

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LISTENING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY EFL FRESHMAN STUDENTS AND THEIR LISTENING PROFICIENCY

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Abstract

Listening is an active process of receiving, interpreting, and responding to spoken language. This process is supported by listening strategies, which are conscious cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective techniques that help learners understand and manage spoken input. This study investigates the levels of listening strategy use among EFL freshman students, categorized as low, moderate, and high, and examines whether these strategies are significantly related to their listening proficiency. It is a quantitative correlational design with 45 EFL freshmen students from a University in Surabaya, selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using a Listening Strategy Questionnaire and students' listening scores from the Test of English Proficiency (TEP), then analyzed with descriptive statistics and Spearman's rho. The results show that most students were high strategy users (71.1%). Socio-affective strategies used most often ($M=3.94$, high), followed by metacognitive strategies ($M=3.89$, high), while cognitive strategies were used at a moderate level ($M=3.41$). However, the correlation between overall strategy use and TEP listening scores was not significant ($p=0.719$). The p-value is higher than 0.05. Similarly, each strategy category was not significantly associated with students' listening scores. These findings suggest that listening instruction should combine strategy training with stronger language input and regular listening practice.

Keywords: Correlational Analysis, Listening Proficiency, Listening Strategies

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English language proficiency, especially listening skills, has become essential for academic and professional success. Listening involves various activities, such as understanding conversations, following lectures, analyzing multimedia content, and interpreting nonverbal cues. For a long time, listening in language learning was ignored by researchers and teachers. This is because it is believed that people will naturally pick up listening skills without the need to put in a lot of effort (Kazemi & Kiamarsi, 2017). However, effective listening is an active process that involves not only hearing but also interpreting and responding to spoken language (Renandya & Hu, 2018). Listening serves as a foundational skill in language acquisition, enabling learners to process information, engage in conversations, and comprehend academic content (C. C. M. Goh & Vandergrift, 2021).

For EFL learners, effective listening is important because it directly affects their ability to participate in classroom discussions, understand lecturers, and interact in English-speaking environments. According to Bennetch et al., (2021) the process of listening in professional and academic contexts consists of five elements: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding. It begins with receiving, or focusing our attention on listening input while filtering the distractions. Understanding follows, where meaning is given to spoken and non-spoken cues. In evaluating, listeners assess the relevance and credibility of the message. Remembering allows listeners to retain information for later use, and responding provides feedback that shows engagement. Together, these elements prove that listening is not passive but an analytical and interactive part of effective communication. EFL learners often face problems with listening which limit their understanding of spoken English, such as fast speech, unclear words, unfamiliar vocabularies, and limited knowledge of English. These difficulties lead to frustration, anxiety, and less participation in class (Zulfikar et al., 2025).

Overall, the use of poor listening strategy combined with all the struggles that learners face can cause bad understanding.

To overcome listening difficulties, learners need strategies such as active listening, using media, and collaborating with peers (Rost, 2024). Listening strategies refer to techniques that listeners use to improve their listening ability. They include actions like planning, monitoring, and using context to process and remember information. According to O'Malley & Chamot (1990), in EFL teaching strategies are grouped into three types: metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective. Cognitive listening strategies refer to the mental processes that learners use to understand spoken language more directly. Metacognitive strategies involve the regulation of cognitive processes through planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's listening performance. Socio-affective strategies cover the use of social interaction and emotional regulation to support listening comprehension. Using these strategies together, makes listening more effective.

Several studies have been investigating the relationship between listening strategies and listening proficiency, providing perspectives on how listening strategies affect learner listening proficiency. Study by Amin et al. (2011) explored this relationship among 80 secondary school students using SLI, SLQ, SLC, and think-aloud protocols, and found a significant correlation, where students who used strategies more effectively got higher scores. Similarly, Wahyuni & Inayati (2022) involving 62 eighth-grade students through surveys and interviews, found that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used. In contrast, Hidayanti & Umamah (2019) examined 140 university students and reported no significant gender differences and no correlation between strategy use, gender, and listening achievement. Meanwhile, Anggarista & Wahyudin (2022) found that metacognitive strategies were the most dominant among 38 EFL students and confirmed a significant correlation between strategy use and English proficiency. Despite differences in methodology and participants, these studies affirm that strategic listening behaviour is associated with listening performance.

