

## Instruction of Metacognitive Strategies to Enhance Students' Listening Comprehension

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### **Abstract**

*The listening skill has been reported as a neglected skill in the ESL classroom. The lack of attention to this particular skill has been linked to ESL students' poor performance in authentic communication and examinations. The study reported in this paper examined the effectiveness of explicit instruction on metacognitive strategies in enhancing students' listening comprehension skills. A quasi-experimental research design which involved pretest-posttest control and experimental groups was used. A semi-structured questionnaire was also distributed to gather information about the students' perceptions in using metacognitive strategies to monitor their listening comprehension. 90 Upper Sixth Form students in a Malaysian school were selected to participate in this study and they were divided into two experimental groups and one control group. The treatment in the form of explicit instruction and modeling of metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension was given to the experimental groups while the control group was taught using the conventional non-metacognitive product-based method. The pretest and posttest results were analysed using the paired t-test and data from the questionnaire were analysed using frequency counts and thematic coding. The findings showed that there was a significant difference in the scores obtained by students treated with explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies compared to the conventional method. Data from the semi-structured questionnaire displayed students' positive responses in using metacognitive strategies to monitor their listening comprehension. These findings provide support for the instruction of metacognitive strategies to be included as a beneficial pedagogical method to enhance students' listening comprehension in the ESL classroom.*

**Keywords** *Explicit instruction, metacognitive strategies, listening skill.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The listening skill is crucial in the development of an individual's proficiency in any language. It is the first communication skill that is acquired because humans respond to sounds as early as when they are in their mother's wombs (Beebe & Redmond, 2011). Kurita (2012) pointed out that listening comprehension is at the heart of language learning. It is an essential skill that helps to develop speaking, writing and reading skills in the course of learning a new language. However, the importance of this skill has always been overlooked and given the least attention in the language classroom.

## **Challenges in teaching listening comprehension**

In second language learning, listening has been described as the “Cinderella skill” (Nunan, 1997) or the “neglected” skill (Dean, 2004). According to Field (2008), throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, instructors placed great emphasis upon speaking, on the grounds that possession of the skill constituted the most important long-term need of the majority of language instruction. Many teachers are misguided into thinking that speaking a language is more directly responsible in acquiring a language. However, it is impossible to acquire speaking skills without having the ability to listen.

Listening skills have been neglected due to the challenges they present to the teaching and learning of a second language. The listening skill is rather undervalued as there is still plenty of evidence that the methodology of the listening lesson has not been discussed, researched and challenged as much as the other language skills. Research focusing on listening skills became prominent only about two decades ago when many studies had highlighted the importance of self-regulated and deep processing strategies to process the auditory input received. In the present situation, the listening and speaking skills are important to enhance communication skills and to develop interpersonal skills required in the authentic environment. Dean (2004) stressed that listening is one of the vital skills, increasingly required of all those leaving school and seeking success in the real world in the next few years.

In the Malaysian context, ESL students have been reported to place less importance on how to listen and comprehend effectively. Listening component was given less emphasis in the ESL classroom probably because this skill was not tested in any public examination until late 2014 for the Form 3 Evaluation. Thus, when these students pursue their studies to Form Six or other pre-university courses where they prepare to sit for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), they have difficulties passing the (800/1) Listening paper in the test. According to the findings of a survey conducted locally by Mohana & Shamara (2012), none of the teachers interviewed in their study perceived listening as an important and essential skill at the tertiary level. Both teachers and students gave negative feedback on the significance of listening in the classroom and 30% of the teachers emphasized more on reading and writing skills which are allocated more marks in the MUET test.

Although listening comprehension has not been much of a problem for native speakers and highly proficient second language speakers, the lower proficiency learners often face difficulties. According to Abbas & Mohammad Reza (2011), lower proficiency ESL learners need to rely on listening strategies to assist them in comprehending aural communication.

