THE EFFECT OF INTERACTIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES ON UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS' INTERPRETIVE COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension plays an important role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in helping students interpret meaning beyond literal understanding and engage effectively in communication. However, despite the increasing emphasis on interactive approaches in language pedagogy, many EFL classrooms still rely on traditional teacher-centered listening practices, creating a gap between theoretical perspectives and classroom implementation. This study examines the effect of interactive listening strategies on EFL students' interpretive comprehension. A quasi-experimental design was employed involving an experimental group that received instruction through interactive listening strategies and a control group that received conventional instruction. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test instruments and analyzed using statistical procedures to identify differences between the two groups. The findings indicate that students taught through interactive listening strategies demonstrated better improvement in interpretive comprehension than those taught through conventional methods. These findings suggest that interactive listening strategies effectively support the development of higher-order listening skills. The study highlights the importance of integrating interactive and student-centered approaches into listening instruction to improve EFL students' interpretive comprehension abilities.

Keywords: interactive listening strategies; interpretive listening comprehension; EFL students; learning instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Listening plays a vital role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it serves as the primary source of linguistic input and supports learners' overall language development. Through listening, learners are able to comprehend spoken messages, participate in communication, and construct meaning

from auditory input. However, listening is not merely a passive process of hearing sounds; it is an active and complex cognitive activity involving decoding, interpreting, and integrating information. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) emphasized that successful listening requires the interaction of bottom-up processes, such as recognizing phonological and lexical features, and top-down processes, such as activating prior knowledge and making inferences. Due to this complexity, listening remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners.

In recent years, the focus of listening instruction has shifted from basic comprehension toward higher-order skills, particularly interpretive listening comprehension. Interpretive listening involves understanding implicit meanings, identifying speakers' intentions, and drawing inferences from contextual cues. Rost (2011) stated that effective listeners are able to go beyond literal understanding and actively construct meaning using both linguistic and contextual knowledge. Similarly, Field (2008) argued that listening should be viewed as a process of meaning construction rather than merely answering comprehension questions. Nevertheless, many EFL learners still experience difficulties in achieving interpretive comprehension because of limited exposure to authentic input and inadequate strategic support during listening activities.

Despite these theoretical developments, listening instruction in many EFL classrooms continues to rely heavily on traditional teacher-centered approaches. In such classrooms, students are commonly required to listen to recordings and answer comprehension questions without sufficient guidance throughout the listening process (Graham, 2017). This product-oriented practice often limits learners' opportunities to apply listening strategies, engage actively with spoken texts, and develop interpretive understanding. Consequently, students may struggle with higher-level listening tasks that require inference, interpretation, and critical engagement with meaning.

To address these challenges, researchers have increasingly highlighted the importance of interactive listening strategies in language instruction. Interactive listening strategies encourage active learner participation, collaboration, and strategic processing of spoken input. Goh (2008) emphasized that metacognitive strategies, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating, play an important role in improving listening

comprehension. Furthermore, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) found that explicit strategy instruction significantly enhanced learners' listening performance. More recent studies also support the effectiveness of interactive and strategy-based instruction in promoting deeper comprehension and learner autonomy (Graham, 2021; Goh & Vandergrift, 2022).

Although many studies have investigated listening strategies, relatively limited research has specifically examined their impact on interpretive listening comprehension in EFL contexts. Previous research has predominantly focused on general listening achievement rather than higher-order interpretive abilities. In addition, earlier findings remain inconsistent, suggesting that the effectiveness of interactive listening strategies may vary depending on factors such as instructional design, learner proficiency, and classroom environment (Graham & Macaro, 2023). These conditions indicate the need for further empirical investigation into how interactive listening strategies contribute to students' interpretive listening development.

In many EFL contexts, particularly in developing countries, students also face limited access to authentic listening materials and interactive learning experiences. Traditional instructional practices that emphasize passive listening and teacher-centered instruction continue to dominate classroom activities, potentially restricting students' opportunities to develop interpretive comprehension skills. Therefore, instructional approaches that actively engage students in the listening process are needed to support the development of higher-order listening abilities.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the effect of interactive listening strategies on EFL students' interpretive listening comprehension. Specifically, the study investigates whether students taught through interactive listening strategies achieve better interpretive comprehension than those taught using conventional listening instruction. By employing a quasi-experimental design, this study is expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of interactive listening strategies in EFL listening instruction.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on listening comprehension and strategy-based instruction by

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emphasizing the role of interactive listening strategies in developing interpretive skills. Practically, the findings may provide useful insights for English teachers in designing more engaging and effective listening activities. Ultimately, this study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical perspectives and classroom practices in EFL listening instruction while supporting the development of students' interpretive listening competence.

