

A Review of The Effects of Metacognitive Strategies on Learners' English Listening

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Abstract. This paper reviews the relationship between English listening and metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategy as an important learning strategy shows obvious correlation with second language learning effect. This review introduces many researches on metacognitive strategies and its several basic developmental processes in second language acquisition. The application of metacognitive methods in English listening learning is explored in three aspects by examining and summarizing prior researchers' experiments: the many modalities of metacognitive strategy usage, the disparities in metacognitive strategy use between unskilled and expert students, and the link between metacognitive methods and English listening performance. The review of studies on the relationship between English listening and metacognitive methods leads to a general conclusion. Metacognitive methods can help students improve their English listening proficiency. This study hopes to guide English teachers to emphasize the teaching of learning strategies and English learners should emphasize the use of metacognitive methods by demonstrating their facilitative influence on English listening learning.

Keywords: Metacognitive strategies, English Listening, Second Language Acquisition.

1. Introduction

There are various reasons for choosing to learn a second language in addition to the mother tongue. Some may do it out of interest, others may be due to exams. Regardless of the intentions, when people talk about the purpose of learning a language, the answers appear to be on the same path which is communication and connection. Communication and exchange are based on understanding, which cannot be achieved without information capture and comprehension. In this process, listening plays an important role. Therefore, how to improve listening skills has become one of the problems plaguing learners. Learning strategies, however, point the way. As an important theoretical knowledge in second language acquisition, it enables users to efficiently supervise and control their own cognitive processes, improve self-regulation, and carry out self-evaluation. For the great potential shown by metacognitive strategies, this strategy was picked out among various type of learning strategies and the authors are trying to investigate if there's a connection between the strategies and English listening.

2. Previous Studies

Recent years have witnessed a growing attention to metacognitive strategies made by researchers and educators. When talking about metacognitive strategies, the concept of metacognition has to be mentioned first. Through the long arc of history, it can date to the year 1976. This year, the word metacognition was first described as knowledge of one's own cognitive processes and products, or anything connected to them by John Flavell, the renowned Psychologist [1]. In terms of learning strategies, Oxford proposed that the specific acts that learners do in language learning are called learning strategies [2]. Such actions are taken to make learning a language simpler, quicker, more interesting, effective, and adaptable to various situations. Digesting of all kind's conception presented by scholars,

O'Malley and Chamot refined the strategies and divided them into three types, respectively, cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective strategies [3]. Metacognitive strategies refer to the behavior that adjusts the learning process by planning, regulating, and monitoring. To be more specific, this strategy includes but is not limited to, selective attention, planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Beyond this, they also emphasized the higher order of metacognitive strategies among the three. There is no denying the fact that many scholars have grouped learning strategies in several different ways, the one mentioned above is indeed labeled as the most widely accepted one [3].

In addition, in Wang's opinion, one of the most accurate predictors of learning is thought to be metacognition [4]. Wenden was the first to draw our attention to the immense potential of metacognitive notions for L2 learning in second language acquisition [5]. A metacognitive study by Zhang and Goh has revealed that metacognitive methods are directly related to second language acquisition success, and learners with metacognitive strategies know when and in what situations to use them to complete a learning task and are able to make reasonable assessments after completing the task [6]. In second language acquisition, Pintrich pointed out, using strategies are more crucial than other ways for successful language acquisition because they let students control their learning and successfully complete a variety of language activities in a variety of situations [7]. Rivers' Studies have shown that the proportion of people who use hearing is about 40%-60% [8]. This shows that people use listening skills more often in their daily life. As a result, listening is essential in foreign language learning. Thompson and Rubin pointed out that in the hearing domain of second language acquisition, metacognitive methods are potentially advantageous for improving listening comprehension levels and can assist students in effectively self-adjust and self-regulate in listening [9]. The study by Zhang and Goh adds to the evidence that language learners who understand the benefits of utilizing listening strategies can apply these tactics in communication to increase their listening comprehension. The process of using such strategies is the metacognitive process [6].

3. Metacognitive Strategies and Second Language Acquisition

The ability to listen, decode and understand the meaning that English audios conveys is an essential skill for learners who are aiming to achieve proficiency in English. As one of the most commonly used skills in both daily communication and study, a growing number of academics are exploring a wide and varied range of approaches to assist in improving listening skills. The potential of metacognitive strategies has been witnessed over the years, studies that focus on metacognitive strategies and English listening received more notice, and the perspective that researchers are concerned with are not identical. Evidence can be found in the following investigations conducted by researchers both at home and abroad.

