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SOME THOUGHTS ON KEY LISTENING STRATEGIES IN EFL CLASSROOM

Teaching listening strategies is about developing listening comprehension skills in the language classroom. The paper introduces listening comprehension from the perspective of pedagogical research, reviews the notion of listening comprehension, listening comprehension strategies, and indicated difficulties in listening. The literature review assumes that it is necessary to improve students' listening skills as this will reduce their difficulties in listening and can help them develop effective listening strategies, and finally improve their listening comprehension abilities. The paper reveals the main problems that arise during listening, potential reasons why it becomes difficult, and suggests possible ways to reduce students' fears of listening.

The authors believe that one way to improve listening skills is to teach students listening strategies, among which cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies are the most important. To test this point of view an experiment was conducted on university students. This experiment is described in the article. Excerpts from the students' responses both at the beginning of the experiment and after its completion are also provided. It is worth noting that at the beginning of the experiment, students said that although they had previously been familiarized with listening strategies in theory, they used them non-systematically, not considering them important and useful. During the experiment, their points of view changed, which was demonstrated by the received feedback. The experiment confirmed that the students' listening skills improved, and the students became more confident both in their own learning and in their teaching practice. Thus, the authors conclude that students should be taught listening strategies, as it develops both their own listening skills and helps future teachers to teach students these strategies.

Key words: *listening, listening comprehension skills, cognitive listening strategies, metacognitive listening strategies, socio-affective listening strategies.*

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ДО ПИТАННЯ КЛЮЧОВИХ СТРАТЕГІЙ З АУДІЮВАННЯ ПІД ЧАС НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ

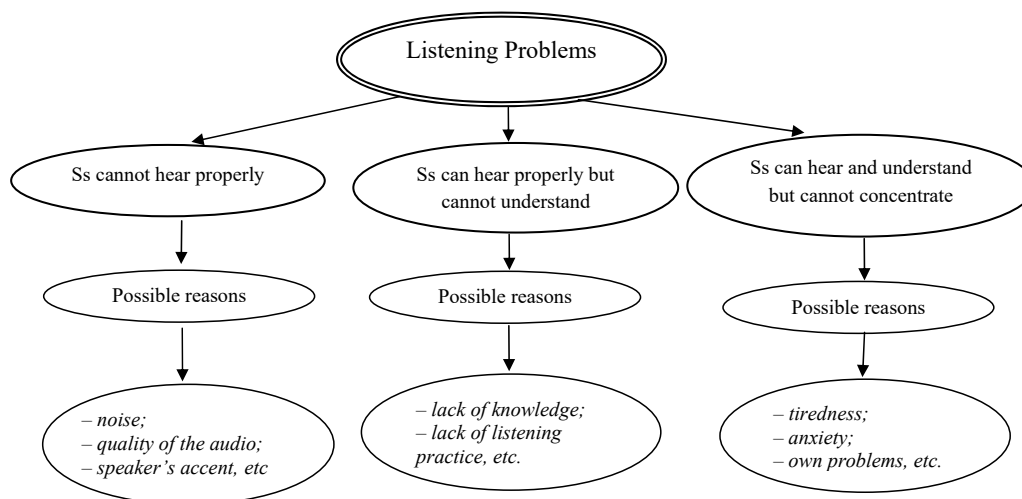
Навчання стратегіям аудіювання полягає у розвитку навичок розуміння на слух у мовному класі. Стаття знайомить з розумінням на слух з точки зору педагогічних досліджень, розглядає поняття аудіювання, стратегії розуміння на слух та зазначені труднощі. Огляд літератури передбачає, що необхідно покращити навички слухання студентів, оскільки це зменшить їхні труднощі в аудіюванні та може допомогти їм розробити ефективні стратегії слухання та, нарешті, покращити здібності до розуміння на слух. У роботі розкриваються основні проблеми, які виникають під час аудіювання, ймовірні причини, чому воно стає складним, а також пропонуються можливі шляхи до зменшення страхів студентів перед аудіюванням.

