PROMOTING LISTENING STRATEGIES AND GROUP WORK FOR TERTIARY STUDENTS LEARNING OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION

ABSTRACT

Indonesia university graduate level of English listening comprehension is usually lower than the other three skills of writing, reading and speaking (Prapphal, 2003), and the culprit related to this causally is inadequate classroom teaching (Foley, 2005, p. 233). Consequently, this research project investigates the implementation of an innovative teaching intervention in some Indonesia tertiary listening comprehension class. The main aims were to:

1. Examine the benefits of the teaching model
2. Explore individual student regulation of listening tasks
3. Examine influences of group interaction on learning in this context.

Both the intervention and the research project are guided by a socio-cultural theory of second or foreign language (L2) acquisition which views human learning and development as dependent on a repeated interplay between social and individual processes (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191; Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The intervention will involve both individual and group work, combining a strategy-based listening instruction model based on the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Chamot et al., 1999) with a three-step task design. This model will provide students with strategy training and practice in selecting and using appropriate strategies in the meta-cognitive processes of planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating.

The research is designed to take place over two year, with 30 participants from each classes of 30, and generating both qualitative and quantitative data from numbers of tertiary classes, while prioritising the former. The qualitative data will be collected through video recordings of classroom activities, teacher-researcher's field notes, and group interviews at the end of the intervention. The quantitative data are generated through pre- and post-tests conducted with the participating students. Data sources and methods are triangulated for the data analysis, which was thematic in the first instance. Vygotskian activity theory explicated by Engeström (1987) will then be used in further interpretation. This theory offers an effective analytical framework accommodating the interconnections between individual and social processes involved in learning listening comprehension.

Keywords: *Listening, Tertiary, Intervention, Group Works*

1. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

As a result of the globalisation of the world economy, English has become a medium of communication between native and non-native English speakers as well as between speakers of different first languages globally (Tudor, 2001, p. 6; Seidlhofer, 2005). As in other countries whose native language is not English, the Indonesia government realises that to succeed in the global market, the Indonesia workforce must improve its English language skills. This issue has led to a considerably increased demand for a proficient command of English among Indonesia graduates in the past decade.

Starting at the junior high school levels, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been adopted to promote student performance and acquisition of skills in communicating and utilising English in international academic and career settings. At the tertiary level, English has become a compulsory subject for all university students across all faculties. Indonesia graduates are expected not only to be able to read and write English, but also to be able to communicate verbally with English speaking people.

In practice, however, despite spending 12 years prior to their tertiary education and another four years in university, Indonesia university graduate English proficiency is lower than the world standard. Of the four language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening), students demonstrate considerably lower proficiency in English listening comprehension as they are unable to respond in English in real communication situations. It has been assumed that Indonesia graduates' low proficiency level is the result of the pedagogical method used and it is therefore essential for teachers to search for an effective teaching pedagogy that would enhance Indonesia tertiary students English proficiency, particularly their listening skills.

The body of second or foreign language (L2) acquisition literature has elaborated the importance of listening comprehension. For example, Richards (2005) argues that listening comprehension is not only the main channel of human communication, but also the essential tool for overall L2 acquisition (pp. 85-86). Listening comprehension is the primary skill that Indonesia students must acquire to master the other three English skills and therefore use English effectively. The aim of this research is to investigate the implementation of an innovative pedagogical model incorporating strategy-based listening instruction based on the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA)

(Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1999a, 1999b) with a three-step task design (pre-, while- and post-listening) in an intervention listening comprehension class in an Indonesia university.

Adopting the notion of teaching students how to listen, this study focused on investigating appropriate listening instruction which could better facilitate students learning of listening comprehension. The two notions of teaching during the pre-, while- and post-listening steps (Field 1998) and teaching through the meta-cognitive processes of planning, monitoring, repairing and evaluating (Chamot et al. 1999a, 1999b) are adopted as a combined theoretical framework in this study. Embedded in the three step listening task are individual and group working structures. Following the socio-cultural approach, the pedagogical model for this study adopted a two-fold structure respectively addressing student need for individual learning (Williams & Burden, 1997) and collaborative learning (Vygotsky, 1978). To maximise student learning, individual learning was planned for the while-listening steps, and collaborative group work was planned for the pre- and post-listening steps (as suggested by Hedge (2000) and Vandergrift (2003b).