However, there are only view study have explored in EFL freshman students, who face new challenges when starting higher education. To fill that gap, this study examining how freshman use listening strategies and how these strategies relate to their listening proficiency. The research questions are: (1) What levels of listening strategies do EFL freshman students employ? (2) Is there a significant relationship between the listening strategies used and the listening proficiency of the students? In line with these questions, the null hypothesis (H_0) posits that there is no significant relationship between the listening strategies employed by EFL freshman students and their listening proficiency, whereas the alternative hypothesis (H_a) proposes that there is a significant positive relationship between the listening strategies employed by EFL freshman students and their listening proficiency.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between listening strategies employed by EFL freshman students and their listening proficiency. The population of this study were EFL freshman students from a University in Surabaya. For the sample, the researcher used convenience sampling. Thus, this study involved 45 participants who served as the sample. The participants were selected because they were available and willing to complete the questionnaire. Creswell (2012) stated that sufficient sampling will be minimal 30 students for a correlational study that relates variables.

The study employed a Listening Strategy Questionnaire adopted from the study of Wahyuni & Inayati (2022) consisting of 24 items based on cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies using a five-point Likert scale to assess the participants' listening

proficiency, the researcher utilized their TEP (Test of English Proficiency) scores. The TEP (Test of English Proficiency) is a standardized English test adapted from the TOEFL. It is commonly administered by universities, including State University of Surabaya. Students' listening proficiency are presented in a table based on a CEFR-aligned listening proficiency rubric. Listening descriptors were derived from the Council of Europe's Self-Assessment Grid (2020), while the numerical score bands were based on TOEFL ITP and STAMP rubrics (Heyworth, 2006).

The data collection process is conducted by distributing a Google Form containing a closed-ended questionnaire to the target population. The questionnaire is designed to measure the types and frequency of listening strategies used by EFL learners. The TEP (Test of English Proficiency) scores were obtained from the language centre administrator. The collected data are securely stored and used solely for research purposes, following institutional ethical guidelines.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's rho correlation. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a value of 0.850, indicating that the instrument was reliable. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the results of the closed-ended questionnaire on listening strategies. Data were presented as the mean scores for each category of listening strategies. In addition, the minimum and maximum values for each category were also shown. Spearman's rho correlation was used to examine the relationship between listening strategies and listening proficiency. The non-parametric test was used because the data were not normally distributed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. Levels of Listening Strategies Used by EFL Freshman Students

a. *Students' overall listening strategy use level*

In this section, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to evaluate the average utilization of three distinct categories of listening strategies employed by students, cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. Based on (Oxford, 1990), the mean scores were interpreted and classified according to established criteria, a score ranging from 3.45 to 5.00 was designated as high, a score from 2.45 to 3.44 as moderate, and a score from 1.00 to 2.44 as low. The results of this analysis are encapsulated in the subsequent table.

Table 1. Students' overall listening strategy use level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid moderate	13	28.9	28.9	28.9
High	32	71.1	71.1	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Based on the overall frequency analysis of the Listening Strategy Questionnaire (LSQ), the majority of EFL freshman students demonstrated a high level of listening strategy use. Out of the 45 participants, 32 students (71.1%) were classified as high strategy users, while 13 students (28.9%) were categorized as

moderate users. None of the students were classified as low users, showing that all participants applied listening strategies to some degree during listening tasks. The large number of students in the high category suggests that most participants were actively involved in their listening process. Learners are likely aware of the difficulties in understanding spoken language, which encouraged them to use strategies to support their listening abilities. Regular listening activities in academic context, such as classroom tasks and assessments may also have contributed to the frequent use of strategies.

On the other hand, students categorized as moderate appeared to apply listening strategies less often. Although they used strategies when needed, they may have used them only in challenging situations, particularly when encountering difficulties. This can be influenced by differences in learning experience, confidence, or familiarity with strategic listening. Overall, the findings indicate that while listening strategy use among the participants was generally high, individual differences in the frequency of strategy application were still evident.

b. Descriptive Statistics of Listening Strategy Use

This part presents the descriptive statistical data of students' listening strategies. The data were collected and analyzed to show the overall tendencies. The results are displayed in Table 4.2 below.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of students' listening strategy use

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Metacognitive	45	1	5	3.89	.583
Cognitive	45	1	5	3.41	.486
Socio-Affective	45	1	5	3.94	.643
Valid N (listwise)	45				

Based on the overall mean scores of the three listening strategy categories, socio-affective strategies emerged as the most frequently used by the students, followed by metacognitive strategies, while cognitive strategies showed the lowest mean score.

