ปัญหาในการฟังและการใช้กลวิธีที่ช่วยในการฟังของนักศึกษาระดับมหาวิทยาลัย
LISTENING DIFFICULTIES AND STRATEGY USE BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเชิงสำรวจนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อหาความแตกต่างของปัญหาในการฟังที่เกิดขึ้นระหว่าง นักเรียนที่มีความสามารถในการฟังสูงกว่าและนักเรียนที่มีความสามารถในการฟังต่ำกว่า และเพื่อหา ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างปัญหาในการฟังและกลวิธีที่ช่วยในการฟัง กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการวิจัยครั้งนี้คือ นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 3 เอกภาษาอังกฤษของมหาวิทยาลัยรัฐบาล 4 แห่งในจังหวัดสงขลา โดยคัดเลือก กลุ่มตัวอย่างจากนักศึกษา จำนวน 143 คน และนำมาแบ่งออกเป็น 2 กลุ่ม กลุ่มละ 39 คนตามระดับ ความสามารถ โดยใช้เทคนิค 27% เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการศึกษาค้นคว้า ได้แก่ แบบสอบถามเกี่ยวกับปัญหา ในการฟังและแบบวัดกลวิธีที่ช่วยการฟัง (Strategy Inventory of Language Learning) ซึ่งดัดแปลง จากต้นฉบับของ Rebecca Oxford [1] และแบบทดสอบการฟังจากหนังสือ IELTS Practice Listening Test เพื่อใช้ในการแบ่งกลุ่มความสามารถของกลุ่มตัวอย่าง แล้วนำข้อมูลที่ได้มาประมวลผลโดยการ หาค่าเฉลี่ย ค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน ค่าร้อยละ ความแตกต่างของค่าเฉลี่ย (t-test) และค่าสัมประสิทธิ์ สหสัมพันธ์แบบเพียร์สัน (the Pearson Correlation Coefficient) ผลการวิจัยพบว่าปัญหาในการฟัง ของกลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้ง 2 กลุ่มไม่แตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ แต่พบความสัมพันธ์กันอย่างมี นัยสำคัญระหว่างปัญหาการฟังบางประการกับการเลือกใช้กลวิธีที่ช่วยในการฟังของกลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้ง 2 กลุ่ม

คำสำคัญ: ปัญหาในการฟัง กลวิธีที่ช่วยในการฟัง

Abstract

The purposes of this survey research were to investigate the differences in listening difficulties occurring to students with more and less listening ability and to find out the relationships between listening difficulties and their choices of listening strategies. The subjects were 78 third-year undergraduate students, majoring in English from 4 public universities in Songkhla province, Thailand. The population of 143 was divided into 2 proficiency groups of 39 each: more and less able levels, using the 27% technique. The instruments included the Questionnaire on Listening Difficulties and Strategies and IELTS Practice Listening Test [2] which were given to divide the groups of subjects. The data were analyzed using mean, standard

deviation, percentage, t-test and the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The findings revealed no significant differences in listening difficulties between students with more and less ability in listening (t = -1.02, p> 0.05), but showed significant negative and positive correlations between some of the listening difficulties and choice of strategies of the groups of subjects respectively.

Keywords: Listening Difficulties, Listening Strategies

Introduction

In the past, listening comprehension was disregarded as it was considered to be a passive skill. In fact, it is an active skill because we cannot talk without listening first-communication will not occur if we only speak, but never listen [3]. Since the 1970s, listening has been emphasized more and given priority as a fundamental language skill in learning and teaching [4]. The term 'listening' refers to the activity of comprehending spoken speech. It involves active, complex, and perceptive processes consisting of many sub-skills: perception, language, and pragmatic skills. The listeners need to recognize speech sounds, word meanings, structures, stress and intonation patterns, and then decode the sound waves into understandable meanings using linguistic and background knowledge or schema, and finally interpret and construct the meaning of spoken messages heard from the speakers into a meaningful message in order to respond [5-8].

Thailand is one country where English has been taught as a foreign language starting from kindergarten and continuing to university level. Nevertheless, Thai students still have insufficient English competence, especially in listening and speaking [9-11]. Listening seems to be regarded as the most difficult skill even for native speakers [7], so it is very common for EFL or L2 listeners, including Thai learners to experience listening difficulties which are caused by both language-related factors and external factors. Moreover, the difficulties and the ways to solve them have been discussed by many researchers (e.g. Underwood, Anderson & Lynch, Brown, Mckay, Buck, and Osuka) [5], [12-16]. It is well-known that listening strategies can be highly effective in solving the listening problems, especially when they are used appropriately [17]. Therefore, it is possible that the language learners who are unable to use strategies properly to overcome their limited ability in listening could finally have low level of listening proficiency.

The study thus aimed to investigate listening difficulties encountered by undergraduate students with different listening ability levels and to find out whether the listening difficulties significantly correlate with the students' choice of strategies. It was hoped that the findings could encourage teachers to help students improve their listening comprehension ability by providing more strategy training and conducting more class activities for develop their listening skills.