This research also adopted CALLA (Chamot et al. 1999a, 1999b) as an instruction model for the intervention class. This model offers the teaching of listening strategies by way of triggering student meta-cognitive awareness in the four meta-cognitive processes of planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating.

The overall objectives of the study were thus to:

1. examine the benefits of the integrated teaching model in a Indonesia tertiary listening comprehension class
2. explore individual student regulation of listening tasks
3. examine influences of social interaction in the form of group work on learning in this context.

In order to respond to the research objectives, I set up three key research questions:

1. What were the outcomes of the intervention?
2. In what way did the students use listening strategies to regulate their listening tasks?
3. In what ways did the groups function during the listening task?

Because of the nature of the three research questions, a mixed methods approach was employed as the overall research design of this study. In Research Question 1, I examine the overall outcomes of students participating in the intervention class in which

they both individually use listening strategies and collaboratively work in groups in completing listening tasks. Research Questions 2 and 3 allowed me to deeply explore the details of individual and group work learning processes that affected student listening comprehension development. I applied both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection in seeking the answers to Research Question 1 but only the qualitative method in Research Questions 2 and 3.

1.3 Significance of Research Project

This research project contributes to the practice of L2 listening comprehension instruction to Indonesia tertiary students, and potentially to tertiary students in the region, not only for English but for other foreign languages. First, all of this study is based on a research framework derived from the literature of up-to-date research in the teaching of L2 listening comprehension. Consequently, its intellectual and practical implications address concerns raised in the literature as being widely relevant, and therefore relevant to the Indonesia context.

Second, this research offers a potential model for teaching students how to learn L2 listening skills. The model is developed to fit in the integrated English skills classroom that is mostly found in Indonesia. The strength of the model lies in its capacity to connect individual and collaborative learning processes. Most importantly, this study has investigated the value of a range of pedagogical elements that may contribute to Indonesia tertiary students learning L2 listening comprehension.

Third, this research, with its implications for research, may lead to future research in this area.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter presents the research design I am going to use to investigate how individual student usage of listening strategies and their collaborative learning impacted on their listening comprehension improvement. The aim is to generate rich data in answer to the research questions.

All research is underpinned by a philosophical perspective or an overall orientation about the world that a researcher believes in (Creswell, 2009, p. 6). According to Neuman (2000), the philosophical perspective of how a human views the world can be explained via three paradigms—positivist, interpretive, and critical social sciences. A paradigm is a 'basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Each paradigm consists of principles combining the beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the relationship between the inquirer and the known) and methodology (how we know the world, or gain knowledge of it) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33). These three components within the research paradigm guide a researcher who 'sees the world and acts in it' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33).

Taking an interpretative philosophical perspective, I am going to conduct my research project to 'understand and explain human and social reality' (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). My overall philosophical perspective can be described as being situated within the constructivist-interpretive paradigm as categorised by Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 33).

According to Denzin and Lincoln, (2003), qualitative methods allow researchers to be able to 'seek answers to the questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning' (p. 13). Researchers, therefore, focus on the 'socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researchers and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape the inquiry' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 13). A quantitative method, however, is considered, as it is in this study, a potential method that provides objective data which could supplement or complement the in-depth subjective data collected from the qualitative method (Mertens, 2010).

For some researchers, qualitative and quantitative methods are applied to the inquiry. These researchers believe that a mixed-methods approach is built on the strengths of both the qualitative and quantitative nature of inquiry. By using mixed-methods, researchers could create a more comprehensive understanding of research problems

(Creswell, 2009). As a constructivist-interpretive researcher, my belief is that knowledge is socially constructed by people and that I should attempt to understand the 'complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live in it' (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). Therefore, while I am going to conduct this research based on a mixed-methods approach, most of the data are qualitative. This mixed-method study is directed by the framework which has been described by Creswell et al. (2003) as a study that:

> involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research (p. 212).

