



English Listening Comprehension Problems of Students from China Learning English in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the English listening comprehension problems of university international students from China. The research used a qualitative method to collect data from three China's students taking English Listening Comprehension (ELC) in University Sains Malaysian (USM). This study is a research report related to the problems encounter by China's students in ELC learning. Interview was conducted to investigate students' perspective through the main question concerning the problems from the China's students in their ELC self-learning process in three steps, which is the pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. Findings from this study indicated that the main problem faced by the China's students was the lack of prior knowledge in English vocabulary, this inhibit their understanding in the listening process. Moreover, the differences in the ascent of the native speakers prohibit the proper understanding of the listening content, the short span of concentration, and the learning habit of China's students were discussed as the problems of the ELC learning. This enhances the data availability and the interpretative analysis. In order to validate the data and the analysis, researcher experiences and documents analysis were conducted. This research laid a good foundation for further research; it provided useful information concerning the effective strategies to enhance students' listening skills and will improve the instruction of English listening class to achieve the win-win situation.

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1. Introduction

The study of English in China has been and still is an important subject for worldwide communication. And approximately 90% of published academic articles are written in English (Crystal, 1997). The situation in China is that language traditionally is treated as an academic subject, and China's student have been required to study English as a Foreign Language (EFL) beginning in secondary school. But the problem has persisted over the decades because the aim of English teaching in China has been primarily to train students to pass various kinds of examinations: entrance examinations for high schools and colleges have been especially emphasized. (Lee, 1991). The traditional grammar-translation instructional methods have been widely adopted in both junior and senior high schools (Chen, 2003). Thus, a kind of examination-guided EFL instruction with heavy focus on lecturing from selected textbook materials has caused most students to fail to learn real-life communicative English (Wang, 1999). The findings of this study are expected to provide useful information for conducting more effective English as A Second Language (ESL) listening comprehension at the language center in USM.

1.1 Background of study

Listening, an essential part of the language learning process, but it is the difficulty for Chinese students, even if they are using English as the second language in Malaysia. On the one hand, listening is the weak skill in English learning due to the Examination Education System (EES), the ELC learning is focus on the examination-oriented strategy; it is called "dumb English" by some English educator in China, such as Wang (2009), a young language researcher in China. With the

forementioned introduction, the researcher had summarized two scenarios faced by a Chinese student in ELC as below:

1. English listening skills had not being sufficiently attained by the students. This is because English listening skills are very much dependent on sufficient acquisition of grammatical knowledge and adequate vocabulary skills which many Chinese students do not possess.
2. The small and limited English speaking environment has severely restricted the Chinese students to speak English confidently. That is to say, an immersive environment for English speaking is not there. Even in the English classes, the Chinese students are afraid of being jeered and ridiculed from the teacher or other students when they attempt to speak English. On the other hand, ELC is very important in English learning. Listening is widely acknowledged as a neglected skill due to the insufficient pedagogical development and perhaps even teachers' training (Mendelsohn, 1998; Takahashi, 1999). In other language skills, such as writing, reading and speaking, listening competency receives significantly less attention in the Malaysian classroom (Khatijah Mohd. Tahir & Gurnam Kaur Sidhu, 2004; Mathai, E., Nair, S., 2005). For the China's student, listening is perhaps the most important communication skill needed for success and for graduates. In this context, this study explores the listening problems and strategies faced by the China's students with the aim of improving their listening skills in general.

1.2 Statement of the problem

While the Chinese students are increasing yearly in the higher education institution in Malaysia, the researcher felt the need to survey Chinese students' level of ELC listening

comprehension and speaking proficiency. In pursuit of this objective, it is crucial that self-learning approach was emphasized as the important skills in language learning. Over the years, English communicative competence has always been inadequate for the China's students. This is especially true when students did not improve significantly in their ELC proficiency. Therefore, research needs to be conducted in search of a more effective English instruction in this regard, and one of the research methods is to investigate students' perceptions regarding their ELC proficiency.