In a study comprising 40 Chinese ESL learners, Goh (1997) examined the factors influencing learners’ listening comprehension and listed out 20 factors that were categorized into five characteristics: text, listener, speaker, task and environment. Factors related to text and listener such as vocabulary, prior knowledge, speech rate, type of input and speaker’s accent were main concerns of learners when dealing with listening comprehension. Teachers need to first of all help students recognize these problems that hamper listening comprehension before helping them deal with the problems.

As strategies seem to be like a problem-solving tool for listening comprehension, students should be motivated to listen and monitor comprehension via strategy use in order to deal with problems in listening to aural texts. The L2 listening skill needs to be developed consciously without imposing the threat of evaluation on the students. Using listening activities to only test comprehension leads to anxiety which debilitates the development of metacognitive strategies (Vandergrift, 2002).

Teachers need to guide their students throughout the process of listening so that they not only gain knowledge on listening but also gain motivation and take control of their own listening. In most cases, teachers focus on the product of listening rather than the process of listening. Thus, emphasis is given on the scores of the listening test and little effort on how to mentally process the oral text. In this mode of listening comprehension instruction, every activity becomes a test of the listeners' listening ability only, rather than an activity to understand the social and cognitive nature of developing and using these listening skills. According to Vandergrift and Goh (2012), communicative language teaching still highlights the importance of practicing core listening skills such as listening for details, listening for gist, predicting, listening selectively or making inferences which are geared towards successful listening comprehension.

### **Malaysian University English Test (MUET)**

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) had been introduced in 1999. The main objective of the MUET test was to bridge the gap in language needs between secondary and tertiary education (Malaysian Examination Council, 2006). Mohd. Faisal Hanapiah (2002) stated that The Ministry of Education revamped its policies to arrest or reduce the declining standard of English among the students. It was hoped that by introducing the MUET test, students could meet the standard of language proficiency required at the tertiary level.

The MUET test comprises 4 main components according to skills distributed in 4 sets of paper: 800/1 Listening, 800/2 Speaking, 800/3 Reading and 800/4 Writing. The format was slightly revamped in 2007 which resulted in an inclusion of short-answer responses in the Listening paper and a replacement of the summary question with interpretation of information on a specific non-linear stimulus in the Writing paper.

The listening component, although representing a small percentage (15%) compared to its reading (40%) and writing (30%) counterparts, is undeniably an important skill to master. However, students have difficulty in responding to this paper due to lack of proficiency and poor listening skills. According to Mohana and Shamara (2012), reports on the MUET results indicate that beginning 1999 to 2007, less than 1% of the candidates had achieved the highest score of Band 6 while more than 50% had only achieved the two lowest bands of competency (Bands 1 and 2). The same can be said for the results produced in 2009 and 2010 as more than 50% of the candidates managed only to score the two lowest bands in all the components including the Listening component.

According to the overall analysis of the MUET 2009 and 2010 results as reported by the Malaysian Examination Council (2009, 2010), the overall performance of

students in all the components had declined. As stated by the examiners in the report, the lack of or poor listening skills is one of the main reason why the MUET candidates performed badly in their listening comprehension paper.

Furthermore, a small survey conducted prior to the present study showed that the Form Six students selected for the survey had poor metacognitive awareness when faced with a listening comprehension task. The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) which was adapted from Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghodatari (2006) was used.

The results of the MUET test, supported by the findings of the small survey, prompted this study which investigated the effects of explicit instruction on metacognitive strategies in improving students' listening comprehension skills.

### **Metacognitive Strategies**

According to Flavell (1976: 232), "metacognition refers to one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, e.g. the learning-relevant properties of information or data". Shraw and Moshman (1995) define metacognitive processes as a regulation of cognition that helps to control one's thinking or learning.

Metacognition can lead to selection, evaluation, revision or deletion of cognitive tasks, goals, and strategies. They can also help the individual make meaning and discover behavioral implications of metacognitive experiences. Metacognition is therefore, like a built-in monitoring device that works in regulating one's thought processes and helps one to gear one's mental mechanism towards goal attainment. This device can be used to assist students in their learning by providing them with a host of strategies that they can use to foster learning. According to cognitive psychologists, it is used to describe our ability to assess our own skills, knowledge, or learning. Metacognition is a person's awareness about his or her own thought process and knowledge.

