, or failures as opportunities to grow and improve.

Conclusion

In light of these findings, it is recommended that lecturers, especially those teaching English as a second language, explicitly teach metacognitive methods to their students.

The research also indicates that sure students can learn and apply tactics without the guidance of their teachers. If previous studies are believed, enhancing students' responsibility and ability to learn English independently should not be demanding at the tertiary level, as metacognitive-related skills can be taught to students as early as kindergarten.

There is a need to provide possibilities for knowledge construction in English classes for those respondents who had more instructional teaching and learning. Cognitive construction scientists believe this kind of knowledge is superior to that taught orally since it may be applied in different contexts and situations. When students take the initiative in their education and have a voice in the decisions that will impact their learning, they are more likely to retain the information they acquire.

The literature frequently implies that learner autonomy can be accessed by developing metacognitive knowledge, control, and regulatory methods. This calls for pupils' heightened use of initiative as they acquire linguistic competence. In light of this, evaluating strategic competence alongside knowledge expertise seems prudent.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) highlight the importance of cultural influence when describing successful learners who come from a rote learning-focused education; these students will have highly developed memory strategies and will be less likely to have developed p.c.s. (metacognitive coping

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strategies), which may explain why respondents used so few of them. Accordingly, this may indicate that students require more explicit training in these metacognitive processes to acquire learner autonomy.

This research adds to the existing body of work by arguing that, given the rapid evolution of information, education, and societal expectations in the modern day, it is time to rethink how we teach and learn English as a second language. This research proposes using metacognitive strategies—which incorporate planning, monitoring, evaluation, and problem solving—to supplement conventional approaches to studying the IELTS hearing curriculum

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