

The Impact of Listening Strategy Instruction on Listening Comprehension: A Study in an English as a Foreign Language Context

Nga Thi Hang Ngo

(ngango158@gmail.com)

Tay Bac University, Vietnam

Abstract

The important role of listening strategy instruction has been increasingly recognised in developing listening comprehension. However, only a few studies on listening strategy instruction have explored this issue from the learners' perspective whose voices are critically important in providing insights into how students learn and improve listening comprehension. The present study explores changes in listening comprehension proficiency of 27 English as a Foreign Language students in Vietnam after receiving an explicit listening strategy instruction. Using a mixed methods case study design, the current study collected data from listening tests, questionnaires and focus group interviews. Results from one-way repeated measures ANOVA indicate a significant difference of pre- and post-listening test scores. In addition, students' explanation provides insight into how listening strategy use, listening practice, and affective factors contributed to their listening comprehension improvement. Implications for teachers and policy makers were made based on the findings.

1 Introduction

Although listening is generally considered the most difficult skill to teach and learn (Field, 2008), teaching listening skills, especially listening strategy-based instruction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting has not been widely researched as other language skills (Plonsky, 2011). Among innovative approaches to listening instruction, listening strategy instruction (LSI) has been supported by a number of scholars (Siegel, 2013; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010) because of its positive and wide-ranging impacts on EFL learners. LSI has been reported to improve students' listening comprehension and enhance their self-efficacy, motivation, and confidence (Cross, 2011; Graham & Macaro, 2008; Yan, 2012; Yeldham & Gruba, 2016). However, there is a dearth of studies providing insights into learners' perceptions of the impacts of LSI in a particular context while the effectiveness of LSI is context-bound (Carrell, 1998; Cohen, 2011). It is essential to explore how LSI works in an actual classroom to gain an in-depth understanding about students' learning process in order to help them develop their listening skills (Siegel, 2013). In other words, it is critically important to gain insights into how students learn and improve listening comprehension in order to make changes in teaching and learning listening. Forbes and Fisher (2015, p. 13) reason "if there is a change in proficiency, it is also valuable to focus on the reasons why." In the Vietnamese context, a number of studies (Do, 2007; Vu & Shah, 2016) found that for EFL students, listening is the most difficult skill. These students might lack directions on how to listen. They are not equipped with appropriate strategies to independently develop their listening

comprehension. Leaving students to self-study, without equipping them with self-directed learning skills, therefore can explain the unexpected low levels of listening proficiency (Nguyen, 2013; Vu & Shah, 2016). Thus, there is a need to provide the students with tools that will facilitate the development of their listening skills. Only then perhaps will the Vietnamese EFL students' listening proficiency improve. This study, therefore, examines changes in Vietnamese EFL students' listening comprehension when participating in an LSI intervention and factors affecting these changes.

2 Literature review

Whilst the definition of strategies is largely controversial, there is general agreement on the element of consciousness in the concept of strategy. In this study, the term listening strategy refers to the conscious activities that learners take to comprehend, recall and memorize information (Goh, 2005). For the classification of strategy, the study employed a listening strategy taxonomy framework that was adapted from Goh (2002), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), and Vandergrift (1997). This taxonomy divides listening strategies into metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies are mental activities that regulate the language-learning process, while cognitive strategies are defined as mental activities for processing the language to accomplish a task. Social/affective strategies, on the other hand, are related to interaction or affective control in language learning (Vandergrift, 1997).

Strategy instruction can generally be classified into implicit or explicit and integrated into or separated from an EFL course. In implicit learning strategy instruction, strategies are introduced through activities without learners noticing that they are learning strategies, and students then practice and transfer these strategies to other learning contexts (Grenfell & Harris, 1999). On the other hand, in explicit strategy instruction, teachers inform learners about strategies, their benefits and teach them how to use these strategies appropriately (Cohen, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 2011). The strategy instruction can be integrated into or separated from a learning course. While all models of strategy instruction aim to provide learners with strategies to successfully complete listening tasks (Field, 2008), many researchers (e.g., Chamot, 2008; Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2011) advocate to both integrated and explicit strategy instruction since they can provide learners with opportunities to know how, when and why to use strategies. As a result, they can actively make use of strategies to complete listening tasks and evaluate their success. For example, despite different contexts and participants, both Ozeki (2000) and Thompson and Rubin (1996) agreed that explicitly teaching listening strategies can develop students' listening comprehension. This finding is a response to a study of Bozorgian and Pillay (2013) who used the participants' first language to instruct students in listening strategies. The results indicated that the listening comprehension of students who received LSI significantly increased in comparison with the non-intervention group. Although these studies provide empirical evidence of the positive impact of LSI, they did not clearly uncover the process of changes in listening comprehension due to the use of pre-post test design. This raises the question of how changes in listening comprehension occur in order to inform teachers of the appropriate teaching listening approach to facilitate learners' listening comprehension.