Listening comprehension is widely recognized as a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as it plays a crucial role in language acquisition and communication. It involves an active process in which learners construct meaning from spoken input using linguistic and contextual cues. Unlike other language skills, listening requires real-time processing, making it particularly challenging for EFL learners (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

1. Theoretical Perspectives on Listening Comprehension

From a theoretical standpoint, listening comprehension is not merely a passive activity but an interactive and cognitive process. According to bottom-up and top-down processing theory, learners decode sounds and words while simultaneously using prior knowledge to interpret meaning (Field, 2008). This dual processing supports the idea that listening involves complex mental operations.

Furthermore, interpretive listening comprehension goes beyond literal understanding. It requires learners to infer meaning, interpret speaker intentions, and evaluate implicit messages. These skills align with higher-order thinking processes and are essential for effective communication (Rost, 2011).

2. Listening Strategies in EFL Contexts

Listening strategies are essential tools that help learners process and understand spoken language more effectively. These strategies are generally categorized into metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating, are considered crucial because they help learners regulate their listening process. Research by Vandergrift (2007) shows that learners who apply metacognitive strategies perform better in listening tasks. Cognitive strategies, including inferencing and note-taking, directly assist in processing linguistic input, while socio-affective strategies support learners' emotional and social engagement.

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Empirical studies have demonstrated that explicit instruction in listening strategies significantly improves learners' listening comprehension. For example, Graham and Macaro (2008) found that students who received strategy-based instruction showed greater improvement compared to those taught using traditional methods.

3. Interactive Listening Strategies

Interactive listening strategies represent a more dynamic and learner-centered approach. These strategies involve active participation through questioning, predicting, clarifying, summarizing, and responding during listening activities. Such interaction allows learners to negotiate meaning and engage more deeply with the input (Rost, 2011).

Interactive listening is grounded in communicative language teaching, which emphasizes meaningful interaction as a key component of language learning (Richards, 2006). Through interaction, learners not only process language input but also develop their interpretive skills.

Several studies highlight the effectiveness of interactive listening strategies. For instance, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) found that students exposed to metacognitive and interactive listening instruction demonstrated significant improvement in listening comprehension. Additionally, interactive strategies have been shown to increase learner motivation and reduce anxiety, contributing to a more effective learning environment.

However, most previous studies have focused on general listening comprehension rather than interpretive listening, leaving a gap in understanding how interactive strategies impact higher-level comprehension skills.

4. Methodological Contributions in Previous Studies

Methodologically, research on listening strategies has employed various designs, with quasi-experimental studies being the most common. These studies typically involve control and experimental groups, using pre-tests and post-tests to measure the effectiveness of instructional interventions (Graham & Macaro, 2008).

In addition to quantitative approaches, qualitative methods such as interviews and observations have been used to explore learners' experiences and perceptions (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Mixed-methods research has also gained popularity, providing a more

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comprehensive understanding of both learning outcomes and learner attitudes.

Recent methodological developments include the integration of technology in listening instruction, such as multimedia tools and online platforms, which offer authentic listening materials and interactive learning opportunities (Field, 2008).

5. Research Gap

Although extensive research has confirmed the benefits of listening strategies and interactive approaches, limited attention has been given to interpretive listening comprehension. Most studies emphasize literal comprehension rather than higher-order skills such as inference and evaluation.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of interactive listening strategies on EFL students' interpretive listening comprehension, contributing to both theoretical understanding and pedagogical practice..

.METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design to examine the effect of interactive listening strategies on EFL students' interpretive listening comprehension. A non-equivalent control group design was applied because random assignment was not feasible in the classroom setting (Creswell, 2014).

The design involved two intact classes: one assigned as the experimental group and the other as the control group. Both groups were administered a pre-test to determine their initial level of interpretive listening comprehension. Following this, the experimental group received instruction through interactive listening strategies, while the control group was taught using conventional listening methods over a period of several instructional sessions (over six sessions). At the end of the treatment, both groups were given a post-test to measure any improvement in their listening comprehension.