Listening Processes

Listening involves complex mental processes. It involves parsing, memory and cognition processes. "All listening activity simultaneously happens in the mind from recognition of individual phonemes to recognition of patterns of intonation. Listeners guess, predict, infer, criticize and, above all, interpret using prediction based on knowledge of the speaker, the context and how language works" [3]. There are two distinct processes involved in listening comprehension. They are the sub-processes of the cognition process called top-down and bottom-up processes. The bottom-up process occurs when listeners use linguistic knowledge-splitting the sounds heard into small parts-phonemes or syllables- to help interpret the meaning of the whole oral message. The top-down process occurs when listeners use prior knowledge such as topic knowledge, listening contexts, or socio-cultural knowledge stored in long-term memory to help comprehend what they hear. If the learners are able to simultaneously combine these two processes together, an interactive process is developed, and then listening comprehension can be completed [3, 13]. Subsequently, such processes are developed into major parts of cognitive strategies that help listeners relieve listening difficulties and facilitate the interpretation of spoken texts.

Listening Difficulties

The natural spoken language is what listeners experience when communicating. It is different from the written one in terms of language features [18]. Moreover, spoken language always happens in real time. The listeners cannot control the rate of the speakers' speech and cannot predict what they will hear in advance. They need to interpret the meaning of the speech immediately, and so most of them have problems with a fast speech rate which usually results in unclear pronunciation. Rixon suggested that listening taught in class is quite different from real life listening [19], so this can lead to listening problems. The key language and language related factors having an effect on listening comprehension mainly are vocabulary and grammar rules, speech rate, and topic familiarity.

Vocabulary and grammar knowledge are important elements of language learning. Vocabulary is used to convey meaning, and grammar structures contribute to better understanding of the group of words in sentences. However, both of them make listening more difficult at the same time. Ghrib-Maamouri's study [20] revealed that more than 50% of the subjects reported having difficulty with grammatical problems. In addition, Kijpoonphol's study [21] found that vocabulary, idioms, slangs and reduced words can become barriers in listening comprehension. This coincides with Goh's study [22] which aimed to investigate listening problems of ESL college students in Singapore and found that a large amount of unfamiliar vocabulary had much influence on the listening

ability of high and low proficiency students in terms of comprehension blocks. This is in line with Othman's study [23] which found that the learners could not answer a question once they heard it, because they tried to struggle with new words, so the process of interpreting the meaning stopped instantly.

Speech rate can affect the ability to catch the meaning of the spoken text because it is very difficult to understand speech within a very short time [24] and L2 listeners need to focus consciously on listening input in a target language by thinking fast to cope with the fast rate of natural speech in order to interpret the meaning [15].

The research conducted by Goh [25], on language learners' listening comprehension problems, found that two-thirds of the subjects quickly forgot what had been said to them, although they tended to catch the meaning of words, so this could make them completely lose the comprehension of listening texts, including the main idea.

Retrieving knowledge about the topic is a conscious process which can be gradually developed into an automatic one when the texts are interpreted fast enough. If the listeners are familiar with the tasks or the listening input, they will take less time to understand it and will respond to the questions or the input faster. Thus, the closer the listeners come to the automatic state, the more comprehension can be obtained and the more responses can be elicited. Conversely, if the automatic state cannot be reached—if there is failure to get

the overall meaning within a certain amount of time, listeners' responses will be delayed [15].

Other language and language related factors can be generally classified into five major types: *linguistic features* (e.g. flexible informal and reduced forms, incomplete sentences, simple conjunctions, liaison, elision, blending, assimilation, dialects, idioms, slang, fillers, pauses, hesitations, phonological modification and colloquial words), *message characteristics* (e.g. academic or non-academic, explicit or implicit, difficulty levels, types of input), *speakers* (e.g. pronunciation, accent, intonation, redundant utterances, pace, volume, pauses), *listeners* (e.g. proficiency level, educational and cultural background, prior knowledge, concentration, anxiety, boredom, tiredness, illness), and *environment* (e.g. physical setting, noise, background noise) [5]. These can all contribute to problem in listening.

Some other failures affecting the listening comprehension are external to the communication. As Thailand is a monolingual country where English is not used in everyday life, most Thai students lack exposure to English spoken by native speakers [26-27]. This is an important external factor causing Thai students to lack listening skills. Another important factor can be the backwash effect from the university entrance examination. Since listening is not included in the entrance examination, this skill is rarely seriously taught, particularly in primary and secondary school levels [28].

Listening Difficulties and Listening Strategies

Undeniably, research on listening difficulties often goes along with an investigation of approaches to solve the problems-listening strategies. Bonet [29] stated that, in fact, most people are not good listeners. "We listen at about 25% of our potential, which means we ignore, forget, distort, or misunderstand 75% of what we hear." This phenomenon may partly arise from the mentioned factors that can directly affect listeners' comprehension and finally lead to listening problems. One way to help EFL learners to overcome the listening problems and better understand the meaning of aural texts when they carry out listening comprehension tasks is strategy training. Thus, there are a large number of studies [3],[30-35] exploring the strategy use among listeners of foreign languages in order to find the best way to develop learners' listening competence.

The term 'strategy' as defined by Oxford [1] is tools or actions learners employ to make their L2 learning easier, enjoyable, and transferable to new inputs. It can enhance students' proficiency in learning other languages, and also develop their communicative competence and self-confidence. Listening strategies can be classified by the ways the listener processes the input. One of the most widely used taxonomies was suggested by Oxford [1], in which strategies are divided into two main types—direct and indirect strategies, each of which is subdivided into three categories.

Direct strategies include *memory strategies* which are used for storing information: creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, employing action, etc., *cognitive strategies* which are used in obtaining, storing, retrieving, and using the language learning or solving problems that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of spoken texts and *compensation strategies* which help learners to overcome knowledge gaps to continue the communication-guessing from linguistic and context clues.