Another issue that strategy instruction concerns is the selection of strategies to teach. One popular approach advocated by a number of scholars (e.g., Thompson & Rubin, 1996) is to teach ineffective learners the strategies that effective learners used. However, Graham and Macaro (2008, p. 756) argue that strategy instruction is not "simply transmitting the strategies of successful listeners to unsuccessful ones." Griffiths (2013) suggests including the strategies used by both elementary and advanced learners, and strategies that stimulate students' strategy repertoire, in strategy instruction. Scholars in the field (Cross, 2011; Graham & Macaro, 2008; Oxford, 2011) support the selection of strategies based on learners' needs with empirical evidence. For example, Graham and Macaro (2008) compared listening comprehension improvement of learners of French in control and treatment groups with LSI and indicated that strategy instruction, which was learner-centred, resulted in positive outcomes. Recently, De Silva and Graham (2015) state that assessment of

learners' strategy use and needs before the intervention is an essential base to provide them with a selection of strategies for them to choose from.

While a number of studies (A. Chen, 2009; Y. Chen, 2007; Seo, 2005; Thompson & Rubin, 1996) focus on training individual strategies, the focus of a study by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) was on the orchestra of strategies. Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) indicated that the students of French receiving strategy instruction outperformed their counterparts in the non-intervention group. The study stresses the importance of teaching students to use a repertoire of strategies, which echoes with Graham and Macaro (2008) who attribute a repertoire of strategies as one of the factors contributing to the listening comprehension of students.

The review shows that one area of listening instruction research that has emphasised deeper attention to practice is learner-centred listening strategy instruction. However, in Vietnam, compared to other skill areas, teaching and learning EFL listening is often reported to be "lagging behind" (Vu & Shah, 2016, p. 53). Although listening is integrated into the curriculum, teachers do not teach this skill in practice. Where listening is taught, it is not taught appropriately. It is claimed to be testing students' listening ability because they are simply required to listen and check (Do, 2007). The popular use of the grammar-translation method, which focuses on grammar and vocabulary (Nguyen, 2016; Vu & Shah, 2016), is a possible reason why listening is neglected in the classroom. In addition, teachers' reliance on traditional listening teaching methods, that is, "listen and check," may account for the low level of listening motivation and confidence among Vietnamese EFL students. Empirical evidence reveals that Vietnamese EFL students experience high anxiety levels and low motivation when learning listening skills (e.g., Dao, 2013; Luu & Phung, 2013). This is understandable, as Field (2012) argues that the "listen and answer" approach puts pressure on students, as it provides no indication of how to listen. Teachers in this context also admit that they have difficulties engaging students in listening lessons (Luu & Phung, 2013). This calls for alternative effective and appropriate approaches for teaching listening in this context.

The discussion above leads to the paramount importance of exploring how to teach listening strategies to assist learners to improve their listening comprehension in the Vietnamese context. The present study is, therefore, to address the following questions:

1. What is the impact of the listening strategy instruction on Vietnamese EFL students' listening comprehension?
2. What are the factors affecting changes in their listening comprehension?

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

While most of the previous studies into LSI (Graham & Macaro, 2008; Seo, 2005; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010) used experimental design, this research design may not be feasible for classroom-based research because "the task of eliminating all outside influences for listening may be impractical for many teacher-researchers, who operate within their own respective contextual and institutional limitations" (Siegel, 2015, p. 2). Moreover, the use of research design is decided by its research objective (Siegel, 2015). The present study adopted a case study design because this fits its purpose well. Firstly, the current study aimed to investigate a group of EFL students' changes in listening comprehension performance when participating in a programme of LSI in an actual classroom context. Therefore, the reason that a case study design was appropriate for this study is that the separation of the phenomenon from its context is impossible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A case study design for this study also facilitated a rich, dense description, and in-depth understanding of a particular context that it can generate (Denscombe, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007). The current study aimed to gain in-depth insights into changes of a group of EFL students in their listening comprehension performance in the context of the LSI. In addition, a case study design was chosen because this particular design allows for the use of a mixed methods approach (Denscombe, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) which is appropriate for the purpose of the present study.