3.1. Different Patterns of Use Metacognitive Strategies in English Listening

Learning Strategies are beneficial in enhancing the efficiency and effect of learning. As this advantage gradually becomes a consensus, people tend to ask for learning strategies for help while studying. However, taking into account variables like age, education, sexual orientation, and other situations, different people may show varied tendencies, preferences, and patterns when using the same learning strategies. The same goes for metacognitive strategies.

Xie carried out a study to explore first-year English major students' condition of the use of listening strategies [10]. The survey mainly focuses on which of the three types of strategies are most frequently used by students in listening learning, and which strategies are neglected or less frequently addressed by them. After collecting data through questionnaires and personal interviews, the author presented that although students did not know the names or definitions of the three learning strategies, many of them had already employed some in English listening learning unconsciously. In terms of the frequency of use, metacognitive strategies top the list. What's more, as mentioned above, the metacognitive strategy includes but is not limited to, selective attention, planning, monitoring, and evaluation. This study also investigated various metacognitive strategies used by students. The

conclusion is that monitoring strategies are more often used by students according to what students actually do and feel during listening practice.

Another study conducted by Cao and Lin took gender into account [11]. One hundred and thirty-nine vocational school students were selected as samples, and under the experimental design, questionnaires and tests were a must, with only a small number of them additionally needing to be interviewed. Affected by different educational backgrounds and the neglect of listening and speaking in the countryside, males and female students employed different metacognitive strategies during English listening. Generally speaking, female students use metacognitive strategies more frequently. More narrowly conceived, there is a considerable disparity in planning, monitoring, self-evaluation methods, and self-regulation strategies, while monitoring strategies show the most significant difference.

3.2. Differences in the Use of Metacognitive Strategies Between Skilled Students and Unskilled Students

As a learning strategy that relies heavily on student self-control and self-awareness, however, differences in personal ability between learners also need to be taken into consideration when talking about metacognitive strategies.

Tang used a pre-test to categorize students as superior or inferior, then statistically examined their metacognitive strategy use and tested the differences in metacognitive methods and levels between superior and inferior students using a T value [12]. The results showed that the differences in the application of metacognitive methods and their levels between the superior and inferior students in foreign language listening training were significant. And Tang concluded from the experiment that the primary cause for the two students' differences was the disparity in metacognitive strategy used and their levels.

Xue and Zhen conducted a study with three students (one low-achieving male student and two high-achieving female students, two of whom were categorized as intermediate and advanced) in which the researcher interviewed the three respondents about the learners' listening process and their reflections on the process of planning-monitoring-assessing in listening [13]. The study's findings revealed that the efficiency of metacognitive education is significantly influenced by the English proficiency of the learners. It can be judged from the study that learners with intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency are more capable of using the new method, while learners with relatively low levels of proficiency show more difficulties.

Unlike the two experiments mentioned above, which focused more on a general level, the next two research draw some more specific conclusions.

With the help of a questionnaire, grade, and think-aloud method, a study aimed to highlight the disparities in the application of study strategies among students with varying degrees of skill was carried out by Zhao and Sang [14]. After analyzing participants' prediction skills before listening, strategy use skills during listening and reflection skills after listening as well as the outcomes of the questionnaire, the two authors pointed out that the frequency of use of metacognitive strategies to those who were more skilled is higher. Or in other words, the quantity and quality when strategies were applied by the one with a higher proficiency level are more outstanding.

Li also carried out an experiment with the goal to ascertain whether exists a distinction in metacognitive awareness among superior and inferior learners when listening to English [15]. And he comes up with more specific research conclusions. Total one hundred and thirty-eight test papers that related to listening were collected first, and then subjects were separated into high-score and low-score groups in accordance with the grade. What follows the test is the MALQ. The results of the questionnaire were utilized as measures of participants' metacognitive awareness and the acquisition of the learning strategies required for efficient listening learning. Among the MALQ's five factors, the significant differences between skilled and unskilled students occur among directed attention and plan-evaluation. That to say, skilled learners are good at maintaining attention during the listening process, and in terms of plan-evaluation, they often set a goal before listening, adapting flexibly when

problems are encountered and reflect on the use of strategies after finishing the task. The poor learners, on the other hand, are the opposite of all this.