1.3 Research Questions

Specifically, the following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What are the ELC problems faced by the students from China in Malaysia?
- 2) Why did these ELC problems not solved till now in practice?
- 3) How do these problems affect students on their listening strategies and pace of listening?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 A brief history of the listening skill in language leaning in China

The English listening class had introduced into China with the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in the 1970s. ELC was firstly listed into subjects of college entrance examination in Guangdong Province since 1999 (Sheng Qing, 2001). According to College English Curriculum Requirements (for trial implementation) in January 2004, students' abilities of independent learning should be developed and enhanced, especially for speaking and listening. In 2006, ELC was added into the postgraduate entrance uniform examination, and with the deepening of the innovation of college English teaching and learning, the proportion of ELC subject in College English Test (CET) has reached 35%. Therefore, the students' listening comprehension ability was made valued gradually in the English teaching of Chinese higher education; nevertheless, exam-orientated education and ELC teaching are still in one set.

2.2 The condition of ELC learning in Malaysia

When the English become more and more important, a lot of students choose the different learning environment which is using English as first or second language. Malaysia is a multilingual country with various ethnic groups. The Main ethnic groups are Malay 50.3%, Chinese 24.2%, and Indian 7.1%. And the national language is Malay, but English is widely using as second language. Under British colonial rule in almost a century, the English education was zealously pushed by the British colonial authority, and the English language dominated the leading role of political, economy and legal. The Malaysian created the Bahasa Melayu based on the English language after 1957 as official language, so the English and Bahasa Melayu are the fairly similar language. After that, the government, the administration of commerce and education are also general English, due to English environment and the British Commonwealth system were continued. Many people can communicate in English in Malaysia; basically the local people can speak in English besides the national language. But there are some sensible differences between Malaysian English and British English.

2.3 Problems in listening and in pedagogy

Although the previous section discussed what is involved in the skill of listening, the specific problems that teaching listening bring are not self-evident. And although research on the skill is limited, some valuable sources offer valid comments on the problems involved in teaching listening. Lund points out

some of the unique characteristics of listening that differentiate it from the other receptive skill, reading: "First, it exists in time, rather than space-it is ephemeral in nature" (1991, p.201). In other words, listeners are forced to comprehend in real time, rather than having a text to peruse and review. "Second, the sound system of the second language poses a significant problem" (Lund, p.201). An example Lund uses to illustrate this point is that of cognates, which could scaffold comprehension with written text, yet might not work with listening comprehension because of phonetic variations which could render them unidentifiable (1991).

Anderson and Lynch also address problems posed by listeners' background knowledge and schemata. Language is the means used by a community to express facts, ideas, beliefs, rules, and so on-in short, to express its culture. So gaps in our knowledge of the L2 culture, of the associations and references available to native users, can present obstacles to comprehension (2003, p.35). Koichi (2002) gives an example of such a problem that might occur in the checkout line at a supermarket. Although an English language learner might know the meaning of the words "paper" and "plastic," he or she might not understand that in American supermarkets, patrons are often asked to choose the type of bag for their purchases. Thus, the listener may be confused at the meanings of these words in this context, if this were not an element of shopping procedures in his or her culture of origin.

In addition to pointing out this affective, cultural aspect of problems with the skill, Anderson and Lynch also discuss prerequisite skills for listening that may pose problems for listeners deficient in these areas. The first of the three prerequisite skills which they describe is "the ability to recognize the topic of conversation from the native speaker's initial remarks" (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.42). This is a top-down, cognitive process that involves reviewing, comprehension, and memory, which according to Bacon (1992b), is an ingredient of monitoring, the most prevalent met cognitive listening strategy. The second of the important skills that Anderson and Lynch mention is the listener's "ability to make predictions about likely developments of the topic to which he will have to respond" (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.42). This further illustrates the simultaneous, intertwined nature of the use of all these skills, and how they are likely to occur at any point (and long with other steps) during the listening process. The third skill of prime importance is the ability to recognize and signal when he has not understood enough of the input to make a prediction or a response. These explicit signals are crucial, as they usually elicit a repetition or reformulation by the native speaker, and so give the listener another chance to make a relevant response (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.42).

