

Exploring Listening Strategies in Language Learning

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Abstract

Listening entails the capacity to receive and comprehend messages within the communication process precisely. Consequently, within the domain of language acquisition, listening is recognised as a vital component alongside reading, writing, and speaking. Unlike other language skills, the primary objective of listening is to comprehend speech and extract its meaning rather than focusing solely on the language form itself (Sevik, 2012). This study investigates how learners perceive the utilisation of their learning strategies. In presenting the framework, the study also examines listening techniques proposed by Tuyen et al (2020), categorised into three groups: active, responsive, and attentive listening. A quantitative survey of 192 students from a Malaysian public university was carried out. The results demonstrate that students used all three categories of listening strategies in their language learning. The techniques include sustaining fluency, grasping the primary idea, negotiating meaning, scanning, nonverbal, less-active listening, and word-oriented techniques. The findings of this study can raise awareness among students about their listening strategies in language learning, offering valuable insights for educators, learners, and the broader language learning environment. It is suggested that foreign language instructors must teach students listening strategies, particularly focusing on those at lower proficiency levels. These strategies should be taught consistently and correctly to help students overcome listening challenges across different tasks.

Keywords: Listening Strategies, Attentive, Responsive, Active

Introduction

Background of Study

Language learners are expected to learn and master the four key skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Among these four skills, researchers have not given much attention to

listening skills, even though they are important in language learning. According to Chattaraj (2020), in foreign language acquisition, the focus is more on communication and production, and listening and comprehension have not taken the lead in language classes. Nunan (2002) points out that for a long time, listening skills have been ignored by language teachers. Only in the 1960s, when the emphasis of language instruction changed to the development of oral skills, did listening skills become a focus area. Listening is indeed a very important skill in learning a foreign language. Before learning a foreign language, first, learners must first listen and comprehend what they are listening to (Ahmadi, 2016). According to Renukadevi (2014), listening is a receptive skill that first develops in a human being, and it awakens awareness of the language. Yildirim and Yildirim (2016) stated that listening accounts for 40-50% of communication time. 25-30% go towards speaking, 11-16% go towards reading, and 9% go towards writing.

Listening is a cognitively demanding and complex process that involves interpreting the sounds in a text to achieve meaningful content (Bao, 2019). Previous researchers came up with various listening strategies. Listening strategies can be categorized as bottom-up or top-down based on the way the listeners interpret the information. In top-down listening, we bring up past knowledge we have about a subject or theme and use it to help us understand the current information or story we are hearing. Meanwhile, bottom-up strategies rely on the actual language in the listening input. It is the understanding of sounds, words, and grammatical characteristics to arrive at meaning (Richards, 2008). Rubin (1990) experimented to see if using Spanish videos to teach listening strategies affected students' ability to comprehend what they were hearing. She found that the use of listening strategies can help students work with more difficult material, and training in the use of listening strategies can improve listening comprehension.

Statement of Problem

Listening involves the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are often misunderstood or misread. Thus, in language learning, listening is one of the important components together with reading, writing, and speaking. By listening, students pick up new vocabulary and grammar rules, improve their pronunciation, and gain knowledge on how to utilize the language in everyday situations. In the early days, listening was neglected and not paid so much attention until the 1970s. In the 1970s when teaching second or foreign languages for communication began to play a significant role all over the world, the importance of teaching listening also increased (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2016). According to Nunan (1998), cited in Yildirim & Yildirim (2016), listening is the basic skill in language learning and over 50% of the time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening. It demonstrates the significance of listening and the need for appropriate instruction in the teaching of listening. Both the teachers and students need to recognise that listening is a complex skill that needs to be consciously developed (Hattingh, 2014). Thus, this research is crucial for helping teachers to understand how students use listening strategies. Additionally, teachers can use it to create pertinent content with specific techniques that can be applied during listening.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore the perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions

- How do learners perceive attentive listening in language learning?
- How do learners perceive responsive listening in language learning?
- How do learners perceive active listening in language learning?
- Is there a relationship between all modes of listening?

Literature Review

Listening Strategies

The significance of listening in foreign language classrooms is on the rise, as emphasised by (Nunan, 1989). Consequently, the exploration of listening strategies in language learning becomes imperative for the cultivation of effective communication skills. Listening holds a key role not only in day-to-day scenarios but also in academic contexts, serving as a fundamental component for sustaining effective communication. Despite its crucial contribution to the development of both communicative and cognitive abilities, the incorporation of listening into language teaching curricula faced considerable delays, as noted by (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2016). In a language classroom, learners frequently acquire information through auditory means.

Consequently, mastering listening strategies becomes essential for their success in tackling listening comprehension tasks (Thompson & Rubin, 1996; Hauck & Hurd, 2005). The notion is that by seamlessly applying their knowledge... of listening strategies to the task, learners can effortlessly develop their listening skills in a second language (Goh, 1997; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Gilakjani et al (2016) state that teachers, when aware of students' learning challenges, can assist them in cultivating effective listening strategies. Consequently, this support can lead to the resolution of difficulties in listening, ultimately enhancing students' listening comprehension abilities.

Concerning the utilisation of learning strategies to improve a learner's listening process, Piamsai (2005) conducted a study where data and interviews with students revealed that the high listening ability group employed more cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Furthermore, their selection of strategies was deemed more suitable. Piamsai (2014) also explored how skilled and less-skilled learners utilized listening strategies to finish a listening task. The results indicated a significant difference in how the two groups reported using strategies in specific areas. Additionally, the findings highlighted the proficient students' effective application of the strategies. (Piamsai, 2014).