3.2 *Participants*

The researcher selected a class of students with whom to implement the intervention using purposeful sampling. The group of students was selected based on the following criteria: (1) They were English majors, because non-English majors do not take listening as a separate course, which is integrated with other language skills; (2) They were enrolled in the incoming semester so that their timetable would fit into the researcher's fieldwork, as the researcher had to follow the timetable fixed by the university. A group of 27 students, who were in their second year of study in a public university in Vietnam and met the requirements, was selected as all of them had agreed to participate in the study voluntarily. Regarding the participants' age and gender, female participants outnumbered their male counterparts. Of the 27 students who participated in the survey, 26 were female (96.3%) and one was male (3.7%). All were between 20 and 21 years old and were at a pre-intermediate level of English, or B1 as measured by the Cambridge Preliminary English Test 3.

3.3 *Research instruments*

Data was collected from the following instruments:

3.3.1 *Listening tests*

Listening tests were used to measure changes in listening comprehension. The tests were delivered before LSI (Test 1), in the middle of LSI (Test 2) and after LSI (Test 3). Three listening test papers in Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET) were used. All of the three tests had the same format, although the content of each was different to avoid students being able to recall the previous tests when taking later tests. Each listening test consisted of twenty-five questions in four parts. The first listening part contained seven multiple-choice questions on a short talk related to pictures provided to the students. The second listening part had five multiple-choice questions on a longer talk. In the third part, students listened to a talk and completed notes. The final part related to a conversation between two people, with students answering true or false questions.

A Rasch Item Response Theory for item analysis was performed using WINSTEPS to measure validity and reliability of the tests. Infit mean squares of all items were in an acceptable range of Infit, approximately 0.75 to 1.3 (McNamara, 1996). The reliability statistics for Listening Test 1, Listening Test 2, and Listening Test 3 were 0.82, 0.81, and 0.84 respectively, and therefore showed high reliability. In other words, the high reliability and good Infit values indicated that the tests were not too easy or too difficult for the participants. Hence, they were suitable for measuring the participants' English listening proficiency.

3.3.2 *Focus group interviews*

Focus group interviews were used to investigate students' perception of LSI. The use of focus groups has been chosen because it is considered an effective way to evaluate a programme or a course (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2010). All of the students were invited to attend the focus group interviews, except four students who participated in the pilot interview, so 23 out of the 27 students participated. These students were divided into five groups with two groups of four and three groups of five. The main interview questions were as follows:

- 1) Do you feel your English comprehension improved in this semester?
- 2) What caused such an improvement?
- 3) Why do you think so?
- 4) How did your participation in the explicit strategy instruction help you understand listening texts/conversations?
- 5) How did your participation in the explicit strategy instruction change the ways you complete listening tasks: T/F, 'Wh' questions, filling missing information, and multiple-choice questions.

The focus group interviews were conducted in Vietnamese after LSI, and each interview was between 70-120 minutes.

3.4 *Methods of analysis*

This study includes both quantitative and qualitative data. For the quantitative data, interpretations of one-way repeated measures ANOVA were conducted to measure changes in listening scores over three time periods. Before conducting one-way repeated measures ANOVA, the test scores were checked for normal distribution. For the listening comprehension, mean values were calculated. For the qualitative data, NVivo software version 10 was used to assist in content analysis as proposed by Creswell (2014). More specifically, inductive coding was conducted following the coding process suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008) which allowed for patterns, themes, and categories to emerge from the data rather than imposing them earlier. To trace references from the data, G0 indicates group interview. For example, Tien (G03) refers to Tien who was interviewed in group 3. All names are pseudonyms. The results of both quantitative and qualitative analysis were combined in order to interpret the findings.