Research suggests that the metacognitive skills of self-monitoring and self-evaluation are crucial to learning to listening effectively to an L2 and, thus, a necessary additional instructional focus in the language classroom. Bradley and Slatyer's similar research identified still other problems. Among these are:

The nature of input: speech rate, length of passage, syntactic complexity, vocabulary, discourse, noise level, accent, register, propositional density, amount of redundancy, etc.; the nature of the assessment task: amount of context provided, clarity of instructions, response format, availability of question preview, etc.; and the individual listener factors: memory, interest,

background knowledge, motivation, etc (Brindley & Slatyer, 2002, p.375).

Whereas many of these factors overlap with the previously quoted research, these lists are not exhaustive, and these factors are multi-faceted. Koichi points out that “if listeners cannot use top-down processing effectively and successfully, speakers’ utterances or messages cannot be understood. The reverse is also true. Without bottom-up ability, listeners cannot make good use of top-down processing. In short, for fluent listening, both top-down and bottom-up processing are needed” (2002, p.7).

Likewise, a listener’s effective combining of these skills for the ultimate purpose of comprehension involves a combining of systemic (linguistic) knowledge and schematic (non-linguistic) information (Anderson & Lynch, 2003). Schematic knowledge includes background knowledge (factual and sociocultural) and procedural knowledge (how language is used in discourse). Listeners combine this with systemic knowledge regarding the language system (including semantic, syntactic, and phonological knowledge) and with knowledge of the context of the situation, which is affected by setting and participants, and by knowledge of what has been said as well as the ability to make predictions (Anderson & Lynch, 2003). Under a modern model of listening, in which the ultimate goal is comprehension as opposed to memorization, these are some of the realistic factors that a student of a second language confronts to listen effectively.

2.4 Assessing listening skills

Furthermore, Brindley and Slatyer point out some practical implications regarding reliable assessment task design for the listening comprehension skill. They assert that reliable assessment of the listening skill is difficult to achieve, due to issues with construct validity, pointing out:

“...the test-developer is placed in the position of having to describe the listening skills that contribute to test performance and then design a task that elicits these. However, a number of research studies have cast doubt on the extent to which separate skills can either be identified or matched to particular listening items, since the interactive processing involved in listening may involve the simultaneous exercise of a range of skills...” (2002 p.388-389).

Another important point is that “our analysis suggests that particular combinations of item characteristics appear either to accentuate or attenuate the effect on difficulty” (Brindley & Slatyer, 2002, p.387). They add, “The test developer (must) describe listening skills that contribute to test performance and then design a task that elicits these” (Brindley & Slatyer, 2002, p.388). However, there is a question as to whether these skills can be identified or matched to listening items. Brindley and Slatyer’s assertions seem to mirror those of Janusik’s from the previous discussion regarding model difficulties inherent in the listening skill. Both point to the admittedly complex nature of the listening process, citing difficulties with the ability to isolate particular skills used in the listening process (Brindley & Slatyer, p.389), as well as the tendency (and perhaps the necessity) to “focus on different aspects of the process” (Janusik, 2002, p.8).

Richards, who formulated the aforementioned taxonomy of listening skills, as lists in Appendix E, complains that, “many listening activities focus on retrieval of information from long-term memory rather than on the processing activities themselves, and lists for example, “an exercise involving listening to a passage and responding to true/false questions about the content

of it typically focuses on memory rather on comprehension” (Richards, 1983, p.233). Further, he asserts:

In teaching listening we can manipulate two variables, both of which serve to develop ability in particular skill areas. We can either manipulate the input, that is, the language which the learner hears, controlling for selected features such as grammatical complexity, topic, and rate of delivery, or we can manipulate the tasks we set for the learner. Manipulation of either (or both) is directed toward developing particular micro-skills (1983, p.232).