Indirect strategies include *metacognitive strategies* which are used to oversee, regulate or self-direct language learning: planning, prioritizing, setting goals, and reviewing in advance, *social strategies* which involve learning by interaction with others in order to seek opportunities to expose to and practice the target language: joining language activities with native speakers or language experts or performing language activities with others, and *affective strategies* which are concerned with the learner's emotional requirements: lowering of anxiety, encouraging oneself and positive self-talk.

Goh's study [22] about the factors that influence listening comprehension found that students mostly think that message characteristics—linguistic features and content obstruct their listening comprehension, but that metacognitive strategies can perhaps help them to learn better. This coincides with a study conducted by Holden [36] who stated that applying metacognitive strategies to understand listening texts can lead to effective listening. Yuan-lian [37] also claimed that

cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies can raise students' awareness in using strategies and abilities to perform listening tasks. This result contrasts with Jou's study [38] on listening strategy use by technological university students which revealed that the listening problems found among the subjects were concentration, accents, stress and speech rate, and the cause was lack of listening practice. The subjects reported using metacognitive, cognitive, socio-affective strategies to solve the problems, but most students could not use strategies appropriately and they needed more strategy training.

A study of listening comprehension strategies of 51 Taiwanese freshmen conducted by Teng [31] found that of the six strategy categories, more proficient learners used compensation strategies the most, while cognitive strategies were used the most by less proficient learners, and social and affective strategies were used the least. It was also found that planning strategies for language tasks (metacognitive) were the least used among the subjects. Teng [31] assumed that learners' proficiency had effects on the amount of strategy use. Apart from that, an investigation of listening strategy use conducted by Graham, Santos & Vanderplank [39] stated that the appropriateness of using strategies should be considered rather than merely focusing on what strategies the listeners use. The more appropriate strategies the listeners use for each listening task, the higher comprehension they can achieve.

Objectives

The purposes of this study were to investigate listening difficulties encountered by two groups of students (Students with more and less listening ability) and to find out relationships between the listening difficulties and their strategies use.

Research Questions

1. Are there differences in listening difficulties that students with more and less ability in listening encounter? If so, how are they different?

2. Are listening difficulty types related to the choice of strategies of students with more and less ability in listening?

Technical Terms

Listening Strategies refers to techniques or approaches to facilitate listening comprehension of listeners in order to enhance their listening ability; or "ways in which listeners (particularly L2 listeners) compensate for gaps in their understanding" [34]. The strategies studied in this research are based on Oxford's taxonomy [1].

Students with More Listening Ability (SMLA): those whose listening test scores are in the top 27% of the total number of subjects (n = 39).

Students with Less Listening Ability (SLLA): those whose listening test scores are in the bottom 27% of the total number of subjects (n = 39).

Methods

Subjects

The population of the study was 198 third-year university students from four public universities in Songkhla province, Thailand. The students from Section One from each university were chosen with a total of 143 students. Their listening proficiency levels were between beginner and lower intermediate, based on the results of the listening section of Cambridge IELTS Practice test 7 [2]. They were divided equally into more (n = 39) and less (n = 39) able levels using the 27% technique, so the selected subjects were 78 (72 females and 6 males).

Instruments

A Listening Difficulties and Listening Strategies Questionnaire

The questionnaire aimed to elicit the listening difficulties and strategies the subjects use in various listening situations. It consisted of 3 parts: the subjects' general information and English learning background, a 26-item list of listening problems with Yes/ No responses, and a 40-item list of listening strategies with five Likert-scaled responses for each strategy item ranging from 1 to 5 (never, seldom, sometimes, usually, always). The strategy items were adapted from SILL version 7.0 developed by Oxford [30]. The questionnaire was translated into Thai and back-translated to English before piloting and administering to prevent language confusion and to ensure conceptual equivalence.

A Listening Test

40 items of the listening section adopted from Cambridge IELTS Practice Test 7 [2] were used as a listening test to assess students' ability levels and to separate them into more and less listening ability groups. This Practice Test was used since it is parallel with the real IELTS test as a reliable means of assessing the language ability of candidates. According to the U.S. copyright law [40], it was stated that "a fair use of a copy righted work for research purpose is not an infringement of copyright," so the test was legally adopted from the original source.

However, in this study, the spoken texts were played twice in order to encourage the subjects to respond to the test and the results can be used to identify their ability levels. This is due to the fact that the subjects could not answer the questions after the first listening and the study was set out to measure their ability in listening for real life communication purpose which is more interactive and adjustable than listening for achieving the required level of proficiency. Jones [41] who did research on the question of how many times the audio recording should be played in a listening comprehension test stated that when listening in real life situations, test takers could certainly ask for repetition when they encountered interpretation problems, especially when the listening input was beyond their ability levels. Listening in a real life situation was different from listening in a test; more cognitive load was required in the test situation since the test takers had to perform various listening tasks and tried to give the

answers on the test paper simultaneously as the audio continues to play. Other conditions occurring in the test situation could be sound quality, or interfering background noise, so the audio could be played twice or more. Hence, this study allowed the subjects to listen to the texts twice.