The definition above clearly suggests four considerations in conducting a mixed-method study:

1 The combination of two research methods

2 The nature of collecting and analysing data

3 The data prioritisation

4 Stage(s) of the actual data mixing or integrating.

I conducted my research project in accordance with the four suggested considerations. In this research project, methodological triangulation and data triangulation are used in order to verify my interpretation of findings.

Table 2.1 Triangulation in the research project (adapted from Denzin, 1989; Freeman, 1998)

Types of triangulation	
Methodological triangulation	Classroom research: - between-method triangulation - within-method triangulation
Data triangulation	Using multiple data sources: - pre- and post-tests - group interviews with students - video recordings of classroom activities - teacher-researcher's field notes

Methodological triangulation: In triangulating the qualitative and quantitative research methods, data from both approaches are compared and integrated (Patton, 2002, p. 556; Dörnyei, 2007, p. 42). Since this type of triangulation allows for comparison of the study's

results from different methods, it provides a complete picture of an issue studied by Flick, (2007b, p. 73). According to Denzin (1989), methodological triangulation could be further divided into two aspects—*between-method triangulation* and *within-method triangulation* (p. 237). In this research project, within-method triangulation is employed for the classroom research. Regarding the between-method triangulation, a quantitative method of test is triangulated with the qualitative methods of group interviews with students and videos of classroom activities. In the within-method triangulation, two qualitative methods of group interview and video recordings of classroom activities are triangulated. By these means, the data from group interviews with students, video recordings classroom activities, and teacher's field notes are compared and crosschecked to paint an in-depth and clear picture of the research findings.

Data triangulation: This type of triangulation refers to generally comparing data from various sources within qualitative methods (Patton, 2002, p. 556). 'By triangulating data sources, analysts can efficiently employ the same methods to maximum theoretical advantage' (Denzin, 1989, p. 237). In this study, data sources—transcripts of group interviews with students and video recordings of classroom activities, written texts of the teacher-researcher's field notes, and numerical records of pre- and post-test scores— are triangulated to verify the research results.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section summarises the main findings from the triangulation of three qualitative data sources—group interviews with students, video recordings of classroom activities, and the teacher-researcher's field notes—as well as from the quantitative data of pre- and post-listening tests. Data analysed in this chapter indicated that the three groups, each taken as a community, exhibit unique characteristics in the ways students regulated the task and their approach to group work, as presented in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: The distinctive characteristics of the three groups

	Group 1	**Group 2**	**Group 3**
Task adherence	All group members strictly followed the prescribed learning task with only one member making a minimal alteration	Group members almost all made one minor alteration to the prescribed learning task	Group members all made a number of major alterations to the task
Learning efforts	Learning effort was evident by all members during discussion	Learning effort was evident by all members during discussion	Learning effort was evident by all members during discussion
Appreciation of benefits of group work	All members strongly exhibited their appreciation of how group work enhanced their listening comprehension skills improvement	All members strongly exhibited their appreciation of how group work enhanced their listening comprehension skills improvement	All members strongly exhibited their appreciation of how group work enhanced their listening comprehension skills improvement

The main findings obtained from data analysis in this chapter direct me to a view of learner language learning as being mediated by the social relations in which learners are positioned. This point of view is concurrent with activity theory, which emphasises that human activities mediate, and are mediated by, the social relationships they have with others (Johnson, 2009, p.78).

This chapter also concludes the study and outlines the findings of the research into a teaching intervention for developing L2 listening comprehension in an Indonesia tertiary classroom. As outlined in previous chapters, the design of the intervention was guided by a socio-cultural theory of language acquisition—that human learning and development depend on repeated interplay between social and individual processes (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191; Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf &

Thorne, 2006). It adopts an innovative pedagogical model which integrates the strategy-based listening instruction model based on the CALLA model (Chamot et al., 1999a; 1999b) with a three-step task design (pre-, while- and post-listening) and both individual and group work.