Such insight is necessary when dealing with the listening skill, so as not to assess memory or previous knowledge, for example. Insight such as Richard’s provides more specific sets of skills, criteria, and micro-skills that deserve attention if language professionals are to properly and fairly assess listening with due attention to its underlying and integral processes.

2.5 Models of listening

Although the distinction that Morley points out here was asserted in the early seventies, even more recent sources harbor the same complaint, suggesting little historical improvement in the issue. According to Janusik, “Historically, more time has been spent on teaching speaking than listening, even though listening is the communication activity in which we spend most of our time” (2002, p. 5).

One of the problems teachers face is “the lack of a single definition of model of listening” (Janusik, 2002, p.8). Other scholars agree that “there is no accepted definition of the construct of listening” (Mendelsohn, 1998, p.81). The International Listening Association (ILA) defines listening as “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages” (Janusik, 2002, p.8). Janusik also points out complications arising from difficulties establishing a model of listening. “In addition to a lack of a single definition, two types of models have been used to explain listening. The dual models may cause confusion unless one states the perspective of listening under study” (Janusik, 2002, p.8). One model focuses upon a listener’s internal processing that occurs while he or she is listening. Another account for affective factors such as the setting and interlocutors in the listening situation. “Therefore, the lack of a single definition and model are two of the difficulties in teaching listening” (Janusik, 2002, p.8).

Janusik describes the first model as cognitive, as it focuses only on factors inside the listener. Janusik describes the second model as a behavioral one, since it involves factors outside the listener. Janusik uses these descriptors to point to the nature of listening as a complex process involving both behavioral and cognitive functions and also to point out the tendency of scholars to focus on different aspects of the process (Janusik, 2002, p.8). This distinction makes a huge difference in how the skill is approached and studied, since the listening skill encompasses so much. A complete picture of listening might involve at least an integration of these models discussed and others in order to move toward a more complete model of the listening skill in ESL learning.

Although resources on the topic of the listening skill are sparse, what is available is interesting in its variations. Recent models of listening tend to regard the skill as more active than models in the past have, due to changes in pedagogical thought and teaching trends. One recent textbook on listening (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.11) states that “the tape-recorder view of listening (i.e. equating the ability to remember spoken input with

the ability to comprehend it) [is]... an inappropriate and inadequate view of the listening process.” This “tape-recorder” view ignores the fleeting nature of listening input, which prevents immediate verbatim reproduction of, but not necessarily internalization of, the input. In other words, much of the listening process occurs internally, such as quickly extracting main ideas and forming hypotheses about unfamiliar words. The “tape-recorder” view of listening does not provide for accurate assessment of many important listening skills, such as determining the speaker’s attitude. In contrast, they recommend “an alternative view of listening: the listener as active model builder” (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.11), which requires the message to be “coherent” and “an interpretation” (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.11), thus accounting for listening as an active skill. This shifts the goal of listening from memorization to meaningful comprehension, with the listener and the environment each playing active roles, shaping the process. This is important because if language learning embraces the basic goal of the students’ functioning in the target culture, then tools like rote memorization are not sufficient for helping to execute the demanding process of listening to a second language. As opposed to reading and writing, the skill of listening is so closely involved with conditional factors such as environment and the speaker’s accent that it must be approached carefully.

