

THE ROLE OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN DEVELOPING LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AMONG EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: Despite the central role of listening in foreign language acquisition, learners frequently struggle to develop effective listening comprehension skills because they lack awareness of the cognitive processes involved in listening and the strategies that can be used to manage these processes. This article examines the role of metacognitive strategies — planning, monitoring, evaluating, and problem-solving — in developing listening comprehension among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in higher education. Drawing on Flavell's foundational framework of metacognition, Vandergrift and Goh's Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire, and a synthesis of recent empirical studies, the article argues that explicit metacognitive instruction substantially improves not only learners' listening performance but also their strategic awareness, self-regulation, and capacity for autonomous listening development. The article further examines how metacognitive approaches can be adapted to the specific conditions of EFL instruction in Uzbekistan, where learners face particular challenges related to phonological processing, anxiety, and limited exposure to authentic English speech. Pedagogical implications and recommendations for teacher training are discussed.

Keywords: metacognitive strategies, listening comprehension, EFL, higher education, self-regulation, Vandergrift, metacognitive instruction, listening anxiety, autonomous learning, Uzbekistan.

Annotatsiya: Tinglab tushunishning xorijiy tilni o'zlashtirishdagi markaziy roliga qaramay, o'rganuvchilar ko'pincha tinglab tushunish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda qiynalishadi, chunki ular tinglab tushunish jarayonida ishtirok etuvchi kognitiv jarayonlar va bu jarayonlarni boshqarish uchun foydalanish mumkin bo'lgan strategiyalar haqida yetarlicha bilimga ega emaslar. Ushbu maqola oliy ta'limdagi ingliz tilini xorijiy til sifatida o'rganuvchilar (EFL) orasida tinglab tushunishni rivojlantirishda metakognitiv strategiyalar — rejalashtirish, monitoring, baholash va muammolarni hal qilish — rolini o'rganadi. Flavellning metakognitsiya bo'yicha asosiy doirasi, Vandergrift va Gohning Metakognitiv xabardorlikni baholash anketi va so'nggi empirik tadqiqotlar sinteziga asoslanib, maqola aniq metakognitiv o'qitish nafaqat o'rganuvchilarning tinglab tushunish natijalarini, balki ularning strategik xabardorligini, o'z-o'zini boshqarishini va mustaqil tinglab rivojlanish qobiliyatini sezilarli darajada yaxshilashini isbotlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: metakognitiv strategiyalar, tinglab tushunish, EFL, oliy ta'lim, o'z-o'zini boshqarish, Vandergrift, metakognitiv o'qitish, tinglab tushunish xavotiri, mustaqil o'rganish, O'zbekiston.

Аннотация: Несмотря на ключевую роль аудирования в овладении иностранным языком, учащиеся нередко испытывают трудности с развитием навыков понимания речи на слух, поскольку не осознают когнитивных процессов, лежащих в основе аудирования, и стратегий управления этими процессами. В данной статье рассматривается роль метакогнитивных стратегий — планирования, мониторинга, оценки и решения проблем — в

развитии навыков аудирования у учащихся, изучающих английский как иностранный язык (EFL) в высших учебных заведениях. Опираясь на базовую концепцию метакогниции Флавелла, опросник метакогнитивной осведомлённости при аудировании Вандергрифта и Го, а также синтез актуальных эмпирических исследований, в статье обосновывается, что целенаправленное метакогнитивное обучение существенно улучшает не только результаты аудирования, но и стратегическую осведомлённость, саморегуляцию и способность к самостоятельному развитию навыков восприятия речи на слух.

Ключевые слова: метакогнитивные стратегии, понимание на слух, EFL, высшее образование, саморегуляция, Вандергрифт, метакогнитивное обучение, тревожность при аудировании, автономное обучение, Узбекистан.

Introduction

The development of listening comprehension in a foreign language is a challenge that many learners find unexpectedly difficult. Unlike reading, where learners can control the pace of input, re-read difficult passages, and exploit visual layout to identify key information, listening requires the processing of transient acoustic input in real time, without the possibility of pausing, rewinding, or rereading in authentic communicative situations. This fundamental asymmetry between the demands of real-world listening and the cognitive resources available to foreign language learners creates persistent comprehension difficulties that do not automatically resolve as learners' general language proficiency increases [3]. Many EFL learners at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels continue to struggle with listening comprehension despite possessing adequate vocabulary and grammar knowledge for most reading and writing tasks, a discrepancy that points to the importance of skill-specific factors — phonological processing fluency, strategic listening behavior, and metacognitive awareness — that are not fully captured by general proficiency measures.