3.3. Relationship Between Metacognitive Strategies and English Listening Performance

Listening is a crucial part of the language acquisition process for humans since it is how they learn the majority of the information. Therefore, how to improve listening skills has been a problem that plaguing learners for a long time. Many came up with learning strategies. But which of the many learning strategies is more effective and which can cooperate better with listening? The metacognitive strategies point out the way.

Zhu picked out 60 non-English majors from a geological university and then divided them into two classes, one was an experimental class and another one was a control class, which adopted the traditional listening teaching mode [16]. The tools of the study were real university English Grade 4 listening questions as well as questionnaires. The study suggests that the teaching technique based on metacognitive strategies is more effective than the standard teaching method in enhancing students' listening ability, i.e., metacognitive strategies used may enhance the English listening instruction.

An experimental investigation was conducted by Bazirgan with 31 English language learners, all of whom were from Iran [17]. The students were trained on metacognitive strategy instruction for a period of eight weeks including planning, monitoring, and regulating. After the training, the researcher took a listening test to observe and record the listening performance of the subjects. The subjects were also asked to complete a questionnaire on the use of metacognitive strategies, which was used as a criterion to evaluate their awareness of the use of metacognitive methods in listening. According to the survey results, students' listening skill has a greatly enhanced after obtaining metacognitive education. All these studies mentioned above directly indicate that students who receive a period of training in metacognitive strategies show a significant improvement in their listening skills, which can provide an important basis for introducing innovations in listening practice and increasing students' autonomy in the future.

Given that learners who were introduced to metacognitive strategies might really help to develop their listening abilities, another study on this topic conducted by Robillos and Bustos reveals something new [18]. They picked out 27 Thai EFL students who were freshmen in the college as samples. With the help of methods like tests, MALQ, and interviews, they try to examine whether learners can use the pedagogical cycle as a catapult to better effect. Then, eight sessions (90 minutes each) of metacognitive training with a pedagogical cycle that involves 5 stages namely: the planning and predicting stage, first verification stage, second verification stage, final verification stage, and reflective stage, were specially organized by researchers for the participants. After analyzing and comparing students' performance before and after receiving metacognitive strategy training, the two writers pointed out that the pedagogical cycle can be used as a powerful aid to integrate into metacognitive strategies teaching, and the two will collaborate better to contribute to the improvement of students' listening skills as well as the metacognitive awareness.

Chou, M. H. took the task-based language learning approach into consideration in this topic [19]. Eighty-eight Chinese university students, with average records, were allocated evenly into two groups. The following 18 weeks of instruction for the two groups in the same English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) courses had to be conducted in several different forms. The only difference appears that one was introduced to TBLT, while the others were not. In the end, the findings demonstrated that for those who were taught with TBLT, the improvements in metacognitive awareness and listening grades were significant. That to say, while people struggle with how they should make the cooperation of metacognitive strategies and listening learning more compatible, tasks can be considered as an important medium.

4. Conclusion

In this review, by reviewing the experiments done by previous researchers on the role of metacognitive strategies on English listening ability, there is a considerable improvement in students' listening performance after being trained in metacognitive strategies. In addition, learners at different levels of proficiency obtained different results from using metacognitive strategies. Combined with the above studies, it is obvious that how to use metacognitive methods in teaching is a critical problem.

Teachers must first comprehend the significant impact of metacognition in SLA, and they should pay attention to cultivating students' strategies using abilities while teaching linguistic knowledge, focus on the teaching method, and intentionally use metacognitive tools in English listening instruction. In addition, because the application of metacognitive methods has varying effects on students at various levels, teachers should emphasize the importance of tailoring the training of metacognitive strategies to the students' needs. For second language learners, teaching is the main way to acquire metacognitive strategies, and students should participate more in related courses to develop their ability to pay attention to the learning process. Students should pay attention to the usage of tactics to govern their foreign language acquisition after acquiring the ability to apply metacognitive strategies.

Finally, researchers believe that how to better integrate metacognitive strategies into teaching is an urgent problem to be solved. For example, how to combine metacognitive strategy training with textbook writing and how to study the practical application mode of metacognitive strategy training to make teaching more effective. Therefore, in the future, more metacognitive strategy application patterns should be found to improve students' foreign language learning ability more effectively.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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