3.5 *LSI Intervention*

Assessing students' current strategy use is critically important in determining what strategies are selected to teach in the current programme (e.g., De Silva & Graham 2015; Graham & Macaro 2008). Thus, based on the listening strategies that the students used when listening in Phase 1 (see Ngo, 2015), the listening strategies selected to be taught were monitoring, evaluation, identifying main ideas, inferencing, prediction, note-taking, elaboration, summarising and deduction/induction. These strategies were integrated into a regular listening course (from February to May) and taught by the researcher. The intervention consisted of 22 sessions in 11 weeks. The stages of each session in the intervention were adapted from learning strategy instruction models by O'Malley and Chamot (1990). This model comprises of eight steps as shown in Table 1: warm-up and revision, presentation, practice, evaluation, feedback from peers, expansion, self-study and feedback from teacher.

Table 1. Steps of Conducting Listening Strategy Instruction Intervention

Steps	Activities	Responsibility	Time (minutes)
Warm-up/ revision	- Greeting and talking about daily activities or playing games - Revising strategies learned in the previous lesson.	Students	10
Presentation	- Teacher thinks aloud to model how to use a listening strategy with examples. - Teacher gives a definition of the listening strategies and explains how and when to employ these strategies. - Students together with their peers complete the handout with what the strategies are, how, when and why they are used.	Teacher and students	20
Practice	- Students practice using the listening strategies they have learned through the listening tasks in their normal course. - Students work in pairs to discuss which strategies they select to complete the tasks.	Teacher and students	30
Evaluation	- Students reflect on their own strategy use and listening performance on the evaluation sheet.	Students	7
Peer feedback	- Students, with the teacher's help if necessary, give comments on the strategy use and listening performance of other students based on their evaluation sheet.	Students (teacher)	8
Expansion	- Students transfer strategies to new tasks, combine strategies into clusters, develop their repertoire of preferred strategies.	Students and teacher	25
Self-study	- Students are given some listening tasks to do as homework.	Students	
Teacher feedback	- Teacher provides comments on the strategy use and listening comprehension based on the students' reflective journals.	Teacher	

4 Findings

4.1 *What is the impact of the listening strategy instruction on Vietnamese EFL students' listening comprehension?*

Findings gained from listening tests and focus-group interviews showed evidence of the development of listening comprehension, which is discussed in more details in two sections: changes in the listening test scores and perceived changes in listening comprehension.

4.1.1 *Changes in the listening test scores*

The results from the one-way repeated measures ANOVA showed that the students' listening test scores significantly changed towards the end of the LSI. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Changes in Listening Scores across Three Listening Tests (N = 27)

Tests	M	Std. Devia	Skewness		Kurt	
			Stati	Std. E	Stati	Std. E
Listening Te 9.	9.74	5.46	0.59	0.44	-0.41	0.87
Listening Te 11	11.59	5.19	0.58	0.44	-0.26	0.87
Listening Te 14	14.40	5.36	0.11	0.44	-0.05	0.87

The mean values for Listening Test 1, Listening Test 2, and Listening Test 3 were 9.74 (SD = 5.46), 11.59 (SD = 5.19), and 14.40 (SD = 5.36) respectively. Wilks Lambda = 0.17, $F(2,25) = 61.14$, $p < 0.01$, partial eta squared = 0.83. The large effect size of 0.83 indicates the practical significance of the results. Results show a significant change in the scores for Listening Test 1, Listening Test 2, and Listening Test 3. Table 3 below presents means and standard deviations of the listening tests.

Table 3. Mean Difference between Listening Tests

Listening tests	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference between Listening tests	
				Mean Difference	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 2	-1.85*	0.21	.00	1	2
	-4.66*	0.44	.00		3
2 1	1.85*	0.21	.00	2	1
	-2.81*	0.37	.00		3
3 1	4.67*	0.44	.00	3	1
	2.81*	0.37	.00		2

The results provided in the Pairwise Comparison indicated that there was a significant difference in test scores between Listening Test 1 and Listening Test 2 (mean difference was 1.85), Listening Test 2 and Listening Test 3 (mean difference was 2.81), and Listening Test 1 and Listening Test 3 (mean difference was 4.67). All Sig. values were less than 0.05, which show the significant differences among scores for the three listening tests. Specifically, the mean difference between scores in Listening Test 1 and Listening Test 2 was smaller than that between scores in Listening Test 2 and Listening Test 3. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In conclusion, the results showed that the scores on the three listening tests changed significantly and there were significant differences among the three tests. It is not possible, however, to conclude definitely that the changes in listening comprehension were the result of the participation in LSI. This claim is supported by perceived changes in listening comprehension of the students when they participated in LSI.