Metacognition — broadly defined as the capacity to think about and regulate one's own cognitive processes — has emerged as a particularly important construct in the study of listening development. Flavell [4], who first systematically articulated the concept of metacognition, distinguished between metacognitive knowledge — beliefs about cognition, tasks, and strategies — and metacognitive regulation — the active monitoring and control of cognitive processes during task performance. Applied to foreign language listening, this distinction maps onto the difference between knowing that previewing a topic before listening helps activate relevant background knowledge, and actually doing so before beginning a listening task. Research consistently shows that proficient listeners engage in substantially more metacognitive regulation than less proficient listeners: they plan their approach before listening, monitor their comprehension as they listen, identify the source of comprehension failures, and adjust their strategies in response to incoming information [9].

The implication of this finding is significant: if metacognitive regulation is a distinguishing characteristic of skilled listeners, then explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies should be a central component of foreign language listening pedagogy, rather than an optional supplement for advanced learners. Yet traditional listening instruction in EFL classrooms — particularly in contexts shaped by centralized curriculum frameworks and high-stakes assessment cultures, as in Uzbekistan and much of Central Asia — continues to be dominated by comprehension testing rather than strategy instruction, leaving learners without the tools they need to improve their listening independently [13]. This article addresses this gap by providing a theoretically grounded

and empirically supported account of the role of metacognitive strategies in listening development, and by identifying practical approaches that EFL teachers can adopt to make metacognitive instruction a viable and regular part of their listening pedagogy.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section of the Main Part reviews the theoretical foundations of metacognitive approaches to listening, focusing on Flavell's foundational framework, Vandergrift's pedagogical cycle, and the concept of metacognitive awareness as operationalized in the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire. The second section examines empirical evidence on the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy instruction across a range of EFL contexts. The third section considers the specific challenges and opportunities of implementing metacognitive listening instruction in Uzbek higher education. The Conclusion synthesizes the main findings and offers recommendations for practice and future research.

Main Part

The theoretical foundations of metacognitive approaches to foreign language listening rest on Flavell's [4] foundational distinction between metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation. Metacognitive knowledge about listening encompasses learners' understanding of themselves as listeners — their awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses in processing spoken language — as well as their knowledge of the characteristics of different listening tasks and the strategies available for managing them. This knowledge is not static but develops through experience and reflection, and learners who have more elaborated metacognitive knowledge about listening are better positioned to make effective strategic choices when confronted with challenging spoken texts. Importantly, metacognitive knowledge can be explicitly taught: teachers who help learners understand why listening is difficult, what cognitive processes are involved, and what strategies proficient listeners use are directly enriching the metacognitive knowledge base that supports strategic listening behavior.

Metacognitive regulation in listening involves three primary processes that Vandergrift [9] identifies as planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Planning refers to the pre-listening activities through which learners activate prior knowledge, set comprehension goals, and prepare themselves cognitively for the incoming speech. Monitoring refers to the ongoing assessment of comprehension during listening, in which learners track whether they are understanding the message, identify the points at which comprehension breaks down, and decide whether to maintain or modify their current processing strategy. Evaluating refers to the post-listening reflection through which learners assess how well they understood the text, identify the sources of comprehension difficulties, and consider what they might do differently in future listening encounters. Together, these three regulatory processes constitute a metacognitive listening cycle that can be explicitly practiced and internalized through structured classroom instruction.

Vandergrift and Goh's [10] Metacognitive Pedagogical Sequence offers a concrete instructional framework for implementing this cycle in the EFL classroom. The sequence typically involves four stages: a pre-listening phase in which learners predict the content of the text on the basis of title, topic, and context clues; a first listening phase in which learners attempt to verify their predictions and identify the main ideas; a collaborative reconstruction phase in which learners compare their comprehension with a partner and resolve discrepancies through discussion; and a second listening phase in which learners listen again with the benefit of the collaborative discussion, followed by a reflective phase in which they evaluate their comprehension process. This sequence makes metacognitive regulation explicit and observable, transforming listening from a private, unobservable cognitive event into a shared, discussable pedagogical activity.

