

A Study of the English Listening Comprehension Strategies Used by Female and Male Senior Secondary School Students in Edo State

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Abstract

One of the aims of this study was to find out the English listening comprehension strategies used by Female and Male Senior Secondary School Students in Edo State. From a population of four thousand eight hundred and fifty four (4854) Senior Secondary 1 students in public schools, a total of four hundred and forty-two (442) students constituted the sample size drawn through the stratified sampling and simple random techniques from four (4) sampled schools (Two All-girls and Two All-boys Schools). One instrument titled Listening Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire (LCSQ) adopted from Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was used to collect the data for the study. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and t-test for independent sample. Results indicated that among the six strategy categories, Metacognitive strategies had the highest mean for both sexes. The Affective strategies had the lowest mean for the Males, while the Memory strategies had the least mean for the Females. It was also found that there is no significant difference between the English listening strategies used by Female and Male Senior Secondary School Students. It is recommended among others that teachers should engage Female students in tasks that will require more of their use of the Memory strategies and Male students tasks that will require more of their use of the Affective strategies.

Keywords: Female, Male, Senior Secondary, Meta-cognitive strategies, Memory strategies, Affective strategies.

1. Introduction

Listening is the process of focusing all attention on a source of sound in order to hear and pick the information that the sound brings. There are certain reasons for the importance of listening for second language learners. First, listening is an essential prerequisite for oral communication to take place. Second, it often influences the development of reading and writing. Third, it plays a central role in academic success, since students understand teachers or lecturers through listening (El-Koumy, 2002). Listening is the gateway to understanding and communication and, therefore, it is absolutely critical for language learners.

Studies have been carried out to determine the relationship between listening and other language skills including intelligence and students achievement in other school subjects. Listening usually comes first because it is the most important skill and also the basic way to receive language input. People cannot speak until they receive enough comprehensible input through listening. A high relationship has been found to exist between speaking and listening. One speaks to a listener; the other listens to a speaker. Rost (1994) points out that of the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing, listening is the most critical for language learning at the beginning stages. Extensive listening practice before speaking or reading may prepare the learner to acquire a second language with greater efficiency than if he or she was taught all the skills simultaneously.

Listening plays a crucial role in learning. Coakley & Wolvin (cited in Schwartz 1992) found that students listened to about 57% to 90% of their in-school information from their teachers and their schoolmates. One can see that a large proportion of students' time is spent listening to the teacher during the teaching and learning process. A senior secondary school student therefore needs to develop good listening strategies to be able to perform well not only in English Language but in all school subjects as they all depend on the listening skill.

Listening is essential not only as a receptive skill but also as a skill for the development of spoken language of students as well as professionals. Listening facilitates understanding of actions, instructions, activities and problems that people face daily, in organizations, in companies, at home, work and school. Students receive most of their information through listening to teachers, professors and to one another. Students ought to be made aware of the different strategies of the listening skill as early as possible as it is considered the key to success or failure of the entire education system. However, this seem not to be the case. Yet, researchers have been able to determine that listeners require effective listening strategies to be able to understand aural information. Without effective strategies, students' listening comprehension becomes challenging, problematic, and ineffective (Mendelsohn, 2006).

Gender as a variable has been found to have implication for second language learning. Will this study find a

gender difference in listening strategies adopted by students? Significantly, greater use of language learning strategies by females have been reported in four areas of: general study strategies, functional practice strategies, strategies for communicating meaning, and self- management. This study is aimed at identifying listening strategies used by Female and Male Senior Secondary School Students to process oral language inputs and find out which type of these strategies contributes the most to listening comprehension.

2. Gender and Listening Strategy Use

One of the highly perpetuated American stereotypes is that listening is, essentially, “women's work.” Brain imaging research (Phillips, Lowe, Lurito, Dziedzic, & Mathews, 2001) does demonstrate that men and women bring some very real differences in attention styles and cognitive processing styles to the communicative interaction. As these researchers explore more deeply the biological influence of the male/female genetic makeup, however, the social influence model continues to dominate the understanding of gender variables. Research reveals that men and women have been found to “learn to listen for different purposes and have different listening goals. The primary contrast appears in task versus interpersonal understanding: Males tend to hear facts, while females are more aware of the mood of the communication” (Booth-Butterfield, 1984). Not only are there differences in the structure of the brain, there are differences in the process of information when listening, reading, or during emotional experiences.