Одним із шляхів покращення навичок сприймання на слух автори вважають навчання студентів стратегіям аудіювання, серед яких когнітивні стратегії, метакогнітивні стратегії та соціально-афективні стратегії є найважливішими. Задля перевірки цієї точки зору серед студентів був проведений експеримент, який і описується у даній статті. Також наводяться уривки із відгуків студентів як на початку експерименту, так і після його завершення. Слід зазначити, що на початку експерименту студенти зазначали, що вони хоча й були ознайомлені раніше теоретично зі стратегіями аудіювання, проте вживали їх не систематично і не обґрунтовано, не вважаючи за щось важливе і корисне. Під час експерименту їхні точки зору змінилися, що й продемонстрували отримані відгуки. Експеримент підтвердив, що у студентів покращилися навички сприймання на слух, а також вони стали більш впевненими як під час власного навчання, так і під час проходження своєї педагогічної практики. Таким чином, автори приходять до висновку, що студентів слід навчати стратегіям аудіювання, оскільки це розвиває як їх власні навички сприймання на слух, так і допомагає майбутнім вчителям навчати учнів цим стратегіям.

***Ключові слова:** аудіювання, навички розуміння на слух; когнітивні стратегії аудіювання, мета когнітивні стратегії аудіювання, соціально-афективні стратегії аудіювання.*

Formulation of the problem. Our discussion so far has dealt with the perspective on listening as comprehension. Everything we have discussed has been based on the assumption that the role of listening in language learning is to help develop learners' abilities to understand things they listen to. The approach is based on the assumption that teaching listening strategies can make learners more effective listeners and confident communicators in further perspective. The pedagogical research has proved that the lack of the English language comprehensive skill is partially rooted from the lack of listen-

ing skills and strategies. As listening is essential to other language skills, poorly administered listening classes may lead to deficiency or failure in language mastery. The challenges faced by a number of EFL learners in the listening process are varied and considerably complex. They might be caused by vocabulary limitation, words recognition or structural components of a text, and may gradually demotivate non-strategic learners to continue learning English. In general, problems which students have during listening can be divided into three main groups (see the picture 1).



Pic. 1

Nevertheless, a caring teacher can do a lot to lessen students' fear of listening and to help non-strategic EFL learners to cope with stressful feelings. For example, rather often students start to panic when they cannot understand the instruction of the activity. Due to this they do not see any reasons for listening as they do not know what to pay attention to. Moreover, aimless listening to the story seems useless to them because students understand that remembering the whole audio is impossible. In this case the teacher should check their understanding by asking some simple questions, e.g., *Who are we going to listen to? Who are his / her pieces of advice aimed at? What other useful information can we find in the instruction? Etc.* In these cases, students' answers will show the teacher whether they have coped with the understanding of the instruction, whether these instructions are appropriate and correctly formulated. What is more, these questions let them anticipate the context of the listening text and this works as ice-breakers and make students more positive and motivated to continue the activity. Taking into account that listening is rather challenging, teachers should avoid conducting it at the end of the lessons when the students are already tired. Needless to say that unfamiliar phrasal verbs, idioms or even vocabulary should be explained before listening to reduce the tension. Besides, to increase the interest in the listening text the teacher ought to choose topics which are interesting for his/ her students, updated, and related to the theme. The last but not the least is that teachers should emphasize the absence of the necessity to understand every word in the listening text. It will help students concentrate on important parts of the audio and avoid frustration. Summing up, it becomes obvious that thoughtful planning and teacher's management during the lesson can really

help make learners more effective listeners that will further result in comprehensive communication.

Theoretical background. Listening received little attention in language teaching and learning, because teaching methods emphasized productive skills and listening was characterized as passive activity (Richards & Renandya, 2002). However, listening is not a passive activity. Some definitions of the notion of listening are presented in the paper to highlight its different aspects. Listening is an active, purposeful process of making sense of what we hear (Helgesen, 2003). It is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal messages (Brownell, 2002). Listening comprehension is a highly complex problem-solving activity that can be broken down into a set of distinct sub-skills (Byrnes, 1984). Listening is a unique skill that needs systematic and regular training especially in a context where English is taught as a foreign language. It is the ability to receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is communication procedures needed by the listener to understand, interpret and assess what they hear (Sharma, 2011). It is a process of receiving what the speaker says, making and showing meaning, negotiating meaning with the speaker and answering, and creating meaning by participation, creativity, and empathy (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). To sum up, we will consider listening as an active and interactional process in which a listener tries to understand the message of the oral text to respond effectively to communication.