2.6 Listening process

Since listening “is a reciprocal skill... involving a multiplicity of skills” (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.4), then one would do well to explore some of the complex elements inherent in the active process that it involves. Then, skills can be isolated, focused upon, and improved, providing the attention necessary to be cognizant of, to integrate together, and to put the skills to more effective use. Anderson and Lynch (2003) give an outline of the listening process and its various elements in the context of face-to face interaction. Each point in this “simple, step-by step” (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.4) list requires a variety of cognitive functions in order for it to be executed. The first of these steps is that “the spoken signals have to be identified from the midst of surrounding sounds” (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.4). This could entail tasks such as separating discourse markers (such as “uh” and “hmmm”) from morphemes (linguistic units of meaning, such as a prefix or a root word). This is because, when listening to a second language, one initially only hears a string of unorganized, continuous sounds which emerge as sentences and words more as the language becomes more comprehensible. In the second step, “the continuous stream of speech has to be segmented into units, which have to be recognized as known words” (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.4). This involves the prerequisite of some lexical knowledge of the language, as well as the ability to apply this knowledge during discourse. Especially for novices, this usually involves the unavoidable “skill-getting” tasks, such as memorizing lexical and grammatical content; this could include memorizing vocabulary terms or verb conjugation rules. The third step is, “the syntax of the utterance has to be grasped and the speaker’s intended meaning has to be understood” (Anderson & Lynch, 2003, p.4). The two tasks in this third step offer room for extensive speculation as to what and how many stages occur during this process, and regarding the specifics of how they function. For example, step three can occur through a process of the listener’s mentally translating the utterance into the first language in order for comprehension to occur, or of relating the heard utterances to known words in the target

language (Anderson & Lynch, 2003). This stage is a challenging part of the listening process, largely because strategies can work to the learner’s detriment as well as to the benefit. For example, hearing of an “auction,” and having heard it used previously as a verb, a student might be able to guess that the noun “auction” involves selling. A similar strategy may prove beneficial in regard to compound words, as students may piece together true meaning from separate parts. However, language learners can be significantly disadvantaged when applying the same strategy to understand, for example, false cognates, or for idiomatic expressions such as “give me a break,” and compound words, such as “give me a break,” and compound words, such as “eyesore.”

The final steps as described by Anderson and Lynch is, “We also have to apply our linguistic knowledge o formulating a correct and appropriate response to what has been said” (2003, p.4). This step involves interpersonal skills and some knowledge of the target culture’s conversational norms as well as a myriad of tasks associated with knowledge of the language. Having described the process step-by-step, Anderson and Lynch state that “there is evidence that these listening skills are deployed not as separate steps but simultaneously-which makes listening an even more formidable achievement” (2003, p.4). Therefore, it can be concluded that although this process is listed here as steps, it likely involves an overlapping and meshing of all these varieties of tasks discussed. Grognet and Van Duzer similarly endorse an interpretation of listening that regards the process as active”

Although once labeled as a ‘passive’ process, listening is very much an ‘active’ process of selecting and interpreting information from auditory and visual clues. Research does tell us that there are a number of events that constitute ‘listening.’ The listening: determines a reason for listening; takes the raw speech and deposits an image of it in short-term memory; attempts to organize the information by identifying the type of speech event identifying the type of speech event (inform, request, persuade); sometimes predicts information expected to be included in the message; recalls background information to interpreted the message; assigns a meaning to the message; checks that the message has been understood; transfers the original message into long-term memory; and deletes the original information from short-term memory. Although we do not know in what order or how this occurs-indeed the listener is seldom even aware of performing these steps- it is a guide for the teacher of the steps that take place when a message is perceived (2002,p.2). While Grognet and Van Duzer’s perspective is largely in agreement with Anderson and Lynch’s, neither accounts for the importance of other environmental factors, namely that of situational context. According to Richard’s taxonomy of listening micro-skills, these skills are employed according to the context of the listening situation. Appendix E offers his detailed list of “conversational” versus “academic” listening micro-skills. Although each list contains similarly worded micro-skills, the author’s focus on listening as dependent on context deserves attention, as it empowers students and instructors with more specific and perhaps more effective skills as applied to the appropriate listening context.