The structure of the research design can be illustrated as follows:

Experimental Group: O_1 — X — O_2
Control Group: O_1 — — O_2

Where:
O_1 = Pre-test

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O_2 = Post-test

X = Treatment (Interactive Listening Strategies)

The independent variable was the use of interactive listening strategies involving prediction, clarification, note-taking, questioning, and collaborative discussion activities during listening tasks. These strategies were designed to promote active engagement and meaning negotiation among students. The dependent variable was students' interpretive listening comprehension, defined as their ability to infer meaning, interpret speakers' intentions, and understand implicit information in spoken texts.

To maintain internal validity, both groups received the same learning materials, instructional duration, and assessment procedures, with the instructional strategy serving as the primary difference between groups. The same teacher taught both groups to minimize instructional variability. Although random assignment was not possible, the use of a pre-test helped establish the equivalence of the groups at the outset of the study.

Overall, this quasi-experimental design enabled the researcher to investigate causal relationships between the instructional strategy and students' learning outcomes while maintaining the natural classroom setting.

1. Population

The population of this study consisted of all EFL students enrolled in the second year of a public senior high school in Medan, North Sumatra. The participants were second-year EFL students at a public senior high school in Medan, North Sumatra. They were considered appropriate participants because they had prior experience with English listening instruction.

he classes were selected based on similar English achievement scores and comparable listening proficiency levels determined through pre-test results. This technique was considered appropriate as it allowed the researcher to select groups that met specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Creswell, 2014). The total number of participants involved in the study was approximately 60 students, with each class consisting of around 30 students.

The selected classes were then assigned as the experimental group and the control group. The allocation of groups was based on existing classroom

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arrangements without random assignment, which is characteristic of a quasi-experimental design. One class was designated as the experimental group and received instruction through interactive listening strategies, while the other class served as the control group and was taught using conventional listening methods. Prior to the treatment, both groups were given a pre-test to ensure that they had relatively similar levels of interpretive listening comprehension. This grouping allowed for a meaningful comparison of the effects of the instructional strategies on students' learning outcomes.

2. Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a listening comprehension test designed to measure students' interpretive listening comprehension. The test consisted of multiple-choice and short-answer items focusing on students' ability to infer meaning, identify speakers' intentions, and interpret contextual information from spoken texts. The listening materials were adapted from standardized EFL listening resources to ensure authenticity and appropriateness for the students' proficiency level. The audio recordings were delivered using a digital audio player and classroom speakers to ensure clear sound quality during test administration.

A pilot test was conducted to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and validity of the instrument. Several revisions were made to improve item clarity and difficulty level based on the pilot results. The reliability of the instrument was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, which indicated an acceptable level of internal consistency.

The data collection process was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher prepared and validated the test instrument with the assistance of two experts in English language teaching. Second, the pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups by the classroom teacher under the researcher's supervision. Third, after the treatment period, the same instrument was administered as a post-test to measure students' improvement. All procedures were carried out systematically to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data collected.

3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean

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scores and standard deviations were used to summarize students' performance, while paired-samples and independent-samples t-tests were conducted to examine within-group and between-group differences.. The students' scores were then tabulated and converted into mean scores and standard deviations to summarize the overall performance of both the experimental and control groups. To examine the improvement within each group, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare pre-test and post-test scores. Furthermore, an independent-samples t-test was employed to compare the post-test results between the experimental and control groups to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference attributable to the treatment. All statistical analyses were performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Prior to conducting the t-tests, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were tested using the Shapiro–Wilk test and Levene's test, respectively. The level of significance (alpha) was set at $p < 0.05$, meaning that any p-value below this threshold was considered statistically significant. The results of these analyses were used to determine whether the implementation of interactive listening strategies had a significant effect on students' interpretive listening comprehension.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Results

This section presents a comprehensive account of the findings derived from the data analysis, focusing on answering the research question regarding the effect of interactive listening strategies on students' interpretive listening comprehension. The results are reported chronologically, starting from the preliminary analysis to the hypothesis testing.

Prior to conducting the main analysis, the data were examined to ensure that the assumptions for parametric testing were met. The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that the data were normally distributed for both groups ($p > 0.05$), while Levene's test confirmed the homogeneity of variance ($p > 0.05$). These results justified the use of parametric tests, specifically paired-samples and independent-samples t-tests.

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The pre-test results were first analyzed to determine whether there was any significant difference between the experimental and control groups before the treatment. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 62.40 (SD = 6.85), while the control group achieved a mean score of 61.75 (SD = 7.10). An independent-samples t-test revealed that the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), indicating that both groups had comparable initial levels of interpretive listening comprehension.