In essence, the literature review emphasizes the crucial need to integrate listening strategies into language teaching, underscoring the key role of teachers in guiding learners toward effective approaches. Addressing students' learning challenges in listening is highlighted as a pathway to enhancing comprehension skills and creating a more effective language learning environment. Therefore, the literature review suggests that when teachers are cognizant of students' learning challenges, they can assist in cultivating effective listening strategies. This, in turn, can lead to the resolution of difficulties in listening and contribute to the enhancement of students' listening comprehension abilities.

Past Studies on Listening Strategies in Language Learning

There have been many past studies on listening strategies. Thiviyasreena (2018) investigated the metacognitive awareness of listening strategies among Malaysian second-language learners of English. One hundred English as a Second Language (ELS) undergraduates from a private university participated, and their metacognitive awareness was examined with their performance in a listening comprehension test. The test was based on the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) listening syllabus, and participants also completed the

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ). The results indicated a significant relationship between ESL learners' metacognitive awareness of listening strategies and their scores on the listening comprehension test. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the findings of this study may not apply to the entire population of ESL learners in Malaysia, as the participants represent only a specific group from a private university. According to Thivyasreena (2018), generalizing the results to the broader ESL learner population in the country should be approached with caution due to the limited scope of participants in this study.

Next, the study by Tuyen et. al (2020), which had explored the most commonly used strategies in English oral communication among English-majored students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, Vietnam. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods, employing a questionnaire and a focus group with 213 English-majoring sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The research identified prevalent speaking and listening strategies among students. Notably, common speaking strategies included 'fluency-oriented,' 'message reduction and alteration,' and 'negotiation for meaning while speaking,' with a preference for achievement strategies over reduction ones. For listening, the frequently used strategies were 'negotiation for meaning while listening,' 'non-verbal,' and 'scanning.' Additionally, the study found no significant differences in the use of communication strategies among sophomores, juniors, and seniors, indicating a consistency in strategy application across different academic levels.

In another research, Li (2017) conducted a study exploring Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) and Listening Strategy Instruction in a Chinese language Classroom. To fulfill the study's objective, Li (2017) has conducted an interpretive case study research design. The study involved one instructor and six students enrolled in an intensive Chinese basic course. Data were gathered through 25 classroom observations, a focus group session with the students, and a face-to-face interview with the instructor. The study's results indicated that certain cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational strategies were recognized as effective in fostering self-regulated learning among Chinese as a second language learner. The results also affirmed that instruction in listening strategies contributed to learners' heightened awareness of strategy utilization, enhanced self-confidence, improved listening skills, and the cultivation of learner autonomy and self-regulation. Additionally, the findings suggested that integrating listening strategies into instruction could enhance teaching quality, though potential challenges for teachers may arise. Ultimately, these findings carry implications for language teachers, foreign language learners, and the overall language learning environment.

In conclusion, the three studies shed valuable light on the intricate relationship between listening strategies and language learning outcomes. The findings pointed to improved listening skills, heightened awareness of strategy utilization, and the development of learner autonomy. These studies contribute to our understanding of how targeted listening strategies can enhance language learning, providing valuable implications for educators, learners, and the broader language learning environment.

Conceptual Framework

Among the four components of language learning are reading, writing, speaking, and one last skill that is not often given emphasis; listening. To make the language classroom effective, the instructor has to consider the learner, the learning process, and also the learning situations and strategies used (Rahmat, 2018). The framework of this study is rooted in Tuyen, et. al's (2020) list of listening strategies. The strategies are negotiation for meaning, fluency-

maintaining, scanning, getting the gist, non-verbal, less-active listening, and word-oriented strategies.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study explores how language learners perceive the use of their listening strategies. The listening strategies by Tuyen, et. al (2020) are further categorized into Attentive listening, Responsive listening, and Active listening to reveal the framework in Figure 1 below.

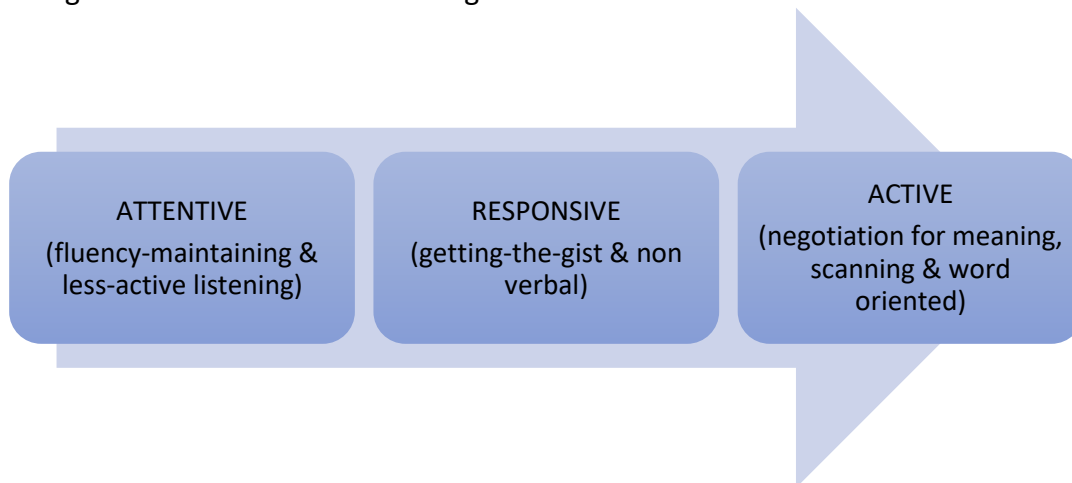


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-Listening Strategies

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore the perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. A purposive sample of 192 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted in Tuyen, et.al. (2020) to reveal the variables in Table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 8 items on attentive listening. Section C has 7 items on responsive listening while section D has 13 items on active listening.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey

No	MODES OF LISTENING	Categories of Listening Strategies	Items	Tot
B	ATTENTIVE	Fluency -maintaining	5	8
		Less-active listener	3	
C	RESPONSIVE	Getting-the-gist	4	7
		Non-verbal	3	
D	ACTIVE	Negotiation for meaning	5	13
		Scanning	4	
		Word oriented	4	
				28

Table 2

Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.935	28

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .935, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1-Gender

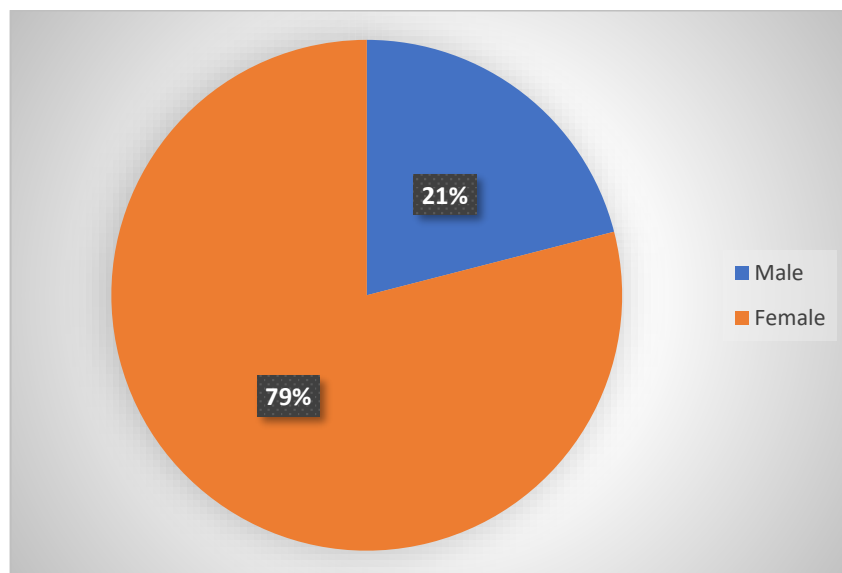


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 above shows the percentage of gender of the respondents. The respondents consisted of 21% of males and 79% of females.

Q2-Japanese Language Level

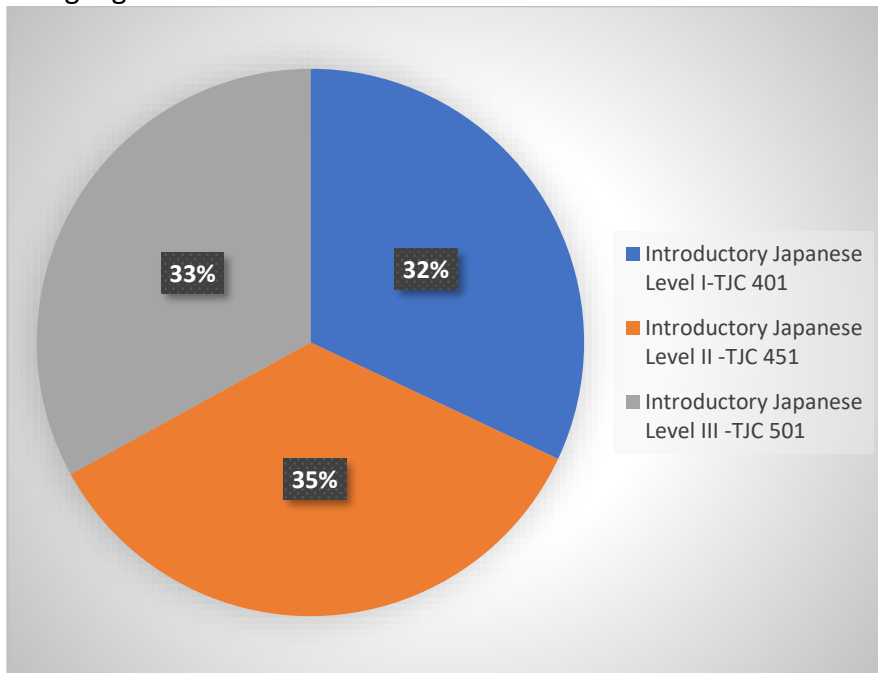


Figure 3- Percentage for Japanese Language Level

Figure 2 presents the percentage of Japanese language level of the respondents. It shows that 32% of the respondents are taking Introductory Japanese Level I, 35% are taking Introductory Japanese Level II, and 33% are taking Introductory Japanese Level III.