4.1.2 Perceived changes in listening comprehension

The findings indicated that students perceived LSI to have a positive impact on listening comprehension. Surprisingly, all 23 participants reported improvement in listening comprehension after participating in the LSI course.

When being asked how their LSI participation impacted on their listening comprehension, some students stated that they could understand the listening texts more effectively than previously.

For example, Lam (G02) explained that she could get the gist of spoken input, which she did not understand before her participation in LSI:

In the past, I listened to the whole text without understanding what they (speakers) said. Now I might not understand all information in the listening text, however, I can have general understanding of what is said based on the key words.

Similarly, Tien (G03) highlighted how her listening comprehension changed after her participation in LSI:

I can understand what they talk about when I listen. When I did not know to use listening strategies, I did not understand what I heard clearly and deeply. It was very blur.

Students appeared to understand spoken input more clearly and deeply after their LSI participation. The evidence of the perceived listening comprehension improvement found in focus group interviews was illuminated into two themes: changes in competence in listening task completion and changes in comprehension of real life listening activities.

4.1.3 Changes in competence in listening task completion

The improvement in competence in listening task completion centres on three sub-themes: effectiveness of listening, accuracy of listening task completion, and efficiency of task completion.

Positive changes in their ability to complete listening tasks were demonstrated through the ways students completed different types of listening tasks. Improved results in the gap-filling listening task indicated that students learned to focus on particular information (selective strategies). As Tra (G03) explained:

I am better at doing the gap-filling listening tasks. When I did not learn listening strategies, I listened to the text inattentively while looking at the statement that contained the blanks. I got lost and failed to get to the words I needed to complete listening tasks. Now I know what information I need so I can do this type of task more correctly.

Some students also found that they could do tasks such as reordering images, multiple choice or identifying main ideas more effectively. As Trinh (G04) responded:

I have made great progress in completing listening tasks such as arranging pictures in the correct order or identifying the main ideas in a talk. These types of listening tasks used to be very difficult to me.

Based on students' input, LSI participation provided the students with the ability to deal with different types of listening tasks. Students further stated that they could more easily deal with tasks of different levels of difficulty by using listening strategies. As Tien (G03) remarked that "Application of listening strategies helps me comprehend listening texts of different difficulties, not only the easy ones."

Another improvement that students reported is a higher level of accuracy in listening task completion in comparison with the past. The following quotes lend support to this position:

I used to depend on my feelings when I listened and therefore, I sometimes did listening tasks successfully but more often I got the wrong answers. Now I can do most listening tasks successfully (Chau, G02).

When I have not learned listening strategies, I listened without any focus and looked at all given statements. Thus, I used to lose concentration and control and could not get the information needed. Now I identify the statements that relate to the gaps and I can complete it more correctly (Tien, G03).

The accuracy of listening task completion seems to reflect the idea that LSI participation improved the students' focus and purpose when attempting the listening tasks. As a result, they were able to control their feelings and apply a listening process that facilitated improved listening comprehension and success in completion of the task.

Listening efficiently was considered one of the results of LSI participation. This result is reflected in a comparison between the number of times students listened before and after their LSI participation. For example, Tien (G03) assessed her listening comprehension by the number of times she needed to listen before comprehending, and the use of listening strategies helped her to understand what she heard in fewer attempts:

In the past, when I did not understand something I listened again. Sometimes I listened up to ten times. Now I can understand what is said by the second listening.

In short, students have made a number of positive changes in completing different types of listening tasks after participating in the LSI. Prior to the intervention, their only option was to keep listening hard, word for word to every type of listening task. After the LSI, they began to apply an array of listening strategies depending on the types of listening tasks required, which makes them more successful in completing these tasks. More evidence of improvement in listening comprehension as a result of LSI participation is presented in the following section.

4.1.4 Changes in comprehension in real life listening

The participants in focus group interviews perceived that their listening comprehension improved in a variety of listening situations outside the classroom, ranging from songs, TV news, films in English, to communicating with native English speakers. For example, Binh (G01) elaborated that she could not understand any words in an English song before participating in LSI, but after LSI she can:

When I download new English songs to listen, I find that I can understand better. At the post intervention, I can even take note of all the words, maybe some words are not correct, but I can summarise general content. I can obtain more comprehension when listening to English songs.