This innovative model provided students with strategies for training and practice in the mata-cognitive process of planning, monitoring and repairing (problem-solving and evaluating) in the pre-, while- and post-listening steps of a listening task. The pre-, while- and post-listening steps were applied in this intervention to create learning space, allowing individual learning agents to construct their knowledge and their situated social context thus creating their own activity system (Engestrom, 1987).

The research into the teaching intervention employed a mixed method for the inquiry, generating both qualitative and quantitative data and prioritising the former. The qualitative data were collected through video recordings of classroom activities during the semester, the teacher-researcher's field notes, and group interviews with students at the end of the course, while the quantitative data were generated through pre- and post-tests conducted on participating students.

The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of issues in three areas of teaching L2 listening comprehension:

1. The benefits of innovative pedagogical model in an Indonesian tertiary listening comprehension class
2. Individual students' regulation of listening task, and
3. Influences of social interaction in the form of group work on learning in this context.

Summary of the findings

The findings of this research study support the belief that language learners are active learning agents actively engaging in constructing their own learning (Lantolf, 2001, p. 145). However, learning does not occur separately from the social context but is dependent on social and individual processes in the construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning occurs when learning agents construct their learning with the help of artefacts and within an activity system (Engeström, 1987).

The qualitative data revealed the process by which individual students used the

strategies introduced in the intervention program to regulate their listening tasks, showing how group collaboration could enhance student listening comprehension. The analytic results from the quantitative data showed improvement in student listening comprehension at the end of the intervention program, supporting the innovative pedagogical model designed especially for the intervention program.

This study revealed that the pedagogical intervention, which combined group work with the CALLA instructional model involving students using listening strategies through meta-cognitive processes in the pre-, while- and post-listening steps of a learning task, positively affected student improvement in listening comprehension.

The study also found that although all student listening comprehension improved after they attended the intervention class, individual students' sense of accomplishment varied according to the extent to which they capitalised on the affordances—listening strategies and group work—which were provided in the program.

In terms of the first affordance—using listening strategies—in general, the more proficient the students the more capably they demonstrated effective strategy use. However, less proficient students could also use listening strategies as effectively as more proficient ones if they regularly practised and if the group they were working in was using and talking about listening strategies. This supports findings by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) regarding becoming a master in regulating the task using strategies. It also supports the widely held view that learning strategy training in general helps learners to become better language learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Kohonen, 1992; Oxford et al., 2004; Chamot, 2005).

For the second affordance—group work—data analysis revealed that group work could facilitate students in working effectively and actively toward completing listening exercise questions through a strong engagement in group discussion focused not only on the achievement of text comprehension, but also on strategy use. This could in turn lead to individual students better sense of accomplishment.

The evidence showing that group work affected students high sense of accomplishment could be traced from Group 1. According to the data findings, Group 1's listening activity was influenced by the group's values and beliefs, notably valuing hard work and individuals contributing to the group, as well as believing that every member is able to learn. Such values and beliefs influenced the group's rules of learning—the group members followed the prescribed task and made only small alterations. The

group's values and beliefs also influenced the role distribution of its members—everybody brought in and shared their knowledge with their peers in the group. The interrelation between the community, rules and division of labour within the group positively influenced the flow of the activity system. Group members as the subjects of activity had the maximum opportunity to work towards their immediate goals with the help of listening strategies and thus become competent in using such artefacts. By mastering the use of listening strategies, the individual subjects in Group 1 could comprehend their listening texts and could fulfil the task of question completion, which was their immediate goal. With continuous practice in this activity system, all members in Group 1 could demonstrate listening comprehension improvement whatever their previous language proficiencies were prior to joining the activity system.