Q3-Self-Rate

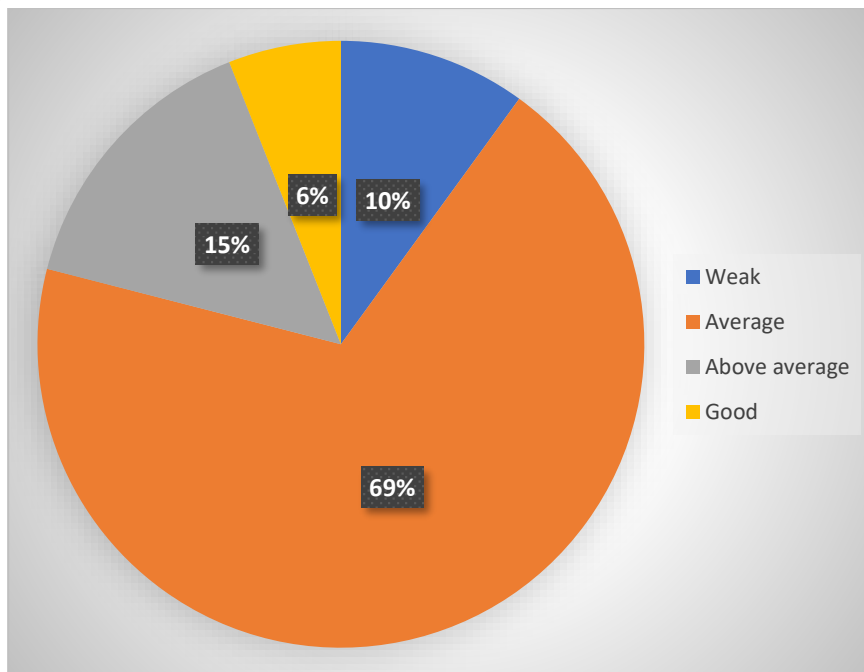


Figure 4- Percentage for Self-Rate

Figure 4 above presents the percentage for self-rate. 10% of the respondents rated themselves as weak, 69% rated themselves as average, 15% rated themselves as above average, and 6% rated themselves as good.

Q4-Preferred Listening activity

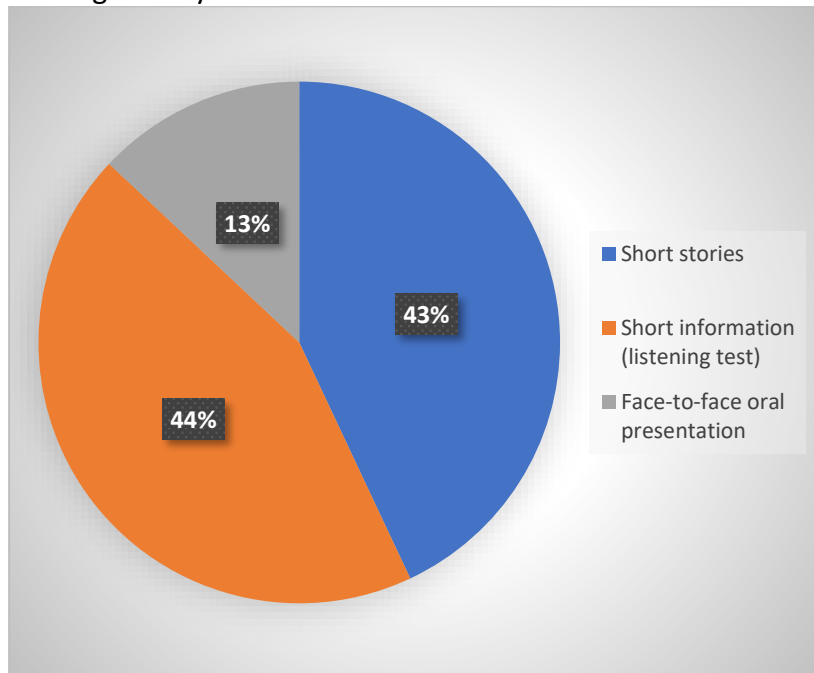


Figure 5- Percentage for Preferred Listening Activity

Figure 5 above shows the percentage of preferred listening activities. 43% of the students preferred the short stories activity, 44% preferred short information (listening test), and only 13% of the students preferred the face-to-face oral presentation activity.

Q5- Why is the Japanese language difficult?

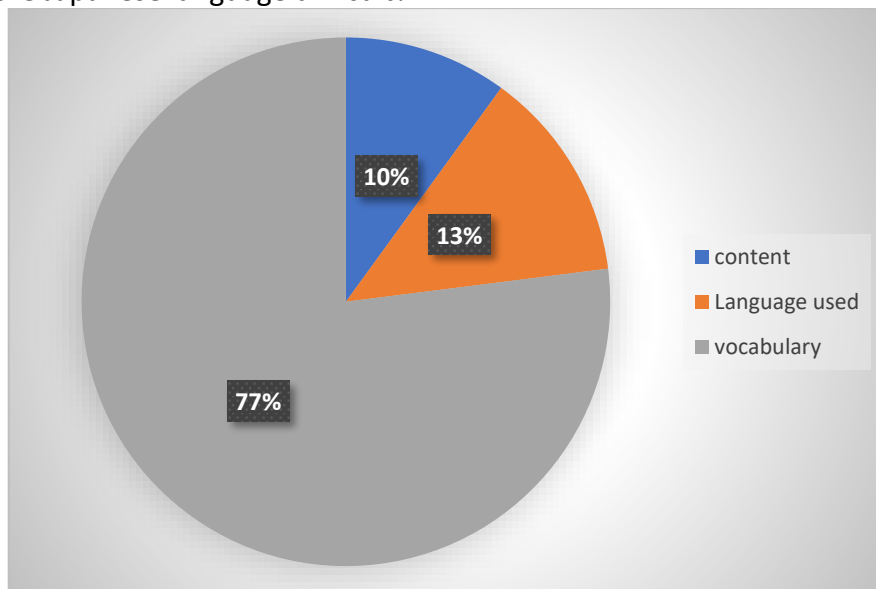


Figure 6- Percentage for Why Japanese Language is Difficult

Figure 6 above shows the percentage of why the Japanese language is difficult. 77% of the respondents pointed out that vocabulary is the most difficult part of the Japanese language. Only 13% of the respondents chose language used, followed by content (10%).