Data Collection

First, the questionnaire was piloted with forty 4th year students comparable to the subject group in terms of listening proficiency. The reliability coefficient value was found to be 0.89. The questionnaire was then administered to the subjects before the listening test. The time requirement was 30 minutes. This was to avoid confusion among the subjects so that they would not misunderstand that they must report only the strategy used for taking the listening test. Finally, the test was launched with the following procedure. First to motivate the students to do their best, full details of the test were given, especially the test instructions, and the purpose of the administration before starting the test. After that the audio CD was played through a portable CD player in a lecture room once, and then again after it was found out that the students could not catch the meaning of what they hear. Altogether 45 minutes were allowed in completing the test.

Data Analysis

Scoring was done by giving one point for each correct answer – the total was 40 marks. Then, the scores were sorted in a descending order; and the 27% technique was used to assign students into more and less able groups.

Descriptive analyses: mean value, standard deviation, and percentage were used to calculate the frequency of strategy use and listening difficulties.

T-test was used to find differences in listening problems and strategy use between the two proficiency levels.

The Pearson Correlation analysis was used to show whether there were significant relationships between listening problems and choices of strategies.

Results

RQ 1: *Are there differences in listening difficulties that SMLA and SLLA encounter? If so, how are they different?*

The total listening problem items included in the questionnaire were twenty six. In the overall picture, the *t*-test results indicated that there were no significant differences in listening problems encountered by SMLA and SLLA (t = -1.02, p>0.05). However, it can be seen that SLLA (M=0.57) encountered problems more frequently than SMLA (M=0.53) did.

Investigating the use of individual strategies, the results showed significant differences in the following strategies as follows.

1.1) SMLA encountered these 4 problems (1, 29, 20, and 21) significantly less frequently than SLLA at .00-.01 levels. Table1 shows the details.

Table 1 High and Low Proficiency Students' Four Listening Problems with Significant Differences

Listening Problems	H (n=39)		L (n=39)		t	p
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
(1) My grammar competency is low, so I cannot understand what I am listening to.	0.31	0.47	0.64	0.49	-3.09	0.00**
(19) In interactive listening: conversation, classroom lecture, presentation, I know almost every word I heard, but I still do not understand what the speakers are saying.	0.18	0.39	0.49	0.51	-3.01	0.00**
(20) In interactive listening: conversation, classroom lecture, presentation, I take a lot of time to respond when the speakers ask me some questions.	0.46	0.51	0.74	0.44	-2.62	0.01**
(21) I cannot understand a classroom lecture.	0.10	0.31	0.33	0.48	-2.54	0.01**

Significance: *$p < 0.05$ **$p < 0.01$

1.2) There were three problems that the SMLA encountered more frequently than the SLLA, but not at a significant level: *P8*, new vocabulary (SMLA, M=0.95; SLLA, M=0.92), *P11*, idioms or slangs (SMLA, M=0.85; SLLA, M=0.79) and *P12*, reduced words (SMLA, M=0.77; SLLA, M=0.69). The inability to understand a listening text with new words was also reported to be the top ranked problem by both groups.

RQ 2: *Are listening difficulty types related to the choice of strategies of SMLA and SLLA?*

In order to discover the relationship between listening problems and choices of strategies used by SLLA and SMLA, Pearson Correlation Analysis was employed. The results indicated that some listening difficulty types related to some choice of strategies of SLLA and SMLA.

On the whole, the findings showed significant positive and negative relationships between some listening problems and some choice of strategies among SLLA and SMLA as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Correlation between Listening Difficulties (LD) and Choice of Strategies (LS) used by SLLA and SMLA

LS	SLLA						LS	SMLA		
LD	MEMO	COG	COM	META	SOCIAL	AFF	LD	COG	SOCIAL	AFF
P5	- 0.31*	0.00	0.06	- 0.08	- 0.07	- 0.20	P5	- 0.43**	- 0.04	0.09
P6	0.32*	0.39	0.38*	0.45**	0.34*	0.17	P9	- 0.30	- 0.40**	- 0.14
P7	0.03	0.28	0.21	0.45**	0.37*	0.20	P13	- 0.32*	0.00	- 0.09
P10	0.10	0.37*	0.05	0.43**	0.47**	0.18	P15	0.16	- 0.35*	0.26
P13	- 0.23	- 0.14	- 0.01	0.03	- 0.05	- 0.32*	P18	- 0.39**	- 0.23	- 0.27
P19	0.03	- 0.17	- 0.34*	0.07	- 0.06	0.01	P20	- 0.41**	- 0.04	- 0.05
P25	0.10	0.26	0.32*	0.19	0.21	- 0.10	P24	0.00	- 0.06	- 0.36*

Significance: *$p < 0.05$ **$p < 0.01$

P5   *Inability to understand linking words in a sentence*
P6   *Inability to use conjunctions to help interpreting the meanings of a spoken text*
P7   *Inability to use signal or transitional words that indicate different ideas*
P9   *Inability to understand various accents except American or British English*
P10   *Inability to distinguish the meanings between implicit and explicit from speakers' intonation or stress*
P13   *Inability to use general background knowledge to help understand listening input*
P15   *Lack of cultural background knowledge*
P18   *The mind always wanders while listening to the news for a long time*
P19   *Inability to catch the main ideas in interactive listening: conversation, classroom lecture, presentation*
      Takes a lot of time to respond when the speakers ask some questions in interactive listening:
P20   *conversation, classroom lecture, presentation*
P24   *Inability to concentrate at all while listening in class during a classroom lecture*
P25   *Easily distracted by surroundings for example temperature, sounds, people, and classroom atmospheres*