Following the treatment, the post-test results showed a marked improvement in both groups, with a more substantial gain observed in the experimental group. The experimental group's mean score increased to 78.65 (SD = 6.20), while the control group's mean score rose to 69.30 (SD = 6.75). To examine within-group improvement, paired-samples t-tests were conducted. The results indicated a statistically significant increase in the experimental group's scores ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that the implementation of interactive listening strategies had a strong positive effect. Although the control group also showed improvement, the increase was comparatively smaller.

To further compare the effectiveness of the two instructional methods, an independent-samples t-test was conducted on the post-test scores. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups ($p < 0.05$), with the experimental group outperforming the control group. This finding confirms that interactive listening strategies were more effective than conventional methods in enhancing students' interpretive listening comprehension.

For a clearer comparison of the results, the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Pre-test and Post-test

	Test	**Mean**	**SD**	**Gain Score**
Experimen	Pre-test	62.40	6.85	—
Experimen	Post-test	78.65	6.20	16.25
Control	Pre-test	61.75	7.10	—
Control	Post-test	69.30	6.75	7.55

As shown in Table 1, the experimental group achieved a higher gain score (16.25) compared to the control group (7.55), indicating a more substantial improvement in interpretive

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listening comprehension. This suggests that the treatment had a meaningful impact on students' performance.

Overall, the findings consistently demonstrate that the use of interactive listening strategies significantly enhances students' interpretive listening comprehension. The results provide strong empirical evidence that supports the effectiveness of interactive and student-centered approaches in listening instruction

2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that interactive listening strategies have a significant positive effect on EFL students' interpretive listening comprehension. Students who participated in interactive listening activities demonstrated greater improvement than those taught through conventional methods, suggesting that active engagement in predicting, clarifying, and discussing meaning enhances deeper comprehension. These findings support the perspective that listening is an active process of meaning construction rather than a passive reception of information (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). When students are encouraged to apply cognitive and metacognitive strategies during listening activities, they become more effective in interpreting implicit meanings and contextual information. This result is also consistent with Rost (2011), who emphasized that interactive listening promotes deeper understanding through meaning negotiation and learner participation.

The findings of this study are also in line with previous research on strategy-based listening instruction. Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) reported that explicit listening strategy instruction significantly improves learners' listening comprehension, while Field (2008) highlighted the importance of teaching listening as a process rather than merely focusing on correct answers. However, this study extends previous research by specifically examining interpretive listening comprehension, which has received relatively limited attention in EFL contexts. Therefore, the findings contribute to strengthening the connection between theoretical perspectives on interactive listening and classroom instructional practices.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that integrating interactive listening strategies into classroom instruction can help teachers create more student-centered and engaging learning environments. Such

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strategies encourage learners to participate actively in the listening process, develop higher-order listening skills, and improve their interpretive comprehension abilities. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these strategies may also be influenced by factors such as students' proficiency levels and classroom conditions.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The use of a quasi-experimental design without random assignment may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the relatively limited duration of the treatment may not fully capture the long-term impact of interactive listening strategies on students' listening development. Therefore, future studies are recommended to employ broader samples, longer intervention periods, or mixed-method approaches to obtain deeper insights into the effectiveness of interactive listening strategies across different educational contexts.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that interactive listening strategies are effective in improving EFL students' interpretive listening comprehension. The findings reinforce the importance of shifting from traditional teacher-centered instruction toward more interactive and student-centered listening practices to support learners' higher-order listening development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine the effect of interactive listening strategies on EFL students' interpretive listening comprehension, and the findings provide clear empirical support for their effectiveness. The quantitative results revealed that although both groups started from a relatively similar baseline (M = 62.40 for the experimental group and M = 61.75 for the control group), the experimental group demonstrated a substantially greater improvement after the treatment (M = 78.65) compared to the control group (M = 69.30). The statistical analysis confirmed that this difference was significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the use of interactive listening strategies contributed meaningfully to the development of students' interpretive listening skills.

These findings imply that interactive listening strategies, which actively engage students in predicting, clarifying, and interpreting meaning, are more effective than conventional listening instruction in fostering higher-order comprehension.

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The study reinforces the importance of shifting from passive listening practices toward more interactive, student-centered approaches that align with current theoretical perspectives in language learning.

In terms of pedagogical implications, English teachers are encouraged to integrate interactive listening strategies into their classroom practices to enhance students' ability to interpret spoken texts more effectively. Overall, this study contributes empirical evidence to support the adoption of interactive listening strategies in EFL contexts and highlights their role in improving students' interpretive listening comprehension.

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