Before learning the teaching listening comprehension, we need to clear the definition of teaching listening comprehension. Teaching listening comprehension is about developing listening comprehension skills in the language classroom (Wang, 2020). The importance of listening in foreign language learning

can hardly be overestimated, as listening comprehension is an essential part of communication. Listening comprehension encompasses the multiple processes involved in understanding and making sense of spoken language. In particular, recognizing speech sounds, understanding the meaning of individual words and the syntax of sentences in which they are presented, understanding word stress, sentence stress, intonation and, thus, understanding spoken language in a continuous sequence.

When we teach listening in class there is a fairly standard approach, which involves setting the topic, pre-teaching vocabulary, setting gist questions, playing the audio, checking the answers and then setting an intensive task (listening comprehension questions, true/false/not mentioned activity, complete the table or fill in the blanks). These activities suggest that the reason to listen is to answer the questions, and if the students can't answer the questions, it means they haven't understood the recording. But, this is not the right strategy to develop and intensify the listening skills. Scrivener (2011: 255) emphasizes that teachers forget that listening is not just testing and answering questions. Moreover, the students' attempts to get the answer are more valuable than the right answer itself as they are working hard training their listening skills.

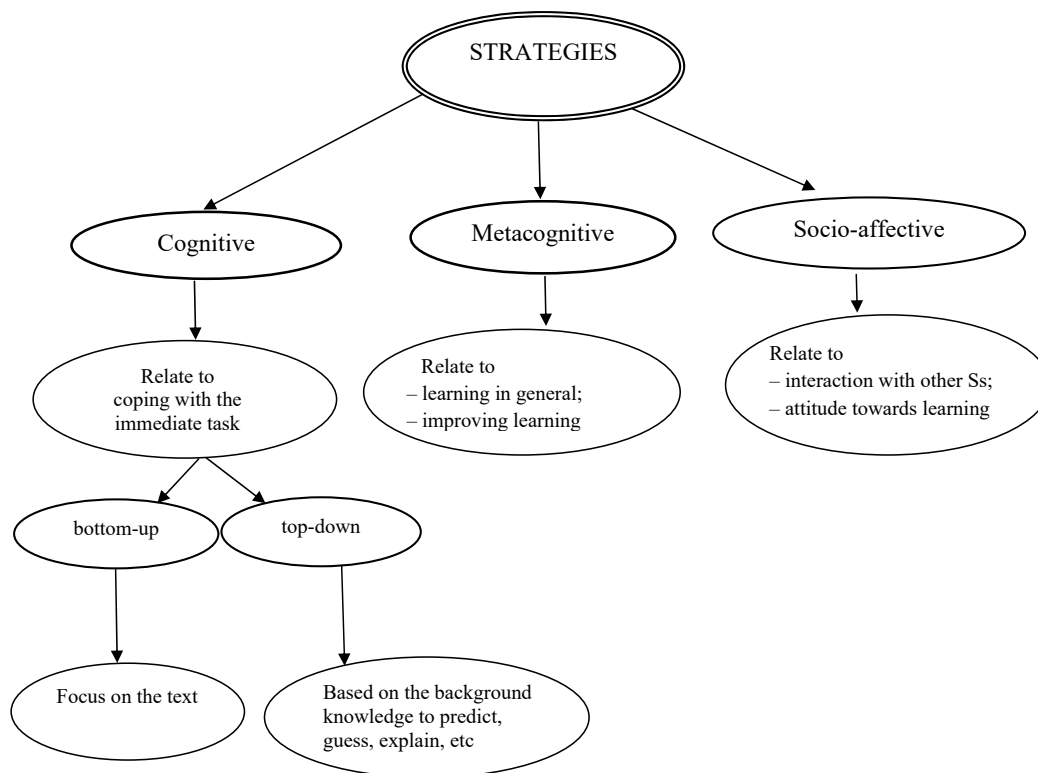
So, teachers should keep in mind that getting right answers is not the desired outcome but one of the

ways for helping students develop/improve their listening skill. Thus, teachers should use different strategies to provide and recall listening input directly to the comprehension. Scientists and teachers propose a lot of strategies, among which cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies are pivotal. To make the difference between them more visual, we have compiled the following flow-chart (see picture 2).

Thus, teachers should help their students become better learners (or in our case – better listeners) teaching them how to use strategies deliberately. It is rather important because if students understand that conscious usage of the strategies could help them improve their knowledge, they will definitely try their best to apply these strategies into their learning.

Presenting the main research material. The complexities of using listening strategies in terms of comprehensive communication aimed us to engage in the project. The following research questions guided the study:

- Will the understanding of the key components of listening strategies, in particular cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective, develop/improve students' listening skills?
- Will a basic command of listening skill, analysis of source texts for a listening activity and awareness of the listening strategies benefit listening comprehension?