Students need to be taught how to monitor, track, assess and reflect upon what is being listened to using prior knowledge of the subject matter that is discussed and also the organization of ideas conveyed orally. The usage of metacognitive strategies has been proven to assist students in monitoring their comprehension both orally and in written form. Vandergrift (2003) explored the role of strategies in the development of listening comprehension and this led him to the formulation of a model of the skilled language listener. According to Vandergrift (2003), the difference between more and less skilled listeners resides in the type of listening strategies deployed. More-skilled listeners use less translation, more metacognitive strategies, more questioning, elaboration, and more monitoring. He further suggests that instruction should promote the strategic processing observed among successful listeners (planning, monitoring and evaluating).

Instruction on metacognitive strategies explicitly to students could enhance students' listening skills. Goh (2008) stressed that teacher modeling and scaffolded listening practice in metacognitive process, are clearly valuable in helping one to *learn how to listen* effectively.

Students can learn how to monitor their progress and understanding during listening

and retrieval. Using metacognitive strategies can empower students to be responsible for their own learning and thus, students are trained to think about their own thinking which is the core of metacognition.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test design in order to answer the following research questions:

1. Will the scores of the post-test for listening comprehension among the Form Six MUET students in this study show a significant difference from the pre-test after the students are treated with the instruction of metacognitive strategies?
2. How do Form Six students respond to the usage of metacognitive strategies as a tool to enhance listening comprehension?

In relation to the first research question, the following hypotheses were formed:

HO: There will be no statistically significant difference between the listening performances of students who are treated with the instruction of using metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension compared to the conventional method of answering listening comprehension questions.

H1: There will be a statistically significant difference between the listening performances of students who are treated with the instruction of using metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension compared to the conventional method of answering listening comprehension questions.

### **Sampling**

A total of 90 Upper Six students from a secondary school in one of the midland states in peninsula Malaysia had been selected for this study using the random sampling method. There were a total of 4 schools offering Form Six in the district where the school was located and this school was chosen because the students vary in race, social class and gender compared to the other three secondary schools that were made up of only one dominant race. This was done to maintain the authenticity of the samples that portrayed Malaysian ESL classroom setting with a multi-racial students' background. The samples were selected through the random sampling procedure to ensure an equal chance or probability of each student to be selected from the population. Besides, there was an equal chance or probability of each student to be selected from the population. This sampling procedure was also used in order to avoid researcher bias in selecting the samples for the study.

The selected students were placed in 3 groups (two experimental and one control groups) randomly. They were aged between 18 to 19 years old and came from a middle-class socio-economical background. These students had been exposed to the English language for almost 12 academic years in both the primary and secondary schools.

As they were from different races, they chose to use *Bahasa Melayu* or the Malay language as the common language of interaction and the English language was only used during lessons.

The teachers selected for this study were Ms. A, Ms. C and Mr. B who had been teaching MUET for more than 10 years in the same school. All three of them had a master's degree in TESL. Two of them, Ms. C and Mr. B, were local graduates while Ms. A graduated from overseas. The three teachers also had experience as MUET and Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education) 111/9 English Language examiners. Thus, all these teachers were similar in expertise and experience. Any difference in the students' performance will not be accounted to the teacher-factor but the influence of the treatments given. The teachers were able to use the metacognitive strategies as teaching tools for teaching listening skills during the treatment lessons.

Ms C had been assigned to teach the control group with the non-metacognitive, product-based listening lesson while Ms. A and Mr. B were given training on the metacognitive strategies to be taught explicitly to both the experimental groups.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection involved the administration of a pre-test and post-test to all the three groups with the addition of the administration of the treatment using metacognitive strategies to the two experimental groups and the conventional method to the control group. The experimental groups were also given a semi-structured questionnaire in order to gather information about their perceptions of using metacognitive strategies to monitor their listening comprehension.