The findings showed that the socio-affective strategy had scores between 1 to 5, with a mean score of 3.94, which is categorized as high based on Oxford (1990) classification. This means that students often employed socio-affective strategies in listening tasks. It suggests that they were able to control their emotions, reduce anxiety, and take part in social interaction, such as asking for clarification or cooperating with classmates, to support their listening comprehension.

Regarding metacognitive strategy, the results revealed that the scores also ranged from 1 to 5, with a mean score of 3.89. Based on Oxford's classification, this score falls into the high category. This shows indicates that most students frequently used metacognitive strategies during listening activities. In other words, they showed good awareness of their listening process, including planning how to listen, checking their understanding, and evaluating their performance after completing listening tasks.

Same as socio-affective and metacognitive, the results of cognitive strategy have score ranged from 1 to 5, with a mean score of 3.41. Based on Oxford's classification, this is considered as moderate. This shows that learner sometimes

applied strategies like translating, repeating information, or using context clues to understand the listening materials. However, these strategies were not used as consistently as socio-affective or metacognitive strategies.

The next section presents the findings on each category of the level of listening strategies employed by students. It describes students' level of listening strategies based on Oxford classification level (low, moderate, and high) and frequency distribution.

c. *Metacognitive Strategy Used*

Table 3. Students' metacognitive strategy use level

	Category	N	Percent
Valid	Moderate	9	20.0
	High	36	80.0
	Total	45	100.0

Based on the table above, the use of metacognitive strategy among 45 students is primarily in the higher range score. A total of 36 students are categorized as high within the criteria 3.45-5.00, 9 students are classified as moderate within scores between 2.45-3.44, and no students were categorized as low. These results suggest that most students who prioritize self-regulation and monitoring show a strong preference for evaluating what they have studied after their learning session. Learners actively rechecking their understanding after completing a listening practice to ensure their understanding is accurate. This reflective process is complemented by a high level of listening awareness, where learners are consciously identifying specific sounds that present difficulties and dedicate focused attention. These high score range proof that learners do not just listen passively but also employed a systematic approach to monitor their own progress and language weaknesses.

d. *Cognitive Strategy Used*

Table 4. Students' cognitive strategy use level

	Category	N	Percent
Valid	Moderate	22	48.9
	High	23	51.1
	Total	45	100.0

The results for cognitive strategy show an almost equal distribution between high and moderate levels. 23 students identified as High within 3.45 – 5.00, and closely 22 students categorized as moderate users. Same as metacognitive strategy, none of the participants were categorized as low. The data indicates that learner rely more on contextual and immersive learning rather than on simple memorization. Most of them preferred the use of familiar vocabulary to make guesses about the meaning of unfamiliar spoken content. Furthermore, they also show a strong preference on the use of modern media, such as watching English television program as a cognitive tool for learning spoken language.

e. Socio-Affective Strategy Used

Table 5. Students' socio-affective strategy use level

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Low	2	4.4
	Moderate	6	13.3
	High	37	82.2
	Total	45	100.0

Based on the table above, socio-affective strategy has the widest range of scores. Most of the 37 students are categorized as high, while 6 students were in moderate and 2 students in low levels. Students who categorized as high likely learning through English songs and various listening scripts. They also showed a strong preference using English language movies to train their listening abilities in more natural way. These media-driven strategies tend to be the most effective way to build confidence and stay motivated while dealing with the complexities of a foreign language.

2. The Relationship Between the Listening Strategy Employed by Students and Their Listening Proficiency

a. Correlation between Students' TEP Listening Scores and Overall Listening Strategy Use

Before showing the result of the correlation, the researcher provides participants' listening proficiency based on their Test of English Proficiency scores. The data are presented below:

Table 6. Students' CEFR levels

CEFR Level	Score Range	Frequency
A1	NA	0
A2	31–40	0
B1	41–50	15
B2	51–60	28
C1	61–66	2
C2	67–68	0
Total		45

Based on the table above, 28 students, or 62.2%, scored between 51 and 60 and were classified at the B2 level. This result suggests that most students were able to understand the main ideas and relevant details of spoken text with relatively good comprehension. Meanwhile, 15 students, or 33.3%, scored between 41 and 50 and were classified at the B1 level. This shows that some students had an intermediate level of listening proficiency, meaning that they could follow familiar topics but might still face difficulties when dealing with complex and rapid spoken language. Only 2 students with percentage of 4.4 % reached the C1 level. It means that these 2 students could understand longer texts and recognize implicit meaning.