Among SLLA, 6 strategy categories significantly correlated with some of the 7 problems (*P5, P6, P7, P10, P13, P19,* and *P25*). 3 strategy groups—*memory, compensation, affective strategies* negatively correlated with 3 problems: *memory & P5* (p<0.05); *compensation & P19* (p<0.05); *affective & P13* (p<0.05). 5 strategy groups—*memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive,* and *social strategies* positively correlated with 4 problems: *memory & P6* (p<0.05); *cognitive & P10* (p<0.05); *compensation & P6, P25* (p<0.05); *metacognitive & P6, P7, P10* (p<0.01); *social & P6* (p<0.05), *P7* (p<0.05), *P10* (p<0.01). That is to say *memory, compensation,* and *affective strategies* would

not be selected to help comprehend the listening tasks if SLLA encountered *P5, P13,* and *P19*. Conversely, six strategy groups except *affective strategies* were chosen to alleviate difficulties when SLLA faced *P6, P7, P10,* and *P25*.

Among SMLA, 3 strategy categories—*cognitive, social,* and *affective strategies* negatively correlated with some of the 7 problems (*P5, P9, P13, P15, P18, P20,* and *P24*). *Cognitive strategies* negatively correlated with *P5* (p<0.01), *P13* (p<0.05), *P18* (p<0.01), *P20* (p<0.01). *Social strategies* negatively correlated with *P9* (p<0.01), *P15*

(p<0.05). *Affective strategies* negatively correlated with *P24* (p<0.05). This means that *Memory strategies* was not reported as having been used by students who could not use linking words to interpret the meanings, but were used to facilitate the problem of using conjunctions as a clue. *Compensation strategies* were not used when they were faced with the problem of identifying the main idea; instead they used them when they encountered difficulties of surrounding distractions and different accents. *Affective strategies* were not employed to solve the problems of using background knowledge to help comprehension. *Cognitive strategies* were used when SLLA were unable to distinguish between literal and inferred meanings. *Metacognitive* and *social strategies* were employed to solve the same problems: inability to use conjunctions, signal, or transitional words to interpret the meanings and problems of distinguishing between direct and inferred meanings.

Conclusions and Discussion

The results indicated that in the overall picture, no significant differences in listening problems between SMLA and SLLA were found. Nonetheless, the significant differences at 0.01 levels were found in the problems which SLLA reported confronting more frequently than SMLA: low grammar competence (problem 1), inability to catch the main idea in academic and general contexts and understand lectures (problem 19, 21), and the delay in responding to questions (problem 20). It means that SMLA might have been able to deal with those listening difficulties

better than SLLA did. This can be explained as follows:

1) Grammar knowledge is considered to be a key component to help listeners be more proficient in listening. Even though both SMLA and SLLA realized that they have low ability in grammar, the test and the questionnaire results showed that SMLA could do the listening test better and reported having fewer problems with grammar than SLLA did. Hence, it may be concluded that grammar knowledge can contribute to better comprehending listening texts and has an influence on L2 listening competence. The result is consistent with the studies conducted by Liao and Savage [42-43].

2) The ability to catch the main idea and understand lectures could be affected by speech rate. It might be assumed that SMLA might have dealt with the fast speech rate better than SLLA did since SMLA could get better scores than SLLA in the listening test, so the ability to deal with fast speech rate of SMLA might also have helped them to be able to catch the main idea better than SLLA did. Moreover, the possible reason why SMLA could catch the main idea better than SLLA could be the fact that SMLA probably performed some activities which could enhance their ability to listen to rapid speech more frequently than SLLA. This can be supported by mean scores obtained from the questionnaire investigating the frequency of listening strategy use among the subjects. The results showed that SMLA employed the following strategies more frequently than SLLA: trying to grasp the main idea while listening, trying to pay full attention

and concentrating to what they were listening to, watching English TV programs and movies, listening to songs and news in English, and seeking opportunities to practice listening (SMLA, M=3.66; SLLA, M=3.49).

3) The delay in interpretation and response to questions can have occurred when the students were not familiar with the listening tasks or the types of input. Often listeners have to unavoidably listen to something without a good knowledge of it, such as making conversation with people from different cultures or background knowledge, listening to a presentation or attending a lecture on a very new topic. It is possible that subjects might face all of the above situations. According to the personal information from the questionnaire asking about the students' language exposure, it was found that nobody has been to an English-speaking country for more than a month and very few of them had someone to talk to in English. Further information obtained from informal interviews with lecturers teaching at those universities revealed that the following opinions:-

"I think most students acquired insufficient language exposure because they have very few opportunities in listening, especially listening outside the classroom and talking with native speakers. The students lacked not only listening practice even in an English class itself, but also a variation of listening input."

This could have limited students' new conceptual frameworks which can be applied to listening practice in various tasks. Therefore, it is impossible for the subjects, especially to have interpreted the meaning fast enough

to become automatic. Instead, a delay in catching the key ideas, understanding lectures, and responding to questions occurred [15].