The teachers for all the three groups were briefed about the procedure for data collection. The teachers for the experimental groups, Ms A and Mr B, were provided with the metacognitive lesson plans. A detailed explanation on metacognitive strategies was given to these two teachers prior to the treatment to ensure uniformity of content and strategies to be used. The teacher for the control group, Ms C, was asked to prepare her own lesson plan to teach listening skills according to her usual practice. This was done to avoid researcher bias. However, the theme, topic and listening materials provided for both experimental and control groups were the same.

All the three groups in the study were given a pretest with questions taken from the MUET past year papers. The experimental groups were given three treatments which consisted of the instruction on metacognitive strategies and how to employ them in order to monitor listening comprehension. Table 1.1 outlines the metacognitive strategies deployed in the treatment lessons. Simultaneously, the control group was taught in the conventional way (non-metacognitive) which was aimed at getting the answers for the listening comprehension questions. The conventional way is a product-based lesson where teachers teach students to read the questions and listen to answer the questions. Finally, teacher discusses answers with the students. Metacognitive strategy-based lesson is *process-based* while the conventional or non-metacognitive lesson is *product-based*.

**Table 1** Steps in guided metacognitive sequence in a listening lesson from Goh and Yusnita (2006) as cited in Richards (2008, p. 13)

STEPS	ACTIVITIES
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Pre-listening activity</b> In pairs, students predict the possible words and phrases that they might hear. They write down their prediction. They may write some words in their first language.
<b>Step 2</b>	<b>First-listen</b> As they are listening to the text, students underline those words or phrases (including first language equivalents) that they have predicted correctly. They also write down new information they hear.
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Pair-process based discussion</b> In pairs students compare what they have understood so far and explain how they arrive at the understanding. They identify the parts that cause confusion and disagreement and make a note of the parts of the text that requires special attention in the second listen.
<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Second-listen</b> Students listen to those parts that have caused confusion or disagreement areas and make notes of any new information they hear.
<b>Step 5</b>	<b>Whole-class-process based discussion</b> The teacher leads a discussion to confirm comprehension before discussing with students the strategies they reported using.

In Table 1, Goh (2006) has outlined five steps to teach listening using the metacognitive strategies. During the pre-listening activity, students' schemata are activated by asking them to predict the content of the listening text after informing the topic. As they listen, students monitor their listening and direct their attention by checking their prediction and also adding new information gained. During the third stage, pair work is suggested to help students check their understanding and evaluate their performance. Students listen and identify problem areas in their second listening and the final step is whole-class discussion where students with guidance from their teachers discuss the comprehension and the strategies used.

During the first treatment, intervention in the form of instruction on metacognitive strategies was first explained to the students. Then a guided listening lesson using metacognitive strategies was demonstrated where the teachers thought aloud the metacognitive strategies employed before, while and after listening. The students were then taught step by step on how to use the metacognitive strategies and were encouraged to discuss and seek for clarification. In the second and third treatments, the teachers facilitated listening comprehension monitoring using the previously taught metacognitive strategies. The lesson plans comprising the metacognitive strategies were used for both the experimental groups. After a series of three treatment classes, all the three groups were given a post-test to determine the effectiveness of the treatment given.

A semi-structured questionnaire was also distributed to the 60 students in the experimental groups. This questionnaire was used to elicit richer understanding and information about the students' responses to the treatment of explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies to monitor their listening comprehension. The questionnaire comprised nine yes/no questions (Questions 1-9) and one open-ended question (Question 10). This last question was constructed to elicit more detailed feedback

about the process of metacognitive strategies that the students used. The ten questions were as follows:

1. I am more confident in answering the listening comprehension questions.
2. After learning the usage of strategies, I am able to use them to help me answer the listening comprehension questions.
3. Before I start listening, I have a plan in my head on what to focus on.
4. I use my background knowledge about the topic to understand the text.
5. Now I am more interested in doing listening comprehension.
6. I am able to use the strategies learned to answer the MUET Listening paper.
7. I am able to concentrate while listening when I know what to focus on.
8. On the whole, listening is challenging for me.
9. I enjoy using these strategies and hope to use them in other subjects too.
10. Describe what you did when you answered the listening comprehension questions.