Using a think aloud procedure, Bacon (1992) examined the strategy use of male and female university students learning Spanish. Subjects were fifty (50) students in the first course beyond the Arts and Sciences foreign-language requirement at a large midwestern university in America. This population was selected because it was expected that they were motivated, though not yet highly proficient listeners of Spanish. The location of the institution precluded students from having a great deal of exposure to authentic input outside of class. Of the initial group, 19 men and 31 women completed all aspects of the study. She also found that Female students made use of metacognitive strategies more than males.

Mohseny and Raesi (2009) investigated “The Relationship between Language Proficiency of EFL Students and their Strategy Use in Listening Comprehension”. The participants of the study were one hundred and one (101) undergraduate sophomore Iranian students (63 females and 38 males) studying English Translation at Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas Branch, Iran. They found no significant differences between males and females on their use of listening strategies.

Lurito, a neuro-radiologist, conducted a study at the Indiana University School of Medicine. In the study, 20 men and 20 women volunteers, underwent functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) while listening to a passage from “The Partner,” a John Grisham novel. The scan visualizes areas of the brain activated while performing certain tasks. A majority of the men showed exclusive activity on the left side of the brain, in the temporal lobe, which is classically associated with listening and speech. The majority of women showed activity in the temporal lobe on both sides of the brain, although predominantly on the left. The right temporal lobe traditionally is associated with non-language auditory functions. Lurito (2000) found gender differences in an area of the brain called the temporal lobe, located on the side of the head between the eyes and the ears. While listening to the tape, the left side of the men's brains was far more active than the right side. But when Lurito looked at women's brains, both left *and* right temporal lobes were activated equally, although the left side was slightly more active than the right. Lurito discovered that women used both hemispheres to process language; men only used the left hemisphere (Blake, 2012).

Purdy, (2000) examined the stereotypes about listening behaviour that have contributed to the sustained belief that one gender functions better as listeners than the other. Characteristics of good and poor listeners were collected. The most frequent characteristics of good listeners (top 30) and poor listeners (bottom 28) were randomized and participants were asked to respond to each on a scale from male, some- what- male, true of both sex, female, some-what- female. Results showed that most of the good characteristics were associated with females, while the poor characteristics were associated with males.

Tannen (2001) stated that men and women have very distinct communication styles that influences how they listen. For example, women listen to understand the other person's emotions to find common interests whereas men listen in order to take action and solve problems. Also, males listen to hear facts, while females are more aware of the mood of the communication (Booth – Butterfield, 1984).

3. Research Questions

To find out the English listening comprehension strategies used by male and female senior secondary school students, the following questions were posed:

1. Which English listening comprehension strategies do male senior secondary school students use when they listen to their teachers?
2. Which English listening comprehension strategies do female senior secondary school students use when they listen to their teachers?

3. Is there a difference in the use of English listening comprehension strategy between male and female senior secondary school students?

Research question 3 is hypothesised thus:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in English listening comprehension strategy use between male and female senior secondary school students.

4. Methodology

This study employed the descriptive survey design. This design was chosen so as to collect information already in existence from the respondents using a questionnaire to describe the listening strategies used by Senior Secondary School Students from four (4) sampled schools in Edo South Senatorial District, The independent variable for the study is listening comprehension strategies. The dependent variable of this study is listening comprehension proficiency.

Subjects in the present study comprise four hundred and forty-two (442) Senior Secondary School Students from four (4) sampled schools in Edo South Senatorial District, using both the stratified and simple random sampling procedure.

One instrument was used to collect the data for this study. The instrument tagged “Listening Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire (LCSQ)”, adapted from Oxford (1990). As Oxford’s original questionnaire was based on general language strategies including listening, reading, speaking and writing strategies, and the focus of this study is only on listening comprehension strategy use, only the questions related to the listening strategies were used in this questionnaire. The original instrument consists of fifty (50) items describing the strategies second language learners use generally to learn language with each statement having a five point Likert-item rating. The ratings are weighted as follows: 1. “Never or almost never true of me”; 2. “Usually not true of me”; 3. “Somewhat true of me”; 4. “Usually true of me”; 5. “Always or almost always true of me”. However, the researchers because of the academic level of their subjects reduced the number of items to thirty (30), and also reduced the number of ratings to three alternatives weighted as follows: 1 “Never”; 2 “Sometimes”; 3 “Always”. Thirty (30) questions were divided into the six (6) types of strategies, while the questionnaire consists of sections A and B. Section A solicits information about the students such as name of school and sex. Section B is divided into six sections A, B, C, D, E and F to cover the six types of strategies proposed by Oxford (1990) and adopted for this study.

In order to validate this instrument (LCSQ) and to determine its suitability for this study, it was subjected to expert appraisal and criticism by a Language Education specialist, a specialist in Measurement and Evaluation and an English teacher in a senior secondary school, to achieve face and content validity.