Pic. 2

– Will the link of the theory about listening strategies and practice in the teaching of listening improve listening comprehension skills?

Research methods. To collect data on listening strategies and challenges, we recorded interviews with participants: the third year BA students, would-be-teachers of English of Philological faculty in Rivne State University of the Humanities; completed focus group recorded interviews with students – future teachers of English during the course of TEFL.

Data collection tools. We conducted individual semi-structured interviews with participants (10 students of Philological faculty) and a focus group interview (7 students of the same faculty). The interview protocol consisted of 10 questions (with students), and 8 questions (a focus group). Focus group interviews were face-to-face and students' interviews were recorded via Zoom. The interview protocols covered the following areas: whether students encountered problems or barriers in listening; how they coped with such difficulties, if any; what listening strategies they used, and whether such strategies were useful and beneficial for motivation and comprehension.

Data collection procedure. Data were generated via recorded interviews, visuals, documents, and focus group discussions. The interviews lasted 20 minutes, and focus group interviews 40 minutes, for a total 240 minutes of intensive talk. The students were asked to give written consent to participate in the study. Participants communicated in English and were explained the purpose of the study. The participation in the study was anonymous and the participants were informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

Data analysis. The interviews were transcribed and then exchanged among three researchers for analyzing and finding the essential approaches, facilitating aspects of the beneficial listening strategies. We focused on cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies as a bridge of comprehensive listening; motivation that accompany the process in short and long perspective. Finally, we explore the use of these listening strategies for better listening comprehension of the students that help create comprehensive communication.

Findings. The students responded that they were aware about listening strategies but they used them chaotically and episodically during their Observation practice without profound understanding of aims and outcomes. They indicated that it could be solid help in the first weeks of their practice at school, they valued its importance and pointed at the necessity to learn and use them. *“The main thing there was that we conducted listening in the classroom without proper*

understanding of the outcomes of the activity”, *“Pupils keep on listening only the first 2-3 minutes, it was difficult to motivate them...”*, *“I feel I need additional information about what should be done before listening activity.... I did pre-listening vocabulary but it didn't work, the results were poor”*.

Listening strategies can be chosen in accordance with how the listeners process the input. Students pointed out their failures and the necessity to improve the preparation: *“I need extra practice in giving instructions before listening”*. Listening comprehension instruction should be an integral part of reading and writing instruction, incorporating these multiple language and cognitive skills.

“When I went to school our teacher avoided listening activities due to many reasons, and technical support wasn't the main point, I think, thus it was valuable...”. This student's reflection proved the statement that listening is a unique skill that needs systematic and regular training especially in a context where English is taught as a foreign language. *“Listening has always been the most confusing and difficult aspect in learning and teaching English for me”*. Brown (2001) maintains that listening is the main element in teaching and learning language because in the classroom learners do more listening than speaking. It means that listening is an important process in our communication. Students feel this significance, they indicate the drawbacks in listening, and are aware of the necessity to develop/ improve listening comprehension skills.

The listeners should know the background of the topic, the situation, the context as well as kind of text or speech. It can help students interpret what they are listening to, and can anticipate what they will hear next. The students-future teachers also emphasized on this: *“...I think it is crucial to find the proper text for listening in the classroom...”*.

Students should be trained to use listening strategies that will enable them to be effective communicators. This implies that for the foreign language learners, listening strategies must be systematically taught and practiced on regular bases.

Propose you some excerpts from the students' feedback (the writing is not corrected):

Student A: *“I like the strategy of using linguistic knowledge to predict what will be said. I really like the way grammar and vocabulary can be taught in such a way. Especially students' knowledge of collocations is improved in this way, because not only can they do the gap-fill exercise on a sheet of paper but also listen to the collocations, which will help them to remember those collocations better. The strategy can also help students to concentrate*

on the listening task as they have to check whether their answers are correct or not.

The strategy of taking notes, writing down relevant information in shorthand is also pretty. Teaching it I realize that I teach students something they can use every day in real life. Moreover, this skill in the classroom can teach students to think quickly and analyze the information needed for some specific tasks. Writing down something while listening will gradually make students much more mature and experienced in listening.

And the last strategy I'd like to point out is the strategy of listening for transition points. Being able to do so students will learn how to understand a text much better. Knowing the transitions, students can divide the text into pieces and find meaning in each part."