Results also showed three problems which were encountered by SMLA more frequently than SLLA, but not at a significant level: a large amount of new vocabulary, idioms or slangs and reduced words. An explanation of this can be given based on the answers the subjects gave in the test. It demonstrated that SMLA realized that vocabulary is important in order to understand spoken texts since they were likely to make an attempt to answer all questions. For example, the answers given by SMLA often had spelling mistakes, but the sound of the misspelled words were quite similar to the correct one-the word 'cheese' was often replaced by 'shees', chees' or 'cheeze'. This meant that SMLA were able to recognize the meaning and pronunciation of the word, though they misspelled them. This probably stimulated SMLA to continually pay attention to struggle with those words by linking the pronunciation with the words they were familiar with, though the interpretation of some other parts of the text might have been missed. This corresponds with Othman [23] who suggested that new words can be another key factor to interrupt an interpretation process of spoken discourse. In contrast, the test results revealed that when SLLA could not give the correct answer, most of them would either write some known words or leave them unanswered. It was possible that they may not know the meanings or even the pronunciation of the words they heard. Hence, they refused to focus on those words and were not aware

of how vocabulary could affect their test scores.

The results also revealed that there were significant correlations between some of the listening difficulties and choice of strategies. 12 of 26 difficulties significantly correlated with some of the six groups of strategies.

Among SMLA, 3 strategies–*cognitive, social, and affective* were reported as not being used in solving some of 7 problems with respective frequencies.

Cognitive strategies would not be chosen to facilitate the difficulties so that they were unable to use linking words and general background knowledge to help comprehension, were unable to concentrate when listening to the news, and were unable to respond to the questions when listening in interactive contexts. The possible reason for this can be explained based on the findings of the strategies used by SMLA. It showed that the strategies SMLA hardly used were in the cognitive category: practicing listening to intonation, pronunciation, and the news. This shows that SMLA might have intended to avoid using some specific strategies, especially in cognitive categories. This finding can imply that SMLA might not have been competent enough to use cognitive strategies in appropriate and effective ways due to a lack of strategy practice. However, no strategies were reported used to solve any particular problems since there were no significant positive correlations shown, only negative ones. The explanation for this is that, based on the test scores, SMLA had higher ability and could deal with the problems better than SLLA did, but they also reported having

problems. So it could not be said that SMLA did not use any strategies, but they might not have been aware that they did so. That is probably because they used them almost automatically. Due to the fact that there were no significant correlations between difficulties and strategy use reported by SMLA, specific amount of strategies they used could not be firmly determined. This result, therefore, seems to be inconsistent with Teng's study [31] which indicated that more proficient learners use greater amount of strategies than the less proficient ones do.

Among SLLA, 3 strategies–*memory, compensation and affective* were reported as not being used to solve one of the 3 problems. 5 of 6 strategies except *affective strategies* were used to solve 5 problems. *Metacognitive* and *social strategies* were the most frequently used.

It was apparent that SLLA used *metacognitive* and *social strategies* to deal with different kinds of difficulties. *Social strategies* (e.g. asking for clarification, learning other different cultures, considering others' feelings or behavior through their tone of voice), not only helped listeners understanding the meaning of the spoken texts in various social contexts, especially in face-to face interaction, but also helped the learners be exposed to native speakers. The strategies which are categorized as indirect approach could contribute to self-confidence, learning motivation, and skill improvement [22], [44], [36- 37].

However, it is surprising that SLLA reported employing a wide variety of strategies, while

SMLA did not report any. It is probable that SMLA were more accustomed with the input and could do better in listening, so they might have had fewer difficulties than SLLA did in terms of frequencies. This made them rely on strategies less than SLLA did. Similarly, SLLA used many strategies, probably because they encountered more difficulties than SMLA did.

All of the results point to the conclusion that all of the subjects might not only have unawareness of what strategies they had used, but also unawareness of how to use the strategies in the right way. However, "an awareness and deployment of effective listening comprehension strategies can help students capitalize on the language input they are receiving" [33]. Unawareness of using the strategies can be a significant sign of inadequate or lack of strategy training and practicing listening skills. It can be suggested that the students should be exposed more to listening activities and practice how to apply strategies effectively. This can be supported by the previous studies suggesting that listeners should learn how to apply strategies appropriate for each listening task [38-39].

Implications of the study

The study has revealed listening difficulties students struggle with while they are performing various listening tasks and strategies they use or ignore. The findings of this study could have implications for EFL teachers and further research. The teacher should expose their students to longer texts that will help them to be better prepared for academic listening and train students to listen selectively for a purpose to help them overcome becoming overloaded with the incoming information. The current study indicating insufficient strategy training is likely to convince English teachers to be more aware of the benefits of strategy training and include these strategies in their lessons, course books, and curricula. Further studies should explore listening difficulties and strategies with a higher number of students. It is hoped that the findings of this study will trigger more research exploring listening problems and strategy use among students with different fields of study (Arts and Sciences).

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Appendix 1

Descriptive Statistics for Listening Difficulties and t-test Results by High and Low Proficiency Students