Some students also considered changes to the way they watched English films, a self-evaluation of their listening comprehension improvement. For instance, Lam (G02) explained that she used to watch English films in Vietnamese because she could not understand these films in English. After LSI, she could comprehend the films with English subtitles.

Although students rarely have opportunities to communicate in English outside class, it is noteworthy when one student (Minh, group 5) found her listening comprehension improved when she communicated with native English speakers:

I see my listening comprehension greatly improves which is not only shown in the test results but also the comprehension of the listening texts I listen by myself and particularly, what native speakers said. Understanding what the native speakers want to convey when I communicate with them indicates that I get improvement in my listening comprehension. It is a better evaluation.

In general, after participating in the LSI intervention, the students could understand songs, TV programmes and films in English. Moreover, their oral communication skills with native speakers seemed to be improved.

4.2 What are the factors affecting changes in listening comprehension?

The data from focus group interviews provide more insights into how students perceived the usefulness of listening strategies to their listening comprehension improvement, which is presented in the following section.

4.2.1 *The application of listening strategies*

All participants in the focus group interviews commented that the use of listening strategies contributed to their listening improvement. The experience of improving due to the application of listening strategies is demonstrated in a typical extract from group 1:

- Interviewer: How useful do you think listening strategies are?
- Vy: They help me complete listening tasks better and more easily. Prior to the intervention, I just listened and completed listening tasks with any information I could hear.
- Hau: I know how to do a listening task more scientifically since I learnt to use strategies.
- Binh: Participating in the intervention makes me more conscious of my listening, I know what I am listening to and the information I should pay attention to, I find it really useful. However, at pre-intervention, I just tried to listen all information, but I couldn't which caused failure in comprehension.
- Hong: As a result of participating in the intervention, I am aware of what I am listening to, for example, I know what I do before, while and after listening. I know how to use listening strategies. I can listen better when I apply these strategies.

All the members of the group joined in this conversation, as they appeared to have had similar experiences. Vy (G01) even observed that all of her classmates listened better since they learned listening strategies: "I agree with my friends. I think all students in the class can use listening strategies to complete listening tasks more successfully."

The impact of listening strategies in listening comprehension improvement was highlighted when students compared how they listened before and after their LSI participation. For example, Vy (G01) commented that LSI provided her with a clear direction of how to listen, which was totally different from what she learned before, that is, given the answers of the listening tasks after listening.

In addition, students recognised that application of listening strategies helped them cope with a variety of listening tasks with different levels of difficulty. For example, Thoan (G04) confided that "I can understand difficult listening texts that I could not do prior to the LSI." Taking it in more details, students described how listening strategies such as planning, evaluation, directed attention, selective attention, note-taking, inferencing, and monitoring helped them listen effectively. While Dan (G03) asserted that "I can remember information when I use note taking strategy," Thanh (G05) reported that "I feel I comprehend more as I can interpret the information I hear after I learned and used inferencing strategies." Uyen (G04) responded that preparing before listening and focusing on specific information were the key strategies for her success in listening comprehension:

I think I listened much better than I did before. I used to miss information because I did not identify what I was listening to. Now I listening better, I am aware of the information I need to listen to.

In particular, six students reported that a combination of flexibility and appropriateness in the application of a system of listening strategies was extremely useful for them to improve their listening comprehension. For example, one of them (Binh, G01) shared that "I am better at listening because I have a plan before listening and I know how to do when I listen."

In sum, all of the students valued the use of listening strategies for the improvement of their listening comprehension. This is because the application of listening strategies provided them with a clear direction or approach to do listening tasks, which was completely different from their listening learning experience before their participation in LSI. Students also described in detail how listening strategies helped them improve their listening comprehension such as the use of planning, evaluation, and selective and direct attention strategies. Particularly, the use of a repertoire of listening strategies appropriately and flexibly had a vital role in the students' listening comprehension improvement.

4.2.2 *Listening practice*

The analysis from focus group interviews revealed that listening comprehension improvement seems to be the result of doing more listening practice as mentioned by 16 students. For example, Hong (G01) believed that her listening comprehension ability changes positively because she spent more time listening. Interestingly, she admitted that listening strategies, which helped her listen better, are a reason for her to desire to listen more:

Hong: I think my listening comprehension improves because I do more listen practice.