Empirical evidence on the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy instruction for listening comprehension is substantial and consistently positive. A meta-analysis by Graham and Macaro [5] examining 25 experimental and quasi-experimental studies of strategy instruction in foreign language listening found a mean effect size of 0.74 in favor of strategy-trained groups compared to control groups receiving conventional instruction, indicating a moderate to large advantage for metacognitive approaches. Studies by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari [11] demonstrated that a fifteen-week metacognitive instruction program produced significantly greater gains in listening proficiency among university-level EFL learners than a control program of equal duration, and that the benefits were particularly pronounced for lower-proficiency learners who had the most to gain from explicit strategic guidance. These findings suggest that metacognitive instruction is effective across proficiency levels but may be especially valuable for learners who are still developing the foundational listening skills that more advanced learners have already partially automatized.

The relationship between metacognitive strategy instruction and listening anxiety deserves particular attention. Research by Goh [6] and Elkhafafi [2] has established bidirectional relationships between listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness: anxious listeners tend to have lower metacognitive awareness of their listening processes, and listeners with lower metacognitive awareness tend to experience greater anxiety because they lack the strategic resources to manage comprehension difficulties when they arise. Metacognitive instruction can break this cycle by providing learners with a repertoire of strategies for managing both the cognitive and affective dimensions of listening difficulty, thereby reducing the sense of helplessness that characterizes highly anxious listeners. In EFL contexts where listening anxiety is prevalent, as in many Uzbek university classrooms, this dual benefit of metacognitive instruction — improving both performance and affective orientation toward listening — makes it a particularly appropriate and valuable pedagogical investment.

The implementation of metacognitive listening instruction in Uzbek higher education faces a set of specific challenges that must be acknowledged and addressed. Teacher-centered instructional traditions, high-stakes assessment cultures, and curricula structured around language form rather than communicative skill development all create institutional conditions that may resist the shift toward process-oriented, strategy-focused listening pedagogy that metacognitive approaches require [13]. Teachers who have themselves been trained in transmission models of language instruction may lack both the conceptual frameworks and the practical skills to facilitate the kind of collaborative, reflective listening activities that Vandergrift's pedagogical sequence involves. Addressing these barriers requires not only curriculum reform but also sustained investment in teacher professional development that builds teachers' own metacognitive awareness about listening and their capacity to model and scaffold metacognitive processes for their students.

The integration of digital tools with metacognitive listening instruction offers additional possibilities that are particularly relevant in the Uzbek context. Mobile applications that provide access to graded listening materials with interactive transcripts, comprehension questions, and self-assessment tools can support the kind of independent metacognitive practice that classroom instruction initiates but cannot sustain single-handedly. Platforms such as Eilho, ESL Pod, and TED-Ed offer extensive libraries of authentic and semi-authentic listening texts at varying difficulty levels, many accompanied by vocabulary support and comprehension activities that facilitate metacognitive engagement. Research by Cross [1] suggests that metacognitive strategy instruction and technology-enhanced listening practice are most effective when combined: technology provides the quantity and variety of listening input that strategy development requires, while metacognitive

instruction provides learners with the strategic frameworks to engage with that input purposefully and reflectively.

Conclusion

This article has examined the role of metacognitive strategies in developing listening comprehension among EFL learners in higher education, drawing on theoretical frameworks from cognitive psychology and applied linguistics and synthesizing empirical evidence from a range of recent studies. The analysis demonstrates that metacognitive strategy instruction — encompassing planning, monitoring, evaluating, and problem-solving processes — produces substantial and consistent improvements in listening comprehension performance, strategic awareness, and affective orientation toward listening, across a range of EFL proficiency levels and instructional contexts.

The implications for EFL practice in Uzbekistan are clear. Listening instruction should be reconceptualized as a skill development activity rather than a comprehension testing activity, with explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies — particularly planning, self-monitoring, and reflective evaluation — integrated systematically into course design at all proficiency levels. Teachers should be supported through professional development programs that build their own metacognitive awareness about listening and their practical capacity to implement process-oriented listening pedagogies in the specific conditions of Uzbek higher education. Technology-enhanced listening resources should be selected and deployed in ways that complement and reinforce classroom metacognitive instruction, providing learners with the sustained independent practice opportunities that strategy development requires.

Future research should investigate the long-term effects of metacognitive listening instruction on autonomous listening behavior outside the classroom, the specific metacognitive knowledge and strategy profiles that characterize successful Uzbek EFL listeners, and the most effective approaches to teacher training in metacognitive listening pedagogy within Uzbekistan's higher education system. By placing metacognitive development at the center of listening instruction, EFL educators can transform listening from one of the most neglected and anxiety-provoking skills in foreign language learning into a site of active, strategic, and ultimately empowering learner development.

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