In addition to the listening skill’s meshing so many different skills, stimuli, and processes, these is a multitude of additional factors which further convolute and complicate the study of it. For example, students may progress through the stages of listening at different rates, dictated by, among many factors,

their proficiency levels, their awareness and utilization of listening skills, their ages, and the students' previous, or lack of, experience with learning to listening to a new language. Students at lower proficiency levels may need more mental energy and time to determine a purpose for listening, whereas higher-proficiency students might be able to leave this step of the process complete rather quickly. Lower-proficiency students may have to re-utilize various skills this way, doubling back on the process, progressing seemingly backwards as well as forward through the continuum of the many listening skills as their comprehension of a listening situation evolves. Younger students, who have used language-learning skills to learn their first language more recently than older ESL students have, may use the listening skills more intuitively and automatically, and so may require less focus on specifically learning those discrete listening skills. Additionally, students with experience in having previously learned a second or third language may have internalized more listening skills than monolinguals.

The target culture in question offers additional factors. A lower-ability student who has more experience in the target culture may require less attention to and revision of background knowledge during the course of the listening event than would a student with, for example, a large memorized lexicon but less time spent in the target culture. Due to the ephemeral nature of listening and to the eclectic nature of language learners, listening skills are perhaps necessarily a highly individualized, complicated matter.

Of course, other factors such as the teacher's ability in both the students' first and target language can influence students' listening processes as well. For example, an instructor may lack vocabulary in students' language that would be necessary to explain mental listening strategies to novice-level students who likewise lack English vocabulary yet to name such concepts. Natural variations in individual students' learning abilities and styles can also complicate the process of listening to a second language, creating the need for more individualized and time-consuming instruction in order for listening skills to be maximized. For example, a particular student may rely more on visual or kinesthetic stimuli rather than possessing traits of an auditory learner, who in turn may have more advantages in listening simply due to a different style of apprehending input. Even among auditory learners, some may be more attuned to tonal- and pitch-related auditory learning, as is beneficial for the study of music, whereas perhaps a natural ease with an auditory skill such as separating speech from discourse markers may prove more beneficial in the area of language acquisition.

Anderson and Lynch concluded that three main skills emerge from the discourse analysis studies as being of prime importance for the L2 listener:

1. The ability to recognize the topic of conversation from the native speaker's initial remarks
2. The ability to make predictions about likely developments of the topic to which he will have to respond
3. The ability to recognize and signal when he has not understood enough of the input to make a prediction or a response. These explicit signals are crucial, as they usually elicit a repetition or reformulation by the native speaker, and so give the listener another chance to make a relevant response (2003, p.42).

In order to execute these skills, listeners must have other necessary skills at their disposal. For example, background

knowledge and social skills are of key importance in order for students to even approach these tasks.

2.7 Cognition and metacognition in the listening skill

The idea to approach the study of listening by first beginning with what is known about other skills, especially about reading, is not new. Other studies that have approached the topic have used the same tactic. An article by Imhof reports on how self-regulation strategies affect the listener's perception of the listening situation (2001, p.2-3). She concludes "...metacognitive strategies are applicable in listening situations if appropriately adapted. Participants consistently reported more comprehensive understanding, deeper level of processing, more reflective assessment of the new material, facilitated integration of new information into existing knowledge structures, and improved processing characteristics (e.g., sustaining attention and selective focus, better retention)...From these results, some important conclusions may be drawn for the teaching of listening skills and strategies...a learner in the area of listening needs to be provided with opportunities to explore a variety of different listening strategies and the specific forms they can take. (Imhof, 2001, p.16). Imhof, though, warns that conclusions drawn from studies on one of the other four skills need to be backed by more research before generalization to the listening skill occurs (2001). Schmidt-Rinehart agrees: "although it is assumed that learners react similarly to listening, as they do to reading, it must be recognized that reading and listening are not entirely parallel skills" (Schmidt-Rinehart, 1994, p.180). This is because of various differences between the reading and listening skills, including but not limited to the ephemeral nature of listening versus the concrete nature of tangible reading material. Imhof asserts that more specific research on the listening skill is necessary in order to systematically account for the demands of a listening situation, some of which are specified below: the transitory character of speech, the problem of following the speaker's rate of information production, and demands on selective and sustained attention all may influence the mental workload and the availability of attentional capacity during listening. It is, therefore, by no means self-evident that metacognitive strategies are equally applicable in reading and in listening (Imhof, 2001, p.2-3).