### Data Analysis

The individual scores for the pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed using the SPSS software Version 19. The mean, median, mode and range were calculated and presented in tabular form. The paired t-test statistical analysis was used to compare the means of both sets of tests to indicate the effectiveness of treatment rendered. The t- test verified whether or not the null hypothesis could be accepted.

Data from the first nine questions in the semi-structured questionnaire were subjected to frequency counts while data from the tenth question were analyzed using the process of thematic coding (Creswell, 2003). The themes were predetermined as follows:

**Table 2** Themes for Open-Ended Question

Theme	Strategies
1. Effectiveness of metacognitive strategies	Planning Evaluation Directed Attention Person Knowledge Mental Translation Problem-solving
Theme	Values
2.Responses towards using metacognitive strategies	Confidence Helpful Interest

## RESULTS

Analysis of the data pertaining to the two research questions showed positive results as presented in the following sections.



### **Effectiveness of the instruction of metacognitive strategies on listening comprehension**

The results from the pre- and post-test scores were compared in order to determine the effectiveness of the methods used. The results of the comparison provided answers to the first research question which inquired if the scores of the post-test listening comprehension among the Form Six MUET students in the study would show a significant difference from the pretest after the students were treated with the instruction of metacognitive strategies.

The null hypothesis stated that there would be no statistically significant difference between the listening performance of students who were treated with the instruction of using metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension compared to those who did not receive the treatment. The same hypothesis was used for all three groups involved in the study.

#### **Paired Samples t-test**

**Table 3** Paired Samples Statistics for the Control Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	5.50	30	3.267	.596
	Posttest	5.53	30	3.048	.557

**Table 4** Paired Samples Test for the Control Group

		Paired Differences					T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest -Posttest	-.033	2.442	.446	-.945	.879	-.075	29	.941

The score of t distribution, with the .05 significance level and 29 degrees of freedom, shows the cut off t score of +2.045 or above, or a t score of -2.045 or below. The t-score of -.075 of paired sample for the control group was less than the needed value of -2.045 for 29 degrees of freedom ( $-.075 < -2.045$ ); therefore, the  $H_0$  is accepted. This result indicated that there was no significant difference in the scores of the pretest and posttest of the control group.

**Table 5** Paired Samples Statistics for Experimental Group 1 and Experimental Group 2

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Exp 1	Pretest	8.53	30	4.091	.747
	Posttest	10.33	30	4.744	.866
Exp 2	Pretest	5.80	30	2.845	.520
	Posttest	8.17	30	4.442	.811

**Table 6** Paired Samples Test for Experimental 1

			Paired Differences				T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower				Upper
Exp 1	Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-1.800	2.538	.463	-2.748	-.852	3.885	29	.001
Exp 2	Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-2.367	3.178	.580	-3.554	-1.180	4.078	29	.000

As for the experimental groups, the t-score of 3.885 and 4.078 of paired sample for Experimental Group 1 and Experimental Group 2 respectively were more than the needed value of +2.045 (3.885>2.045 and 4.078>2.045). Therefore, the H<sub>0</sub> was rejected and the alternative hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> was accepted. These results suggest that the posttest scores of students in Experimental Group 1 and Experimental Group 2 were significantly better than their pretest scores after undergoing treatment with metacognitive strategies.

**Students’ responses on the usage of metacognitive strategies as a tool to enhance listening comprehension**

50 students responded to the semi-structured questionnaire given. The analysis of the first nine questions showed vastly positive responses towards the usage of metacognitive strategies as illustrated in Table 7 below:

**Table 7** Students’ Responses on the Use of Metacognitive Strategies in Listening Comprehension (N=50)

Questions Responses	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
	Yes (%)	74	86	80	82	70	82	82	80
No (%)	26	14	20	18	30	18	18	20	26

Most of the students felt more confident in answering the listening comprehension questions after being treated with explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies (Q1). They also indicated that they were more interested in doing listening comprehension (Q5) and claimed that they enjoyed using metacognitive strategies and hoped to use them in other subjects too (Q9).

After learning the strategies, most of the students were able to use them to help them answer listening comprehension questions generally (Q2) and those in the MUET listening paper specifically (Q6).