Findings for Attentive Listening

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive attentive listening in language learning? In the context of this study, attentive listening involves (i) fluency-maintaining and (ii) fewer active strategies.

(i) Fluency-maintaining strategies (FM)

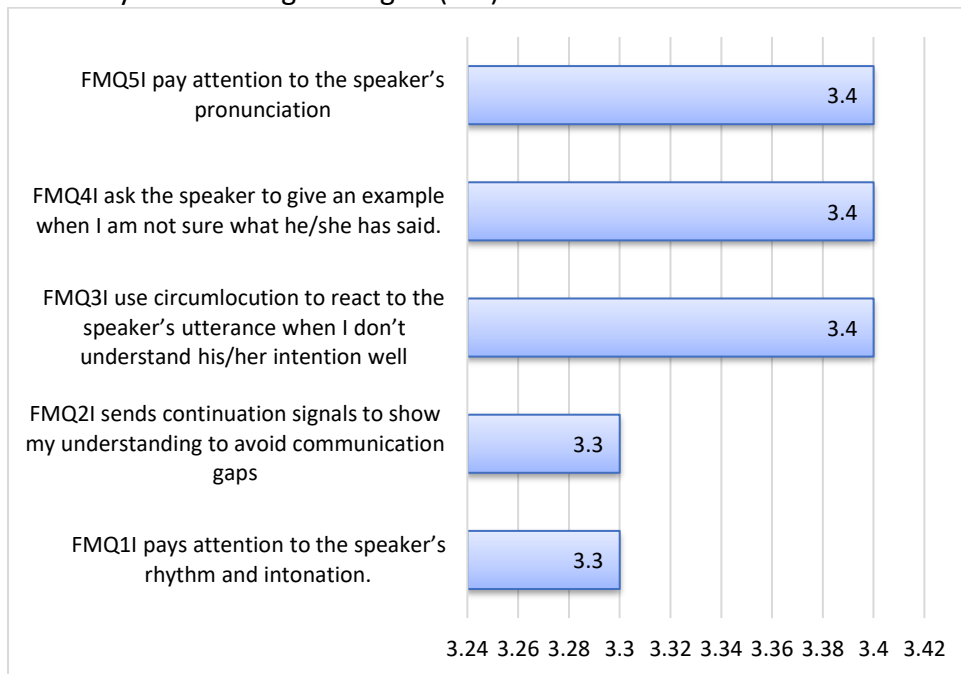


Figure 7- Mean for Fluency-maintaining Strategies.

Figure 7 shows the means for Fluency-maintaining Strategies. Three strategies received a mean score of 3.4. They are “I use circumlocution to react to the speaker’s utterance when I don’t understand his/her intention well”, “I ask the speaker to give an example when I am not sure what he/she has said”, and “I pay attention to the speaker’s pronunciation”. Meanwhile, the mean score of 3.3 is for “I pay attention to the speaker’s rhythm and intonation,” and “I send continuation signals to show my understanding to avoid communication gaps.”

(ii) Less-active-listener strategies (LESS)

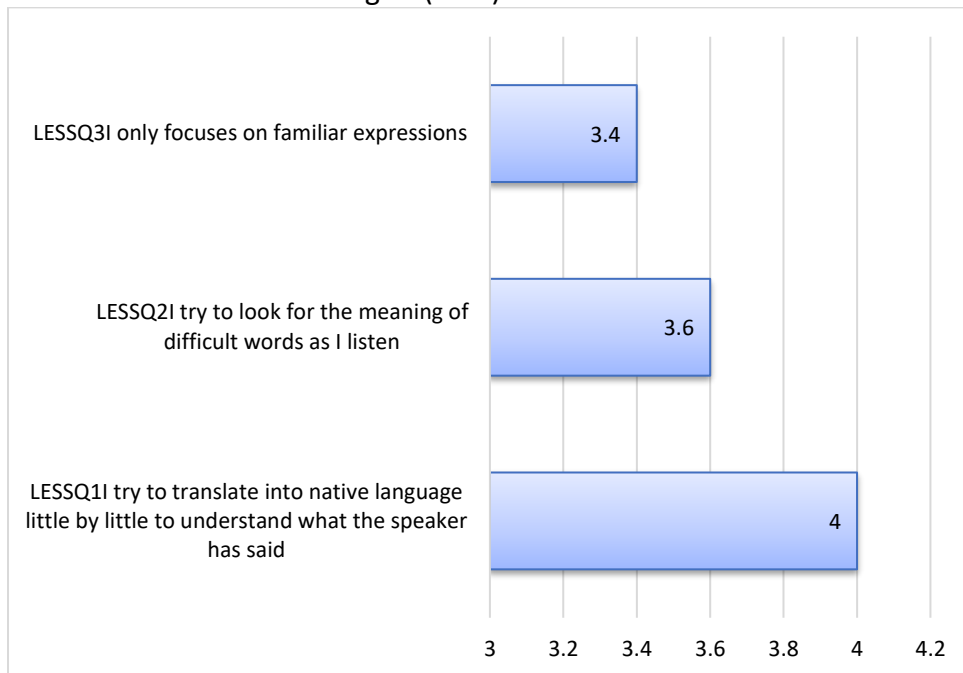


Figure 8- Mean for Active Listener Strategies

Figure 8 presents the mean scores for Less-active-listener strategies. The highest mean score is 4.0 which shows that the learners attempt to interpret the speaker's message by translating it into their native language for better comprehension. Learners also try to find the meanings of challenging words while listening (Mean score=3.6) and they concentrate solely on expressions that are familiar to them (Mean score=3.4).