The study also found that the activity system of Group 3 influenced their overall lower sense of accomplishment when compared to Group1. Group 3's activity practice was influenced by the group's values and beliefs, which favoured spoon feeding by one member and believed that only one member had the ability to learn. This affected the group's rules in learning—making major alterations to the learning activity rules. Three of the four members could not follow the task rules due to their limited language proficiency, and thus altered the rules to get the task completed. The division of labour was also influenced by group members' beliefs and values. In this regard, the only one who took up the learning task and contributed knowledge to the group was the proficient member. The other three members made only perfunctory contributions to their own task regulation and thus could not contribute any knowledge to the group. All the three elements—community, rules, and division of labour—influenced the flow of the activity system in Group 3. Due to the major alteration of the learning task, students overall did not actually concentrate on using their listening strategies to regulate their listening task. Therefore they did not master the use of the listening strategies and this led to them being unable to effectively use listening strategies to help them comprehend the listening texts. By the end of the semester, although the data showed that their listening comprehension improved, overall they could only demonstrate a lower sense of accomplishment compared to Group 1.

4. RESEARCH DISCUSSION

The implications of this study can be roughly divided into research and pedagogical implications, both of which could contribute to L2 listening comprehension instruction and future research of relevance to Indonesia.

Research implications

One research implication that can be derived from this study is that, when investigating student learning in L2 listening comprehension, whether in an integrated skills class or an entirely listening comprehension class, we should not lose sight of the interplay between individual and social processes involved in learning.

A limitation of this research is the narrow scope of the investigation into both the exact mechanisms that govern individual member contributions within the group work activity system and the factors that control individual student choice of listening strategies during the action of listening comprehension. Further research needs to be designed to look into this. Ideally an empirical study should be conducted to test the findings of this research about the interplay between individual and social processes involved in learning L2 listening comprehension skills. Following are three recommendations for future research:

First, this study was designed as classroom research in which 36 undergraduates of a university in Indonesia participated as part of their assigned curriculum. Therefore, a replication of this study with another group of students at the same university or at another university in Indonesia would be quite feasible and may provide some useful contributions about the proposed model instruction.

Second, the method used in this study was context-specific in design and findings. When conducting further research, pre-pilot and pilot studies are needed prior to the main study to investigate the types of listening strategies that could best benefit student learning.

Third, for more understanding of student use of listening strategies to regulate listening tasks and how the group functions to facilitate individual development in listening comprehension, a longitudinal study is recommended in future studies. The intervention in this study lasted for a semester and a longer period of training and practice would be interesting to investigate.

Pedagogical implications

This study offers a teaching model of L2 listening comprehension that seeks to systematise ideas, and to produce a working model which creates an effective pedagogy of L2 listening comprehension learning. The model which emphasises instruction in the meta-cognitive processes of listening, and allows individual and collaborative learning spaces in the form of the pre-, while-, and post-listening steps, supports the post-method teaching and learning perspective, which advocates students as learning agents exploring their learning within the situated social context.

The implication for classroom teaching is that teachers teach L2 listening comprehension by instructing them to use listening strategies in order to comprehend the texts. The instruction should enable students to consciously know which strategies to use for their listening moment. Guiding students through the meta-cognitive processes, particularly the CALLA instructional model, is strongly recommended.

Another implication is that teachers arrange their classrooms in a mixed structure of individual and collaborative group work, within the pre-, while- and post-listening steps of the task. An individual working structure should be set up in the while-listening step to provide opportunities for students to use listening strategies in helping them to comprehend the listening text. The data findings indicate that when working individually in the while-listening step, many students can readily employ the taught listening strategies. In addition, they could also try out the strategies that other peers recommended to make sense of what they could not have otherwise understood.

The last implication for teaching L2 listening comprehension is that group work structures should be set up in the pre- and post-listening steps of the task. The data findings show that in the pre-listening discussion, students can activate their background knowledge about the listening topic while the group discusses the choices of listening topic. This means they feel more confident in their use of listening strategies when the group discusses the appropriate listening strategies to be used in each listening topic. In the post-listening discussion, the data findings indicate that students feel more confident about their comprehension by sharing the answers after listening with other peers. In addition, students can gain knowledge about listening content and useful recommendations about strategy use from other peers as well as solving their listening problems.

One final pedagogical implication is that by creating an environment that maximises

the interplay between individual and social processes of learning, as the model in this research did, we can offer students a better opportunity to fully develop their potential for learning.

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