Reliability check of the instrument was done via a pilot study using forty (40) students, who were randomly selected from a school outside the sampled schools. Cronbach’s Alpha reliability test was used in calculating the reliability coefficient of the LCSQ. Reliability coefficient of .82 was obtained showing therefore that the instrument have satisfied Cronbach’s Alpha reliability test.

5. Procedure

The study was conducted using intact classes. In administering the instrument what the study was about and what the subjects were required to do in the study were explained to the subjects. They listened to the researchers read the statements from the Listening Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire (LCSQ). The statements were read and explained to the students because of their level of education. The researchers had to explain every item on the questionnaire to the students before they indicated their opinion. In each school the exercise lasted for an average of forty minutes.

Research Question 1: Which English listening comprehension strategies do male senior secondary school students use when they listen to their teachers?

Data collected to answer research question 1 were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The result of the analysis is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Listening Comprehension Strategy Use of Male Students

Strategy Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Memory	239	1.89	.40	5
Cognitive	239	1.94	.37	2
Compensation	239	1.94	.47	2
Metacognitive	239	2.14	.47	1
Affective	239	1.77	.43	6
Social	239	1.93	.46	4

Table 1 shows the mean statistics of the six strategy categories used by low proficiency senior secondary school students based on the listening strategy questionnaire completed by the subjects of the study. Among the

six strategy categories, Meta-cognitive ($M=2.14$, $SD=.47$), has the highest mean. The Cognitive strategy ($M=1.94$, $SD=.37$), Compensation strategy ($M=1.94$, $SD=.47$), Social strategy ($M=1.93$, $SD=.46$) and Memory strategy ($M=1.89$, $SD=.40$). The Affective strategy ($M=1.77$, $SD=.43$) has the lowest mean.

Research Question 2: Which English listening comprehension strategies do female senior secondary school students use when they listen to their teachers?

Data collected to answer research question 2 were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The result of the analysis is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Listening Comprehension Strategy Use of Female Students

Strategy Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Memory	203	1.86	.39	6
Cognitive	203	1.97	.33	3
Compensation	203	2.06	.43	2
Metacognitive	203	2.20	.43	1
Affective	203	1.87	.41	5
Social	203	1.93	.45	4

Table 2 shows the mean statistics of the six strategy categories used by high proficiency senior secondary school students based on the listening strategy questionnaire completed by the subjects of the study. Among the six strategy categories, Meta-cognitive ($M=2.20$, $SD=.43$), has the highest mean. The Compensation strategy ($M=2.06$, $SD=.43$), Cognitive strategy ($M=1.97$, $SD=.33$), Social strategy ($M=1.93$, $SD=.45$) and Affective strategy ($M=1.87$, $SD=.41$). The Memory strategy ($M=1.86$, $SD=.39$) has the lowest mean.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in English listening comprehension strategy use between male and female senior secondary school students.

Data collected to test hypothesis 1, were analyzed using independent-samples t-test. The result of analysis is shown in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the differences between Females and Males Senior Secondary School Students English Listening Strategy Use

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening Strategy Use	Females	203	68.82	10.86
	Males	239	67.19	10.88

Table 3 shows the mean of English listening strategy use of two hundred and three (203) Female Senior Secondary School students as 68.82 with a standard deviation of 10.86, while the mean of English listening strategy use of two hundred and thirty nine (239) Male Senior Secondary School students as 67.19 with a standard deviation of 10.88. Results indicate that there is a difference in the mean scores of English listening strategy use for Females ($M=68.82$, $SD=10.86$) and Males ($M=67.19$, $SD=10.88$). To explore whether this difference was significant, t-test for independent samples was conducted. See Table 4

Table 4: T-test for Independent Samples of Females and Males Senior Secondary School Students English Listening Strategy Use

Listening Strategy Use	Levenes test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig(2 tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval Of the Difference Lower Upper	
Equal Variances assumed	.987	.321	1.570	440	.117	1.629	-41098	3.66988
Equal Variances not assumed			1.570	428.797	.117	1.629	-41096	3.66966

Table 4 shows a t-value of 1.570 significant at .117 testing at an alpha level of .05. This indicates that there is no significant difference between English listening comprehension strategies used by Female and Male Senior Secondary School Students. The null hypothesis is therefore retained. It is concluded that there is no significant difference between listening comprehension strategies used by Female and Male Senior Secondary School students.