	Items of difficulties	HPS		LPS		t	p
		M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
1	My grammar competency is low, so I cannot understand what I am listening.	0.31	0.47	0.64	0.49	−3.09	0.00**
2	I cannot interpret the meanings of the spoken text because I am unfamiliar with the contexts.	0.85	0.37	0.87	0.34	−0.32	0.75
3	I cannot understand the spoken text because of fast speech rate.	0.79	0.41	0.85	0.37	−0.58	0.56
4	I cannot grasp the main idea though I know almost every word I heard.	0.31	0.47	0.44	0.50	−1.17	0.25
5	I cannot understand linking words in a sentence. For example 'turn off' is spoken as 'tur noff', 'Can I have a bit of egg?' is spoken as 'Ca ni ha va bi to fegg?'. These can make me misunderstand their meanings.	0.79	0.41	0.82	0.39	−0.28	0.78
6	I cannot use conjunctions: since, for, but, so, as, although, etc. to help interpreting the meanings of a spoken text.	0.10	0.31	0.21	0.41	−1.25	0.21
7	I cannot use signal or transitional words that indicate different ideas: "A key concept is…", "As a result...", "In conclusion..." to help interpreting the meanings of a spoken text.	0.05	0.22	0.15	0.37	−1.50	0.14
8	I cannot understand what I am listening when there are a lot of new and unfamiliar vocabulary.	0.95	0.22	0.92	0.27	0.46	0.65
9	I cannot understand various accents except American or British English.	0.72	0.46	0.82	0.39	−1.07	0.29
10	I cannot distinguish the meanings between implicit and explicit from speakers' intonation or stress (e.g. using rising intonation for questioning, for sarcasm, for ridicule).	0.23	0.43	0.33	0.48	−1.00	0.32
11	I do not understand the spoken text because I do not know the meaning of idioms or slangs. For example, In New York City, a lot of stored are opened **24.7**, I can take a week to send a letter by **snail mail**, He was warned that his job was **on the line** because his lack of concern for his duties.	0.85	0.37	0.79	0.41	0.58	0.56
12	I do not understand the meaning of a spoken text because of reduced speech (e.g. I **dunno**, **whadda** you want to eat?, I **hafta** clean the house or my mom's **gonna** be mad.)	0.77	0.43	0.69	0.47	0.76	0.45
13	I cannot use my general background knowledge to help me to understand what I am listening to.	0.21	0.41	0.38	0.49	−1.75	0.08
14	I cannot understand what I am listening without gestures or illustrations.	0.31	0.47	0.31	0.47	0.00	1.00

	Items of difficulties	HPS		LPS		t	p
		M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
15	I cannot understand what I am listening for lack of cultural background knowledge.	0.41	0.50	0.46	0.51	-0.45	0.65
16	When I listen to fast songs, I cannot interpret the meaning, though the language level is not too difficult.	0.79	0.41	0.90	0.31	-1.25	0.21
17	I cannot understand English movies without subtitles.	0.46	0.51	0.56	0.50	-0.90	0.37
18	My mind always wanders when I listen to the news for a long time.	0.69	0.47	0.72	0.46	-0.25	0.81
19	In interactive listening: conversation, classroom lecture, presentation, I know almost every words I heard, but I still do not understand what the speakers are saying.	0.18	0.39	0.49	0.51	-3.01	0.00**
20	In interactive listening: conversation, classroom lecture, presentation, I take a lot of time to respond when the speakers ask me some questions.	0.46	0.51	0.74	0.44	-2.62	0.01**
21	I cannot understand what I am listening while attending a classroom lecture.	0.10	0.31	0.33	0.48	-2.54	0.01**
22	I cannot take notes while I am listening.	0.64	0.49	0.72	0.46	-0.72	0.47
23	I cannot read explanatory notes and look at a whiteboard while listening.	0.23	0.43	0.36	0.49	-1.24	0.22
24	I cannot concentrate at all while listening in class during a classroom lecture.	0.62	0.49	0.72	0.46	-0.95	0.34
25	I am easily distracted by surrounding things such as temperatures, sounds, people, and classroom atmospheres.	0.54	0.51	0.69	0.47	-1.40	0.17
26	I always feel nervous or stress while listening anything in English.	0.41	0.50	0.49	0.51	-0.68	0.50
Total		0.53	0.27	0.57	0.21	-1.02	0.31

Significance: *$p < 0.05$ **$p < 0.01$

Appendix 2

Correlations Results between Listening Difficulties and Choice of Listening Strategies

LISTENNING DIFFICLUTIES		MEMORY	COGNITIVE	COMPEN SATION	META COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	AFFECTIVE
P1	Pearson Correlation	-0.01	-0.14	-0.09	0.02	-0.09	-0.17
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.79	0.49	0.82	1.71	0.83	0.28
P2	Pearson Correlation	0.10	-0.09	0.11	-0.17	-0.01	0.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.75	0.91	0.64	0.31	1.85	1.54
P3	Pearson Correlation	0.15	-0.06	0.04	-0.04	-0.07	0.06
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.36	1.20	1.42	1.42	1.06	1.22
P4	Pearson Correlation	-0.06	-0.04	-0.11	0.04	-0.11	0.01
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.17	1.47	0.65	1.47	0.69	1.84
P5	Pearson Correlation	-0.25	-0.14	-0.10	-0.07	-0.06	-0.05
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.06	0.47	0.76	1.07	1.19	1.32
P6	Pearson Correlation	0.26	0.17	0.12	0.26	0.05	0.13
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.04	0.32	0.61	0.06	1.35	0.52
P7	Pearson Correlation	0.10	0.15	0.08	0.32	0.15	0.08
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.78	0.38	0.92	0.01	0.39	1.02
P8	Pearson Correlation	-0.02	0.13	0.08	0.03	-0.12	0.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.73	0.56	0.95	1.55	0.58	1.62
P9	Pearson Correlation	0.10	0.00	-0.06	0.07	-0.12	0.02
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.73	1.96	1.18	1.07	0.56	1.78
P10	Pearson Correlation	0.09	0.20	-0.01	0.29	0.25	0.09
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.86	0.18	1.83	0.02	0.05	0.85
P11	Pearson Correlation	-0.01	0.10	-0.03	0.00	0.06	-0.11
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.86	0.79	1.65	1.97	1.25	0.67
P12	Pearson Correlation	-0.08	-0.01	0.10	-0.04	0.02	-0.11
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.94	1.90	0.80	1.52	1.67	0.71
P13	Pearson Correlation	-0.09	-0.19	0.03	-0.08	-0.06	-0.23
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.91	0.23	1.59	0.99	1.20	0.09
P14	Pearson Correlation	0.13	-0.11	0.13	-0.07	-0.01	-0.01
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.48	0.75	0.48	1.16	1.85	1.89
P15	Pearson Correlation	0.03	0.31	0.10	0.14	-0.16	0.01
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.56	0.02	0.73	0.48	0.32	1.81
P16	Pearson Correlation	-0.11	-0.04	-0.07	0.04	-0.02	0.09
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.72	1.46	1.14	1.47	1.66	0.82