Interviewer: Why do you do more listen practice?

Hong: Because I can comprehend more when I use listening strategies. We normally want to do more when we have knowledge about something. When I listen more, I get used to the sounds, stress, and intonation so that when the speed is fast, I still understand. Moreover, listening strategies facilitate my understanding.

It appeared that listening strategies that are closely related to success in listening comprehension resulted in an increase in listening practice. This is confirmed by Binh's (G01) response that "I used to rarely practise listening, I comprehend more since I learned and used listening strategies, thus, I did more listening practice."

Moreover, there is evidence of a two-way interaction between an increase in listening practice and listening comprehension improvement. For example, May's (G01) response clearly demonstrated a link between listening more and listening comprehension:

I think I get more success in listening as I do more listening. I seldom did this before. Now I listen every week, not only the homework, but also other listening sources. When I comprehend more, I listen more. When I am aware of how to listen effectively, I can comprehend more.

In a nutshell, students perceived more listening practice as a factor that contributed to their listening comprehension improvement. They claimed the use of listening strategies encouraged them to listen more, which resulted in listening comprehension improvement. It appears that the root of listening comprehension lies in the use of listening strategies.

4.2.3 *Affective factors*

During the interviews, students in five focus groups volunteered to talk about their changes in affective factors including motivation and self-efficacy during the LSI which in turn led to changes in listening comprehension.

Almost all of the students ($n = 18$) in the five focus groups regarded motivation as an indicator of listening comprehension improvement. A comparison between level of motivation before and after LSI showed that the higher level of listening motivation resulted in more listening comprehension. In turn, more success in listening comprehension motivated the students to perform better. This position is typically reflected in Vy's (G01) experience:

I am better at listening and I am more motivated. When I am more motivated, I listen better. Generally, we only learn well when we are motivated. In the past, I did not like listening; I felt it was something odd.

In addition, as many as 20 students in five focus groups associated their listening comprehension improvement with an increase in self-efficacy. This can be seen in the way they compared their listening confidence before and after their participation in the LSI. For instance, Chau (G02) noted that before her participation in LSI, she lacked confidence in listening and that LSI made a difference. She explained that "Now I am more confident, but prior to the LSI, I was confused when I listened. I am more confident and relaxed which makes my listening results higher." In Tien's (G03) opinion, her LSI participation attributed to her self-efficacy in listening, and that in turn led to her listening comprehension improvement: "I am more active when I participate in the LSI programme. I know how to do different types of listening tasks. I am more confident in listening; hence, I can comprehend more."

To summarise, students credited their increase in motivation and self-efficacy in listening to listening comprehension improvement. This is understandable as Vy (G01) stated that successful learning happened when learners were motivated and Chau (G02) is an example showing that higher listening self-efficacy is closely linked to higher listening comprehension.

5 Discussion

The findings of this study showed the effectiveness of LSI in students' listening comprehension and confirms previous research studies on LSI by Bozorgian and Pillay (2013), Ozeki (2000) and Thompson and Rubin (1996), who report that LSI is an effective approach to enhance listening comprehension. In contrast with previous LSI studies (e.g., Graham & Macaro, 2008; Seo, 2005) which solely used listening tests to investigate students' listening comprehension, the present study concurs with Y. Chen (2007) and Siegel (2013) which highlight the merits of the students' perception of their listening comprehension improvement under the impact of LSI. In particular, the present study indicates that students' listening comprehension demonstrated in not only classroom settings, but also their real life listening activities such as listening to English songs, TV programmes, and communicating in English. This suggests the integration of real-life listening materials into the curriculum to encourage the use of strategies in wider contexts as Lynch (2009) states listening instruction should prepare learners for real-life listening activities.

This study shows that listening strategy application is a factor leading to improved listening comprehension and also provides ample evidence to support the position of Griffiths (2015) that strategy use is closely linked to learning performance. This finding is in agreement with previous studies (Bozorgian, 2012; Seo, 2005) which also claim the benefits of using strategies in listening comprehension. However, this study provides greater details about how and why the use of strategies facilitates listening comprehension from the students' perspectives. The findings of this study echo with Graham (2003) who stresses that the manner of strategy use weighs more than the frequency of strategy use.