Findings for Responsive Listening

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive responsive listening in language learning? In the context of this study, attentive listening involves (i) getting the gist, and (ii) non-verbal strategies.

(i) Getting the Gist Strategies (GIST)

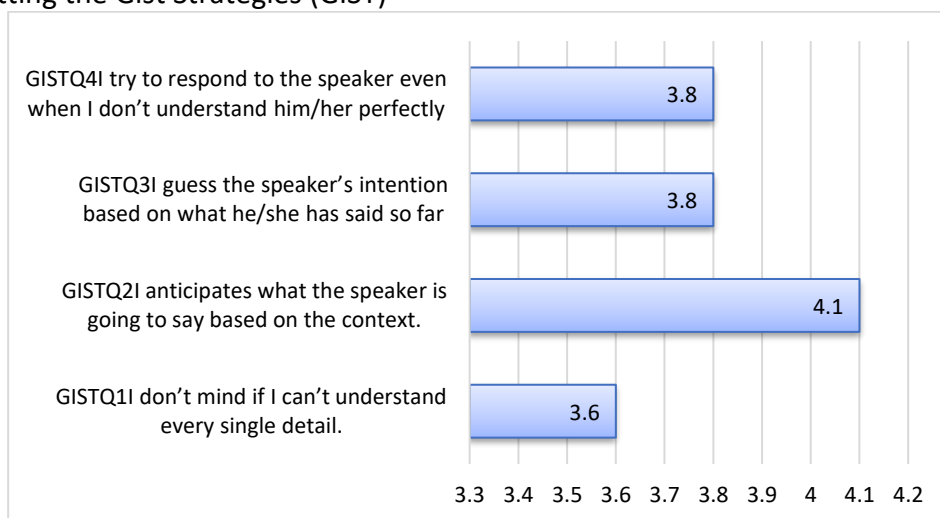


Figure 9- Mean for Getting the Gist Strategies

The results of the Getting the Gist Strategies are shown in Figure 9. The highest Mean Score is 4.1 for the item “I anticipate what the speaker is going to say based on the context.” That means learners predict the speaker's forthcoming words by considering the context. The second highest mean score is “I guess the speaker’s intention based on what he/she has said so far” and “I try to respond to the speaker even when I don’t understand him/her perfectly”. Learners infer the speaker's intention from their previous statements and try to respond even if they don't fully comprehend them.

(ii) Non-verbal strategies while listening (NV)

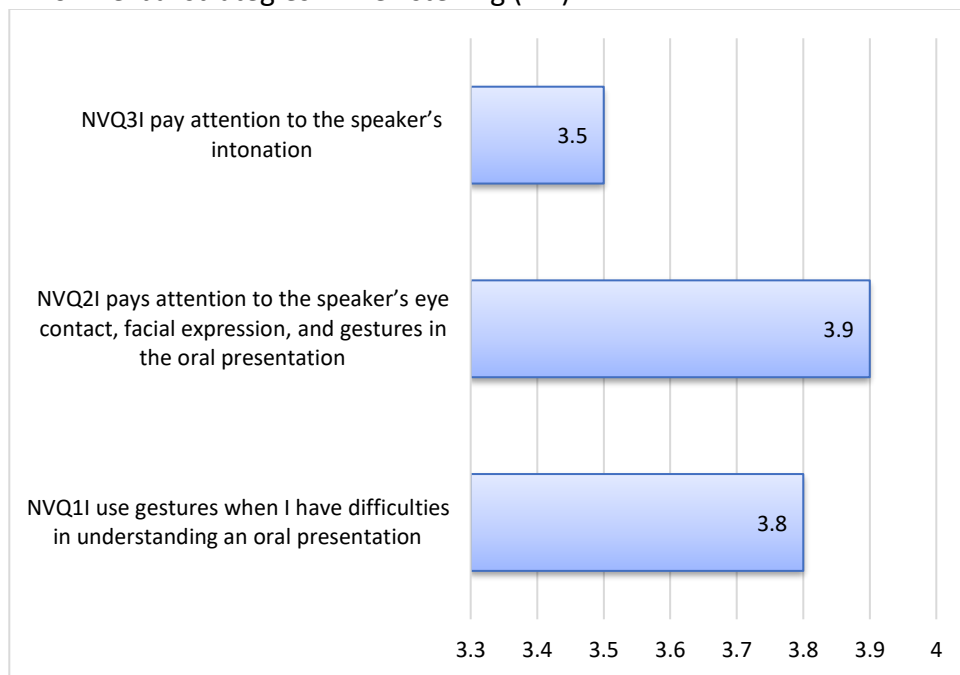


Figure 10- Mean for Non-verbal Strategies

As shown in Figure 10 above, the highest mean score for Non-verbal Strategies is 3.9 which shows that learners pay attention to the speaker’s eye contact, facial expression, and gestures in an oral presentation. They use gestures when they have difficulties understanding an oral presentation (3.8) and pay attention to the speaker’s intonation. In general, the mean scores indicated that learners focus on the speaker's eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures during oral presentations. They employ gestures when faced with challenges in understanding the presentation and take note of the speaker's intonation.

Findings for Active Listening

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive active listening in language learning? In the context of this study, attentive listening involves (i) negotiation for meaning while listening, (ii) scanning, and (iii) word-oriented strategies.