LISTENNING DIFFICLUTIES		MEMORY	COGNITIVE	COMPEN SATION	META COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	AFFECTIVE
P17	Pearson Correlation	−0.13	−0.08	−0.11	−0.03	−0.12	−0.09
	Sig. (2−tailed)	0.50	0.96	0.70	1.61	0.63	0.83
P18	Pearson Correlation	−0.08	−0.22	−0.14	−0.15	−0.24	−0.20
	Sig. (2−tailed)	0.95	0.12	0.42	0.43	0.07	0.16
P19	Pearson Correlation	0.04	−0.13	−0.23	−0.01	0.12	−0.17
	Sig. (2−tailed)	1.40	0.57	0.09	1.84	0.56	0.27
P20	Pearson Correlation	−0.10	−0.15	−0.03	0.00	−0.10	−0.10
	Sig. (2−tailed)	0.82	0.40	1.53	1.97	0.77	0.75
P21	Pearson Correlation	−0.17	0.07	−0.21	−0.02	−0.06	−0.14
	Sig. (2−tailed)	0.29	1.12	0.14	1.71	1.15	0.45
P22	Pearson Correlation	−0.14	−0.02	−0.21	0.09	−0.03	−0.01
	Sig. (2−tailed)	0.44	1.70	0.14	0.88	1.59	1.82
P23	Pearson Correlation	−0.12	−0.05	0.03	−0.01	−0.03	−0.17
	Sig. (2−tailed)	0.62	1.39	1.59	1.84	1.59	0.26
P24	Pearson Correlation	0.15	0.01	0.01	−0.11	−0.10	−0.22
	Sig. (2−tailed)	0.40	1.87	1.89	0.69	0.81	0.10
P25	Pearson Correlation	0.05	0.18	0.13	0.10	0.18	−0.12
	Sig. (2−tailed)	1.27	0.25	0.49	0.83	0.24	0.63
P26	Pearson Correlation	0.12	0.05	0.01	−0.01	0.09	−0.03
	Sig. (2−tailed)	0.56	1.36	1.89	1.85	0.90	1.57

Appendix 3

Significant Correlation results between Listening Difficulties and Choice Strategies of Listening Strategies of SMLA and SLLA

LD \ LS	MEM		COG		COM		META		SOC		AFF	
	SLLA	SMLA	SLLA	SMLA	SLLA	SMLA	SLLA	SMLA	SLLA	SMLA	SLLA	SMLA
P5	- 0.31*	- 0.18	0.00	- 0.43**	0.06	- 0.26	- 0.08	- 0.06	- 0.07	- 0.04	- 0.20	0.09
P6	0.32*	0.24	0.39	- 0.25	0.38*	- 0.23	0.45**	- 0.10	0.34*	- 0.31	0.17	0.12
P7	0.03	0.29	0.28	- 0.15	0.21	- 0.11	0.45**	- 0.01	0.37*	- 0.15	0.20	- 0.06
P9	0.16	0.09	0.17	- 0.30	0.15	- 0.25	0.14	0.01	0.26	- 0.40**	0.23	- 0.14
P10	0.10	0.12	0.37*	- 0.11	0.05	- 0.08	0.43**	0.07	0.47**	0.07	0.18	0.03
P13	- 0.23	0.15	- 0.14	- 0.32*	- 0.01	0.11	0.03	- 0.19	- 0.05	0.00	- 0.32*	- 0.09
P15	0.04	0.05	0.31	0.16	0.28	- 0.08	0.15	0.10	0.02	- 0.35*	- 0.24	0.26
P18	- 0.21	0.05	- 0.12	- 0.39**	- 0.08	- 0.21	- 0.04	- 0.25	- 0.22	- 0.23	- 0.12	- 0.27
P19	0.03	0.18	- 0.17	- 0.17	- 0.34*	- 0.07	0.07	- 0.06	0.01	0.30	- 0.06	- 0.27
P20	0.00	- 0.11	- 0.04	- 0.41**	0.00	- 0.04	0.08	- 0.03	- 0.12	- 0.04	- 0.11	- 0.05
P24	0.13	0.20	0.16	- 0.24	0.27	- 0.24	- 0.15	- 0.06	- 0.10	- 0.06	- 0.05	- 0.36*
P25	0.10	0.05	0.26	0.00	0.32*	- 0.03	0.19	- 0.02	0.21	0.19	- 0.10	- 0.11

Significance: *$p < 0.05$ **$p < 0.01$