The presence of these and other factors specific to the listening skill should serve as a precaution when transferring generalizations about the other language skills to listening.

Before discussing this further, it is in order, for the sake of clarity, to define and discuss exactly what is meant by cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. These strategies are inherent in any learning process and can be more effective when explicitly taught. A simple definition of these terms reads as follows: "cognitive strategies involve solving learning problems by considering how to store and retrieve information. Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension" (Rubin, 1994, p.211). Another basic definition reads, "metacognitive strategies, or self-management strategies, oversee, regulate, or direct the listening process. Cognitive strategies (e.g., inferencing) are the actual mental steps listeners use to understand what they hear" (Vandergrift, 2003, p.427). Examples of cognitive strategies include repeating to memorize, summarizing, and piecing together details. An article which "presents findings from research into listening strategies and tactics of ESL learners" (Goh, 1998, p.124) offers another definition: cognitive strategies are more directly related to a learning task and involve direct manipulation or

transformation of the learning material (Brown and Palincsar, 1982; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990.) Language learners use cognitive strategies to help them process, store and recall new information... Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, do not process input directly... According to Brown *et al.* (1983), metacognitive strategies include the three fundamental executive processes of planning, monitoring and evaluating. Metacognitive strategies, therefore, involve thinking about the way information is processed and stored, and taking appropriate steps to manage and regulate these cognitive processes. Metacognitive strategies are just as important, if not more important, than cognitive strategies (Goh, p.125-126).

An example that makes the meaning of these terms more understandable is "skimming a text for key information involves using a cognitive strategy, while assessing the effectiveness of skimming for gathering textual information would be a metacognitive strategy (Devine, 1993, p.112)" (Salataci, 2002, p.2). Examples of cognitive and metacognitive strategies are extensive, sometimes overlapping and limitless.

Jones offers a succinct description of the essence of metacognitive awareness:

Metacognition refers to an individual's awareness of him/her cognitive processes and strategies... It relates to the human capacity to be self-reflective, to consider how one thinks and knows; it directs attention to what has been assimilated and understood, and the ways in which this relates to the processes of learning. In addition, metacognition develops thinking as implicit understanding becomes explicit: Vygotsky (1962) has argued that when the process of learning is brought to a conscious level, children become aware of their own thought processes that help them to gain control over how they learn. Talk is fundamental to this (2007, p. 571).

Examples of metacognitive strategies include self-monitoring, selective attention, and planning of cognitive strategies.

As previously mentioned, some researchers designate a third group of strategies as social or affective strategies. However, for the purpose of a smaller scope for this study, the focus will cover metacognitive and cognitive strategies in three different contexts. Metacognitive strategies include focusing attention, self-management, and self-evaluation, monitoring comprehension, and being aware of loss of attention (Bacon, 1992, p.165). they also include prediction, planning, selective attention, problem solving, and evaluating (Vandergrift, 2003, p.433). Cognitive strategies include bottom-up processing such as repeating a word, relating a word to known words, using intonation and pauses to distinguish words and phrases, piecing together the details, and listening to sound instead of meaning (Bacon, 1992). Top-down cognitive processing includes listening for the topic before the details, forming expectations, using schemata, inferring from the context, summarizing, and elaborating (Bacon, 1992).

Individual listeners use these skills in different ways and some more effectively than others. Research has shed some light on variables affecting student success in this area. Many studies have drawn a correlation between direct strategy instruction and improvement of listening comprehension skills. Such studies offer notable conclusions, such as one which "highlights the benefit of predictions, the usefulness of discussion with a partner, and the motivational effect of focusing attention on the process as well as the product of listening" (Vandergrift, 2003, p.425). The same study also asserts a popular point: "research shows that skilled listeners use more metacognitive strategies

than their less- skilled counterparts" (Vandergrift, p.428). Another researcher noted in her study that "the high-ability listeners were notably different from (the weaker ones) in the frequency and the quality of tactics used to put these strategies into action" (Goh, 1998, p.141). A review of research cites that "Murphy... found that 'more proficient' listeners placed greater emphasis on 'personalizing' (on elaborating from their own knowledge) and also inferred, drew conclusions, self-described, and anticipated more often than less proficient listeners" (Rubin, 1994, p.211).