Student B: *"Metacognitive strategies are important in learning. It helps students to understand and perceive information in an appropriate way. I have been using self-questioning. And I must say that it really helps to organize thoughts and following work. I have also been using Mnemonic Aid, Writing down your Working and Active Reading Strategies. I think that every student should use these metacognitive strategies to do the task well. Metacognitive strategies help you not only do the task but understand the purpose of it. It also helps to develop thinking and self-organization. I would like to try such strategies as Awareness of learning style, Graphic Organizers and Regulation Checklist. Some of them I have tried. But I want to improve it."*

Student C: *"I prefer 3 listening strategies. In communication, clarification involves offering back to the speaker the essential meaning, as understood by the listener, of what they have just said. Thereby checking that the listener's understanding is correct and resolving any areas of confusion or misunderstanding.*

Clarification is important in many situations especially when what is being communicated is difficult in some way. Communication can be 'difficult' for many reasons, perhaps sensitive emotions are being discussed – or you are listening to some complex information or following instructions.

Selective listening is when you focus your attention on some specific information. It involves consciously or unconsciously choosing to listen to what is relevant to you and ignore what isn't. It is a skill that anyone can develop and improve. As you spend more time in this new environment, you'll learn a few foreign words. Your ears will perk up when you hear recognizable words pop out of otherwise blurry conversations around you. This new language will also

sound more familiar to you if you study it or spend enough time listening to it. Then, you'll need less effort to understand it.

Predicting supports the development of critical thinking skills by requiring students to draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences as well as observations to anticipate what might happen."

Student D: *"Depending on the context we can often predict the kind of words and style of language the speaker will use. Our knowledge of the world helps us anticipate the kind of information we are likely to hear. Moreover, when we predict the topic of a talk or a conversation, all the related vocabulary stored in our brains is 'activated' to help us better understand what we're listening to. This strategy of predicting is very good for engaging students ...*

Taking notes helps you to focus your attention and avoid distractions. As you take notes in class, you will be engaging your mind in identifying and organizing the main ideas. Rather than passively listening, you will be doing the work of active learning while in class, making the most of your time.

The purpose of asking for clarification is to: Ensure that the listener's understanding of what the speaker has said is correct, reducing misunderstanding. So it is a useful strategy for the learning process in the classroom."

Student E: *"Among the listening strategies I like most Monitor performance while listening and Ask for clarification because both of them encourage students to listen attentively, being in the process and make them speak, practice their own pronunciation of the language and communicate with partners using socio-affective strategy too. Also I enjoy Listening for key words for topic identification because we get a lot of vocabulary from the listening, so it's good practice for it.*

So, strategy training is a really useful and necessary thing as for the teacher's planning lessons and also for students to improve qualitatively their listening skills."

The research proved that when the students started to use listening strategies, for example cognitive (taking notes, making associations and analogies, asking questions, seeking the main ideas, etc), metacognitive (reflecting feedback, using mnemonic aids, creating flow charts / mind maps / spider diagrams, etc) or socio-affective (asking for clarification, discussing their answers with peers, trying to relax and think positively before listening, etc.), they improved their listening skills and became more confident both with their own learning and with their teaching.

Conclusions and perspectives of further research. The experiment revealed that the use of

strategy in listening is really important. It is significant to teach students these strategies in theory and practice that will enable them to use these listening strategies for deeper comprehension. In other words, students can perform their listening activity better and well-structured if they apply a strategy (or complex of strategies) in their listening process. Furthermore, the students can also learn how to master the language, enhance their vocabulary through the use of appropriate strategies in the classroom or by themselves during self-study.

The strategies used by EFL students during the Observation practice are Metacognitive Strategies (pre-listening Planning strategies, while-listening Monitoring Strategies, Post listening Evaluation

strategies), Cognitive Strategies (cognitive formal practicing strategies, Bottom-up strategies, Top-down strategies), Socio-affective Strategies. These three strategies are effective in helping the EFL learners in the listening process as the results of the Observation school practice showed.

Improving listening comprehension takes a prolonged time, and thus, instruction should be long-term across multiple years. As cognitive skills contribute to listening comprehension, developing and coordinating these skills are not likely to occur in a short time span. A component skill of listening comprehension such as vocabulary is expansive, and continues to grow throughout the lifetime, and so listening comprehension skill as well.

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