(i) Negotiation for Meaning While listening strategies (NFM)

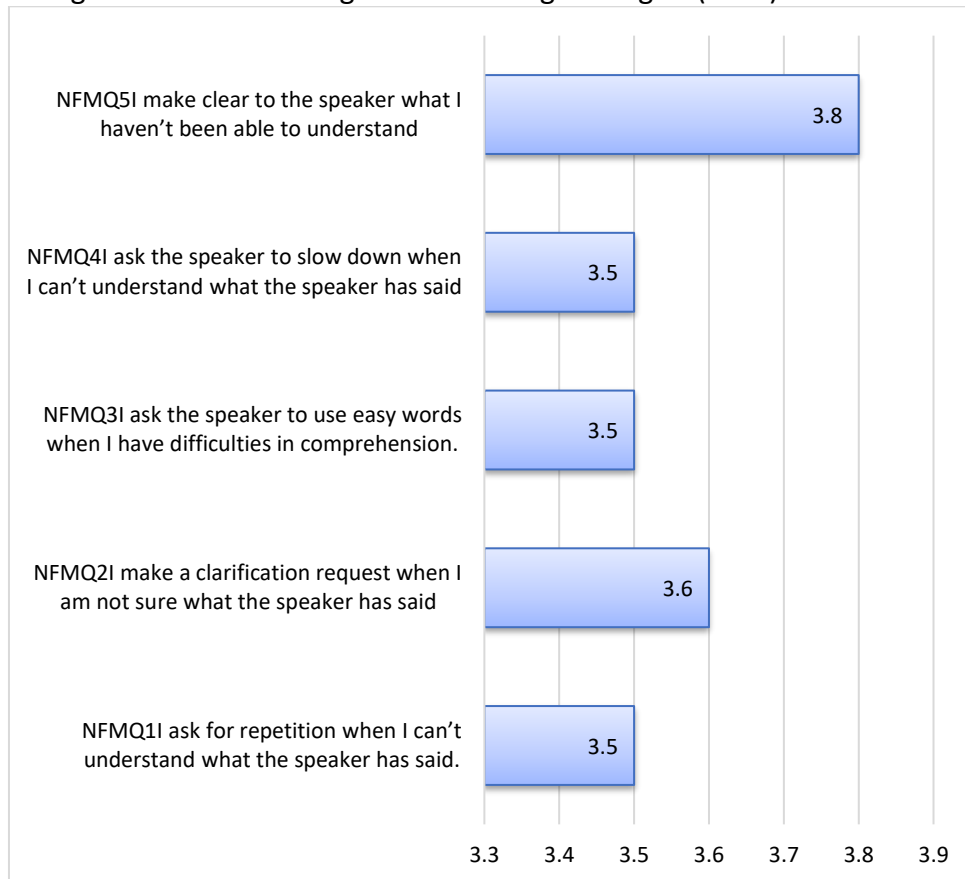


Figure 11- Mean for Negotiate for Meaning Strategies

The findings for Figure 11 indicate that students generally employ effective listening strategies. The mean scores for the items reveal a proactive approach to comprehension challenges. Specifically, students are inclined to ask for repetition (3.5), seek clarification (3.6), and request the use of simpler language when faced with difficulties (3.5). Additionally, students recognize the importance of pacing, as reflected in their tendency to ask the speaker to slow down when necessary (3.5). The highest mean score (3.8) is for making it clear to the speaker when there's a lack of understanding.

(ii) Scanning Strategies (SC)

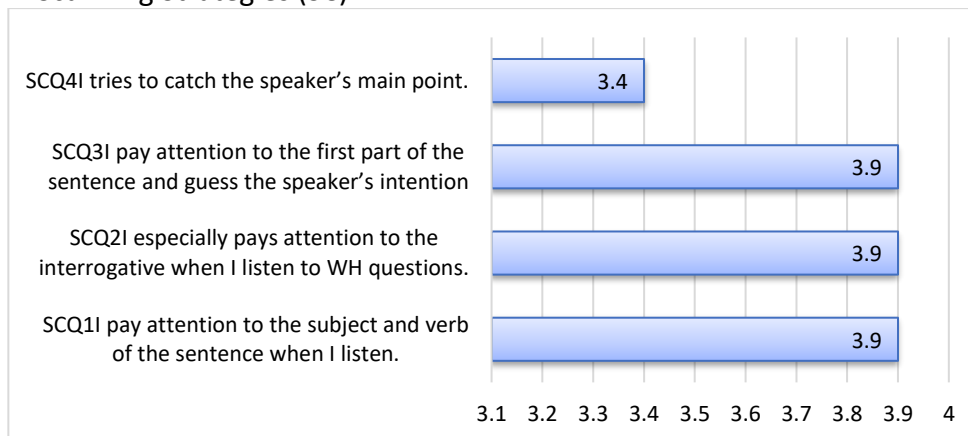


Figure 12- Mean for Scanning Strategies

The findings as indicated in Figure 12, highlight that students generally employ effective listening techniques. The mean scores (3.9) for the items suggest that students consistently pay attention to key elements during listening activities. Specifically, they focus on the subject and verb of sentences and give special consideration to the interrogative in WH-questions. Additionally, students actively engage in scanning by paying attention to the first part of the sentence to guess the speaker's intention. While the mean score (3.4) for catching the speaker's main point is slightly lower, it still indicates a reasonable level of attention to overall message comprehension.