6. Discussion of Results

This study which investigated the English listening comprehension strategies used by Female and Male Senior Secondary School Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State revealed that both Female and Male

Senior Secondary School Students use more of Metacognitive strategy. While the Females use less of Memory strategy the Males use less of Affective strategy. The fact that both sexes use the Metacognitive strategy the most may not come as a surprise because they are both exposed equally to the use of English as a second language and equally need at least a credit pass in the subject to gain admission to a tertiary institution. They are also self-regulated learners who are sensitive of their individual learning process and the requirement of their learning tasks. They have therefore developed essential listening skills and a variety of strategies to meet their listening needs. The males use the Affective strategy least because they are afraid to take risk with language, and do not want to be laughed at when they make mistakes. The females use the Memory strategy the least possibly because they are better at verbal activities. The findings from research question one as presented in Table 1 shows that Senior Secondary School Male Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State use all six categories of listening strategies at different frequency. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) was employed to find out the mean score of listening comprehension strategies that senior secondary school students use in learning English as a second language. Among the six strategy categories, Meta-cognitive ($M=2.14$, $SD=.47$), has the highest mean, followed by the Cognitive strategy ($M=1.94$, $SD=.37$), Compensation strategy ($M=1.94$, $SD=.47$), Social strategy ($M=1.93$, $SD=.46$) and Memory strategy ($M=1.89$, $SD=.40$). The Affective strategy ($M=1.77$, $SD=.43$) has the lowest mean. This means that male students in senior secondary school use more of Metacognitive strategy and less of Affective strategy.

The findings from research question two as presented in Table 2 also show that Senior Secondary School female Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State use all six categories of listening strategies. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) was employed to find out the mean score of English listening comprehension strategies that Senior Secondary School male Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State use in learning English as a second language. Among the six strategy categories, Meta-cognitive ($M=2.20$, $SD=.43$), has the highest mean, followed by the Compensation strategy ($M=2.06$, $SD=.43$), Cognitive strategy ($M=1.97$, $SD=.33$), Social strategy ($M=1.93$, $SD=.45$) and Affective strategy ($M=1.87$, $SD=.41$). The Memory strategy ($M=1.86$, $SD=.39$) has the lowest mean. This means that Female students in Senior Secondary School also use more of Metacognitive strategy but less of memory strategy.

T -test for independent samples was run to determine if there was a significant difference between English listening comprehension strategies used by Female and Male Senior Secondary School Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State. The only hypothesis which states that "There is no significant difference in English listening comprehension strategy use between male and female senior secondary school students" is retained. The findings revealed that the English listening comprehension strategies use mean score of Female Senior Secondary School Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State is 68.82, while that of the Male Senior Secondary School Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State is 67.19. The calculated t-value 1.570 is significant at .117 level which is greater than the alpha level of .05. This shows that the difference in the English listening comprehension strategies use mean score between Male and Female Senior Secondary School Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo is not significant. This indicates that there is no significant difference in English listening comprehension strategy use between Female and Male Senior Secondary School Students in Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State. The reason for this result could be that English listening strategy use is assessed equally by students of both sexes with the same educational level. As such, it is not tied to a specific sex since both male and female students have access to benefit from the cognitive exercise if they choose to. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Mohseny and Raeisi (2009), who found no significant differences between males and females on their use of listening strategies and Bacon (1992), who found that Female students made use of metacognitive strategies more than males but in contrast with the findings of Lurito (2000), Purdy, (2000) who found women to be better listeners than men.

7. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions are drawn. Curriculum planners, textbook writers, language teachers and students should accord the listening skill its right position. Teachers should make students aware of the different English listening strategies and place emphasis on the Affective and Memory strategies. This will make students aware of the different English listening strategies and apply them in the classroom. At present, students hardly make use of the different strategies of the listening skills. This may have resulted in their poor performance not only in English Language but in other school subjects.

8. Recommendations

Students inadvertently utilize listening strategies for English listening comprehension even though they are not trained on the use of strategies for listening. However, they are not aware of what these strategies are. Students use the metacognitive strategy more even though they do not know it. Learners, who use listening strategies more, perform better in listening activities than those who use them less. Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion drawn there-from, the following recommendations are made:

Teachers should take the teaching of the listening strategies and the listening skills seriously as they teach other language skills. There is need for English Language teachers to make known to students what the various types of listening strategies are and teach learners listening strategies to enable them gain from lessons. They should find out the listening comprehension strategies rarely used by their students, so that they can fashion out their lessons in such a way as to develop in the students the strategies they hardly use. Teachers should also help students to cultivate the habit of using English strategies and raise their students' awareness of language learning strategies. Also, teachers should help students to reduce anxiety, gain self-confidence and encourage cooperative learning in listening activities.

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