Notably, no students were classified at the A1, A2, or C2 levels. The absence of A1 and A2 learners suggests that all participants had at least an intermediate level of listening proficiency, which is reasonable considering that they were EFL freshman students in an English education program. Similarly, the lack of students at the C2 level indicates that very few participants had reached near-native listening proficiency, which is expected at the freshman level. Overall, the findings show that the students' listening proficiency was predominantly concentrated at B2 level.

Furthermore, to examine the relationship between students' overall listening strategies and their listening proficiency, a Spearman's rho correlation test was conducted. The table below showed the result.

Table 7. Correlation between students' TEP listening score and overall listening strategy use

			TEP Listening	Overall Mean
Spearman's rho	TEP Listening	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.055
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.719
		N	45	45
	Overall Mean	Correlation Coefficient	.055	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.719	.
		N	45	45

The result showed that the correlation coefficient between the overall mean score of listening strategies and the TEP listening score was $\rho = 0.055$, with a significance value of $p = 0.719$ ($N = 45$). The significance value was greater than 0.05, the correlation was not statistically significant. Therefore, the findings fail to support the alternative hypothesis (H_a), which proposed that there is a significant positive relationship between the listening strategies employed by EFL freshman students and their listening proficiency. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, stating that there is no significant relationship between listening strategies and listening proficiency.

To gain a more detailed understanding of each category, a correlational analysis was conducted between the students' TEP listening scores and each listening strategy category. This analysis aimed to examine how each type of listening strategy is related to the students' listening proficiency.

b. Correlation Between Students' TEP Listening Scores and Each Listening Strategy Category

Table 8. Correlation between students' TEP listening scores and each listening strategy category

		TEP Listening Score	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Socio-Affective	
Spearman's rho	TEP Listening Score	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.103	.033	.216
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.503	.832	.153
		N	45	45	45	45

Metacognitive	Correlation Coefficient	-.103	1.000	.496**	.579**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.503	.	.001	.000
	N	45	45	45	45
Cognitive	Correlation Coefficient	.033	.496**	1.000	.312*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.832	.001	.	.037
	N	45	45	45	45
Socio-Affective	Correlation Coefficient	.216	.579**	.312*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.153	.000	.037	.
	N	45	45	45	45

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Based on the Spearman's rho correlation analysis, none of the three listening strategy categories showed a significant correlation with the students' TEP listening scores, as all significance values were higher than 0.05. The metacognitive strategy had a significance value of 0.503, indicating no significant relationship with listening proficiency. Likewise, the cognitive strategy showed a significance value of 0.832, which also suggests no correlation. In addition, the socio-affective strategy produced a significance value of 0.153, meaning that it was not significantly related to the students' listening scores. Overall, these findings suggest that although students frequently used metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies during listening activities, the use of each strategy type was not significantly associated with students' listening proficiency scores. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was no significant relationship between individual listening strategy categories and students' listening proficiency.

Discussion

1. Categories of Listening Strategies Used by EFL Freshman Students in Listening

Based on the descriptive results, EFL freshman students employed all types of listening strategies, with socio-affective and metacognitive strategies used at a high level, while cognitive strategies were used at a moderate level. This indicates that students tended to rely more on emotional motivation and self-regulation than on direct linguistic processing when completing listening tasks.

These findings are generally consistent with previous studies. Wahyuni and Inayati (2022) and Anggarista and Wahyudin (2022) reported that metacognitive strategies were the most dominant among EFL learners. Similarly, the present study revealed a high use of metacognitive strategies, indicating that students actively planned, monitored, and evaluated their listening process. The moderate use of cognitive strategies also aligns with previous findings.

However, a difference was identified in the use of socio-affective strategies. While previous studies found them less dominant, the present study showed that socio-affective strategies were used at a high level. This suggests that students frequently managed their

emotions and used media such as English songs and movies to support their listening comprehension.