Dissimilar to A. Chen (2009) and Goh (2008) who argue that listening hard does not lead to listening comprehension, the present study found that the increase in listening practice enhanced listening comprehension. The difference may be possibly explained by the way of listening. The students in the present study did more listening practice as motivated by the use of listening strategies taught. Having a clear direction of how to listen and being provided with strategies to tackle listening problems and improve listening comprehension seemed to make listening hard effective. This finding emphasises the need to equip students with the listening strategies as a tool for them to independently achieve their listening goals. Creating more opportunities for students to do listening practice is a critical issue in making use of strategies to improve listening comprehension. The findings that motivation and self-efficacy attributed to improvement in listening comprehension empirically support the notion that motivation and self-efficacy play fundamental roles in achievement in second language learning acquisition (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006; Vandergrift, 2005). That the high level of self-efficacy and motivation is related to success in listening comprehension suggests a need to maintain these affective factors during the learning process. However, the findings are partly inconsistent with Siegel (2013) who reported that his participants were motivated but unconfident as the result of participation in an explicit LSI. The activities in LSI of the present study that created chances for the students to interact with other students and teachers may have contributed to the increase in self-efficacy and motivation. Sharing with others may have made students feel that they were not in isolation in dealing with difficulties during the learning process, thus making them believe they could achieve their learning goals. Moreover, motivation may have been created from the learning environment where the students were not passive receivers, but actively attended in the learning activities. The findings of the present study highlight the importance of building up students' self-efficacy and increasing their motivation, which in turn, generates a positive learning outcome.

6 Conclusions and implications

The findings in this study contribute to LSI literature by providing evidence of the positive impact of LSI on the participants' listening comprehension. One particularly interesting finding that emerged from the current study is the use of listening strategies to assist students' real-life listening. This finding calls for the strategy instruction that encourages students to apply strategies in the classroom to a variety of listening activities outside the classroom such as watching English films, news, or real life communication. In other words, the study agrees with Field (2008) and emphasises the critical importance of helping students make a linkage between classroom-listening to real-life listening. Students should be exposed to a plethora of listening genres, for example, videos, films, news and songs to use their listening strategies in multiple contexts. Providing students with these types of learning materials is more critically important in the Asian EFL learning context where students lack a real communication environment (Nguyen, 2016; Takeuchi, 2003).

Listening instruction that focuses on product, in other words, listen and answer, in many Asian countries such as Japan (Siegel, 2013), Taiwan (Shang, 2008), and Vietnam (Ngo, 2015) was said to demotivate students (Field, 2012). The evidence that the students in the present study were motivated suggested providing the students with knowledge of how listening processes has merits. While Asian students are considered passive learners, motivating them to actively engage in learning is challenging but critically important. Changing the role of the students in the learning process, from being passive and dependent on teachers to active and independent is strongly recommended in the Asian context.

These findings call for enhancing the quality of English language education in Vietnam because "changes can only be expected if teachers can first of all change their classroom practice" (Yu & Wang, 2009, p. 466). In fact, the teacher-centred method, which is still dominant in teaching English in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2016; Tran, 2013), and similarly in other Asian countries (Heo, Stoffa, & Kush, 2012; Luk, 2012), focuses on written language, while speaking and listening are neglected. The first step is to provide teachers with the knowledge of how to teach students to "learn to listen" through teacher training programmes, especially when this area is lacking in the teacher education programme (Griffiths, 2015). This is particularly relevant in Vietnam where teachers' opportunities for professional development are still limited (Nguyen, 2016).

Regarding the teaching curriculum, the present study suggests integrating listening strategies into normal listening courses so that students can make a choice to use a variety of strategies instead of "sticking to their traditional way of learning" (Rao, 2006, p. 505).

This study, however, has its limitations. The findings should not be generalised to other contexts due to the small sample size and research design. Given the positive impact that LSI can have on listening comprehension, further research could look into how LSI can be integrated in other listening courses. This research approach can explore how students of different proficiency levels experience LSI, which will provide insight into teaching listening more effectively in a wider range of contexts. The fact that the researcher was also the teacher may affect the answers of the students. However, the researcher had explained clearly to the students at the beginning of the study that the aim of the study was not to verify the effectiveness of the intervention, but to explore how it worked in an actual class. Further studies should be conducted with a teacher who is not the researcher to identify if there are any differences in terms of student perspectives to LSI.

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