Most of them also indicated that they had plans in their heads on what to focus on before they started listening (Q3) and they used background knowledge about the topic to understand the listening texts (Q4).

The majority of the students felt that they were able to concentrate while listening using metacognitive strategies because they knew what to focus on (Q7). They also agreed that listening comprehension was challenging for them (Q8).

The final question (Question 10) in the semi-structured questionnaire required the students to describe the process of listening they had gone through using the strategies taught to them during the treatment sessions. The students' responses based on the first theme and its subthemes are illustrated in Table 8.

**Table 8** Theme 1: Effectiveness of Metacognitive Strategies

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I plan on what to focus using my knowledge about the topic.</li> <li>• Firstly I understand the general idea of the listening comprehension content and listen for the keywords.</li> <li>• I set my mind to focus more on keywords and highlighted them and make me focus on my goals</li> <li>• First will study the questions then will plan and use strategies to answer listening questions.</li> <li>• Before that I plan using background info.</li> </ul>
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In my second listening I checked my problem area.</li> <li>• Then I check the problem area in the second listening.</li> <li>• In the second listening I checked on the words that I had missed.</li> <li>• Then I list down keywords and check my problem in second listening</li> </ul>
Directed Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus harder in the text.</li> <li>• I focus 100% and find the keywords</li> <li>• I'm listen carefully using info about the topic.</li> <li>• Paid full attention during the listening test.</li> <li>• Lebih banyak memberi focus dan menyusun strategi bila mendengar (Focused more and applied strategies while listening)</li> <li>• Listen to the recording and note the important sentences. I look at the questions and check answers.</li> </ul>
Person Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am able to concentrate while listening when I know to focus on.</li> <li>• On the whole listening comprehension is challenging for me.</li> </ul>
Mental Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translate key words as I listen. Yes, I understand.</li> </ul>

**Table 8** (cont.)

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Problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ..concentrate on the harder(difficult) phrases.</li><li>• Know about the title, using my knowledge and write about the title, write what I understood</li><li>• I find keywords and write down. Focus keywords when listening.</li><li>• I also be able to use my background knowledge to help me understand more during the test.</li><li>• I using my background knowledge to understand what it said. I become more interested to listening comprehension after I get skills</li><li>• Firstly, I write down the main topic and then list down the words about the topic. After that, I used my background knowledge to answer the questions.</li><li>• Tried to get back the points that I missed in the second listening.</li><li>• Listen carefully and answer with my background knowledge</li><li>• Write all the keywords about the topic before listening</li><li>• Read the questions; detect the words regarding the topic and listen using keywords.</li><li>• ..focus on the keywords while listening</li><li>• Kenalpasti topic, focus maksud keywords and cari jawapan melalui keywords. (Identify topic, focus on meanings and find answers using keywords.)</li></ul>
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The data showed that the students did use the strategies that they had learned during the treatment. Some examples of complete responses for Question 10 by individual students are illustrated below:

Student 1:

*I plan on what to focus using my knowledge about the topic.*

*I use the points (strategies) that teacher gave.*

*In my second listening I checked my problem area.*

Student 1 had used the planning evaluation strategy to prepare herself for listening comprehension. Then, the problem solving strategy was used to locate problem areas in the second listening.

Student 3:

*Firstly I understand the general idea of the listening comprehension content and listen for the keywords. Then I check the problem area in the second listening.*

As for Student 3, understanding of the general idea and focusing on the keywords depicting the content helped in monitoring listening comprehension. The usage of planning evaluation and directed attention helped this student to monitor listening comprehension. Besides, this student also used the problem solving strategy to rectify problems faced in the second listening.

Student 22:

*Firstly, I write down the main topic and then list down the words about the topic. After that, I used my background knowledge to answer the questions. Absolutely, I have improved in MUET listening comprehension.*

This student (No 22), used background knowledge of the topic and listed out words related to the topic and used them to monitor listening comprehension. Planning and evaluation as well as person knowledge strategies were used to help this student in listening comprehension. Moreover, this student also claimed to achieve improvement in MUET listening comprehension.