The high use of metacognitive strategies supports the theory that effective listeners actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening process. In contrast, cognitive strategies were used at a moderate level, indicating that students sometimes applied strategies such as inferencing, translating, and summarizing, but not consistently. The high use of socio-affective strategies also highlights the importance of emotional control and social support in reducing anxiety and maintaining motivation during listening activities.

Overall, the findings confirm that effective listening combines cognitive processing, self-regulation, and emotional control. The dominance of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies suggests that EFL freshman students are aware of their limits and manage their learning process accordingly, supporting the idea that listening strategies can improve students' listening and overall language learning experience.

2. The Relationship Between Listening Strategy Used by Students and Their Listening Proficiency

Based on the results of the Spearman's rho correlation revealed that there is no significance relationship between listening strategies employed by EFL freshman students and their listening proficiency. This contrasts with several previous studies, such as Amin et al., (2011), who found a significant positive relationship between listening strategy use and listening comprehension, showing that students with higher strategy use tended to achieve better listening scores. Similarly, Anggarista & Wahyudin (2022) reported a significant correlation between language learning strategies and students' English proficiency, with metacognitive strategies being the most frequently used and strongly connected to higher proficiency. However, this research aligns with Hidayanti & Umamah (2019), who also found no significant relationship between listening strategy use and their listening proficiency. It means that this relationship may depend on factors like student's proficiency level learning environment, and the type of listening test used.

As mentioned before by Bennetch et al., (2021), active listening is a process that involves receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. Learners may use strategies at certain phases but still face problems at other phases. For example, socio-affective strategies might help reduce anxiety, but they do not directly help with decoding speech. This means that the use of strategy alone is not sufficient to describes the result of listening proficiency, because it requires to combine all the elements rather than individual efforts.

Based on this, listening in EFL is also a skill that depends on vocabulary knowledge, grammar, and exposure authentic input (Liu et al., 2025; Rusmiati et al., 2024). Strategies like predicting and summarizing can support comprehension, but it cannot replace the need of meaningful input. Without enough practice, strategies may provide only short-term support and may not lead to long-term improvement in proficiency, which explains why frequent strategy use does not always correspond to higher proficiency outcomes.

In addition, another possible explanation is that metacognitive and socio-affective strategies often focus more on awareness, confidence, and emotional regulation than on actual comprehension. Learners might know how to plan and monitor their listening (C. Goh & Taib, 2006), but they may not apply it during listening tasks. Similarly, socio-affective strategies which can boost motivation and reduce anxiety (Bao & Guan, 2019), but they do not directly improve decoding or meaning-making. Furthermore, strategies are dependent on individual and context, so their effectiveness varies between learners and

tasks. Listening tests often emphasize the accuracy of recognizing detail or main idea comprehension within limited time. In this context, technique like note-taking or predicting may not affect the listening scores because the test focuses more on results rather than process. This lack of alignment between the use of listening strategy and test design can make the results of the relationship between strategies and proficiency weak.

Finally, although students often employed different listening strategies during activities, the use of these strategies did not significantly contribute to higher listening proficiency scores. This shows that listening strategies may work as supportive aids rather than as direct predictors of listening proficiency. Improvements in listening proficiency may depend on other factors beyond strategy use alone, such as language exposure, vocabulary knowledge, and listening experience. This helps explain why the study found no significant correlation between listening strategies and listening proficiency.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings, it can be concluded that most EFL freshman students showed a high level of listening strategy use, while the rest were at a moderate level, with no students classified as low. Among the three strategies, socio-affective strategies were used most frequently, followed by metacognitive strategies, while cognitive strategies were used at a moderate level, indicating that students depended more on emotional control, motivation, social interaction, and self-regulation. However, the correlation analysis revealed that listening strategies were not significantly related to listening proficiency ($\rho = 0.055$, $p = 0.719$), suggesting that strategy use alone does not directly determine students' listening proficiency. These findings imply that although listening strategies support the listening process, they function more as supportive tools rather than direct predictors of proficiency. Therefore, listening instruction should not only focus on strategy training but also be balanced with language input, vocabulary and grammar development, and exposure to authentic listening materials. It is also suggested that students increase their exposure to spoken English through various listening activities, while future research is recommended to explore other factors influencing listening proficiency and apply more varied research methods to gain deeper insights.

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