(iii) Word-Oriented Strategies (WO)

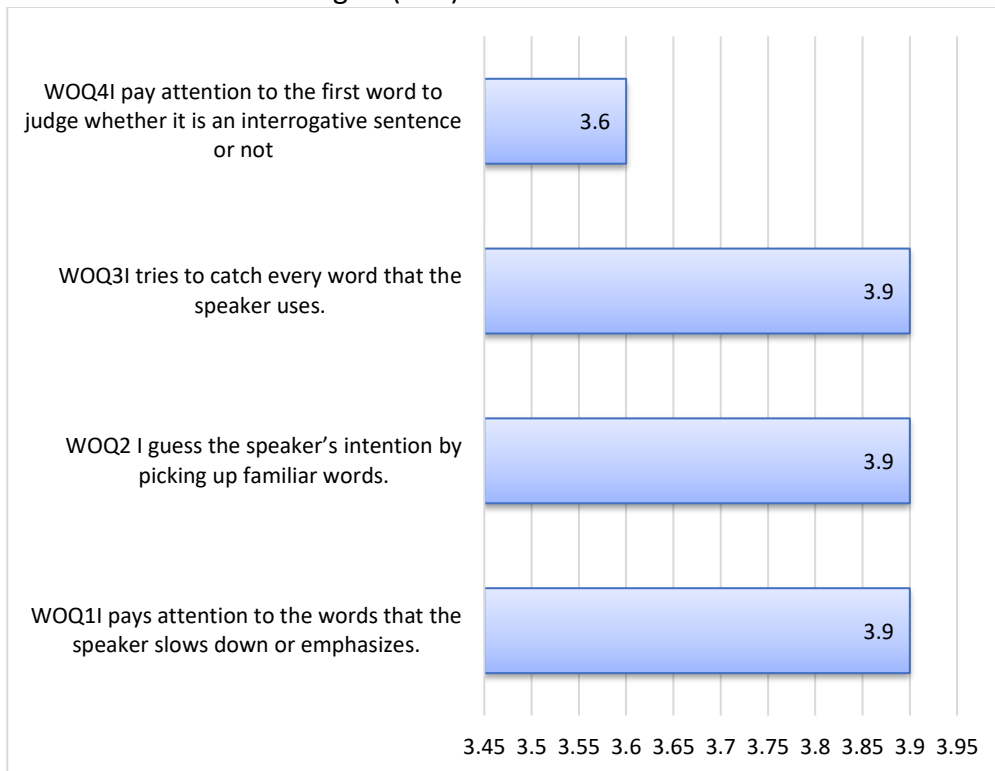


Figure 13- Mean for Word-oriented Strategies.

The findings as shown in Figure 13, tell us that students are good at paying attention to words during listening. They listen carefully to words that the speaker emphasizes or slows down (3.9), guess what the speaker means by focusing on familiar words (3.9), and try to catch every word used by the speaker (3.9). They also pay some attention to the first word to figure out if it's a question (3.6). Overall, this suggests that students are using effective strategies to understand spoken content by focusing on individual words.

Findings for Relationship between all models of listening

This section presents data to answer research question 4- Is there a relationship between all modes of listening? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between all models of listening, data is analyzed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in Tables 14 and 15 below.

Table 14

Correlation between Attentive and Responsive

		ATTENTIVE	RESPONSIVE
ATTENTIVE	Pearson Correlation	1	.497**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	192	192
RESPONSIVE	Pearson Correlation	.497**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	192	192

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 14 shows there is an association between attentive and responsive. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderately significant association between attentive and responsive. ($r=.497^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level, and a positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a moderate positive relationship between attentive and responsive.

Table 15

Correlation between Responsive and Active

		RESPONSIVE	ACTIVE
RESPONSIVE	Pearson Correlation	1	.724**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	192	192
ACTIVE	Pearson Correlation	.724**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	192	192

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 15 shows there is an association between responsive and active learning. Correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant association between responsive and active learning. ($r=.724^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level and a positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between responsive and active learning.

Conclusion*Summary of Findings and Discussions*

The process of listening is very interactive, and a student's ability to understand a text may depend on the vocabulary employed in it. To activate their schema, which includes their linguistic knowledge, listeners must be able to handle a variety of tasks while listening (Tavil, 2010).

In the current survey, the results indicated that many students preferred listening activities that involved telling stories (43%) and short information (listening tests) (44%). Merely 13% of the students favoured the oral presenting task that required face-to-face interaction. The students found it challenging to listen to a piece without first seeing it written down. When asked about why the Japanese language is difficult, 77% of learners found vocabulary to be the most challenging. Only 13% of the students selected that the language used was the most difficult, while 10% found that the content was the most difficult. This is consistent with the findings of Sabouri and Gilakjani (2016), who also mentioned that a barrier to successful listening comprehension is unfamiliar terminology. When the three listening strategies were evaluated in terms of usage, responsive listening was discovered to be the most popular approach. Attentive listening is the least utilised skill, whereas active learning is the second most popular. These results indicate that study participants have attained a higher competency level than first-year students. These results are consistent with those of Nakatani (2010): they have improved their language skills and communication confidence, which enable them to converse rather effectively in English.

In conclusion, foreign language teachers need to teach students listening strategies. Teaching listening skills to students at all proficiency levels is good, but it is more advantageous for those at lower competence levels. Students must be taught how to employ these techniques consistently, methodically, and correctly to overcome listening issues in various listening task types. Hence, the findings of this study can raise awareness among students about their listening strategies in language learning, offering valuable insights for educators, learners, and the broader language learning environment.

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