The students' responses based on the second theme and its subthemes are illustrated in Table 9.

**Table 9** Theme 2: Responses Toward Using Metacognitive Strategies

Values	Responses
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am able to use concentration during listening</li><li>• I can concentrate and answer better than before.</li><li>• I can answer questions better in listening comprehension</li><li>• I can do listening well now.</li><li>• I think I can get Band 6 in my MUET and can be like Puan Nora and compete with her international level.</li></ul>
Helpful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I use the points (strategies) that teacher gave.</li><li>• Absolutely, I have improved in MUET listening comprehension.</li></ul>
Interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I become more interested to listening comprehension after I get skills</li><li>• I enjoy using these strategies and happy learning something new.</li><li>• Finally, I so happy after I study how to use strategies in listening examination.</li><li>• I know what I don't know and now I enjoy MUET listening</li></ul>

The students' responses here were consistent with their responses for the first nine questions reported in Table 7.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the study indicate that strategy-training was useful in enhancing students' listening comprehension. These findings are further support of Al-Alwan, Asassfeh and Al- Shboul (2013), Goh (2008), Vandergrift's (2003) and Carrier's (2003) observations that metacognitive strategies when taught explicitly to students help to enhance their listening comprehension performance. These findings are also consistent with Bidabadi and Yamat's (2011) findings that students at different levels of proficiency are capable of employing a variety of listening strategies to comprehend a text.

The findings imply that ESL learners are capable of learning and using strategies that help to improve their listening comprehension. The role of the listening skill should be given more prominence in the second language classroom. It should no longer be a neglected skill and should be given equal attention as speaking, reading and writing skills.

In the context of the lower and upper secondary school system in Malaysia, learners have often been left to their own devices when performing listening tasks. This is mainly due to the fact that the listening skill is either not included in the national tests or it commands only a small percentage of the marks for those tests, as in the case of the MUET test. However, since it is a skill that is needed for effective communication,

it should be taught and since it is a complex skill, it has to be developed consciously (Vandergrift, 2002). Teachers need to find a way to engage learners' metacognition in teaching listening (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Form Six students and other MUET candidates should not be left without guidance in the ESL listening classroom. This is because they may give up listening when they get stuck along the way or when they fail to translate the L2 aural input word by word. Giving up listening especially during the MUET test will have a negative effect on their scores for the listening component and their overall score in the test. Apart from these candidates, the study paves way for other students to gear themselves in using strategies to enhance their listening comprehension skills.

Teaching the process of listening explicitly to MUET students and not merely focusing on the product of listening would enable teachers to promote strategy-usage among their students. Explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies not only produces students who can monitor their listening comprehension during the MUET test but also help to promote self-regulation that is vital in producing independent learners who will be responsible for their own learning. When students are taught to plan, monitor, evaluate and problem-solve, they regulate and fine-tune their listening comprehension level by utilizing strategies.

## **CONCLUSION**

Using metacognitive strategies to enhance listening comprehension has been advocated by researchers mentioned earlier in this paper. In this study, the provision of explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies was shown to have a significant effect on the students' listening comprehension. The findings provide empirical support for the need to provide guidance to students on how to improve their listening comprehension competence especially in ESL learning contexts where the lack of attention on the skill has been shown to have an adverse effect on the students' academic performance. The activation of metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension demands a lot of time and effort from both teachers and students respectively. However, the outcome is worthwhile and rewarding and will go a long way in establishing an active listener who would be able to make sense of aural input. It will also create an independent listener of the target language who would be able to interact effectively and meet the authentic demands of communication in the target language.

Instruction on metacognitive strategies is student-oriented listening instruction which is geared towards helping students to have a sense of self-direction in achieving their listening goals. Students should be guided by teachers on how to plan their own listening goals as well as evaluate their performance and detect their weaknesses to be rectified in upcoming listening experiences. These cyclical processes of listening makes learners anticipate and monitor their progress and at the same time keep track of their performance and problem-solving orientations. As suggested by the findings of this study, when students are guided to use metacognitive strategies, it does has a positive impact on their listening performance.

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