Bacon (1992a) provides a fairly complete breakdown of many of the most popular listening strategies. The survey for this study was formulated in part by her list, which organizes listening comprehension strategies into metacognitive, cognitive, pre-listening, during-listening, and post-listening activities, as well as outlines which of the cognitive strategies are respectively bottom-up and top-down.

Research seems to point not only to the general effectiveness of using metacognitive strategies to enhance the listening skill but also highlights some other variables to keep in mind. These variables, such as Goh's attention to the quality of the approach, Vandergrift's observation of the importance of the process of listening, and Richard's focus on micro-skills, give good ideas of what to expect and where to start in studying strategies and the listening skill.

2.8 Related studies in listening comprehension

Even as this discussion has offered an overview of the listening skill and of some of the processes involved, there are still many remaining factors that may work to influence the effective use of such a complicated skill. Prior research helps to put present research into perspective, to give a framework of sorts, and to provide a realistic starting place for discussion. But the same research may simultaneously and ironically serve a different function: to raise more questions.

Such questions in his discussion could include: How do we properly isolate the variables involved in listening in order to test or assess it? Or, is it really fair to consider listening to be a separate skill? More specific questions might involve one of the multitudes of variables involved in using cognitive and metacognitive strategies when listening. Such questions include: Which cognitive and metacognitive strategies are used together most? The answers to this question could offer further insight to the effective (or at least popular) pairing or grouping of the use of these strategies in students. It would also be informative to find what factors (such as age, gender, or years of language study) seem to affect the frequency of use of the strategies, if at all.

Some research has been done on gender in this area. One study which "reports initial findings of an experiment in which men and woman listened to radio broadcasts... and then reported their comprehension strategies, level of comprehension, confidence, and affective response to the passages" (Bacon, 1992, p. 160) concludes that "all listeners paid more attention to male speakers than to female speakers" (Bacon, 1992, p.161). This gender variable seems worth considering with the listening skill, especially since the study and research of both gender and listening is relatively new and somewhat sparse. A review of research that addresses interlocutor characteristics states: Markham considered sex bias and perceived speaker expertness of ESL student listening recall. Working with intermediate and advanced university level ESL students, he reports that: 1) both groups recalled more from the nonexpert male speaker than from

the female nonexpert; 2) the advanced group recalled more from the male expert than from the female expert... and 3) both groups performed at a noticeably higher level when the presentation was given by a female expert than by a female nonexpert... He concludes that 'gender bias is a pervasive factor that exerts an influence on ESL students' recall of orally presented material' (Rubin, 1994, p.205).

Rubin goes on to point out that over half of Markham's subjects were North Asian and that these results may more or less true from culture to culture. Markham noted that cultural factors influencing speech norms in the subjects' community could have conditioned subjects to pay more attention to males, due to gender-driven status discrepancies (Rubin, 1994, p. 205).

Since Markham's predominantly North Asian group displayed such a stratified tendency in their recall after the listening event, the curious may ask if similar findings would result when using another cultural group. These questions, if answered, could assist not only in providing more insight into the listening skill and in the metacognitive skills that seem to nurture it but also could shed light on the relative significance of the speaker's, or the listener's, gender.

Other research questions could involve investigation of variables such as the use of cognitive strategies, to see if and how they coincide with the use of metacognitive strategies in listening.

Much research is also available on translation, another popular listening strategy. O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) found the use of translation to be problematic with a group of intermediate-level language students listening to a lecture-style, academic language sample. However, Bacon (1992, p. 328) was surprised to find translation to be "significantly correlated" to students' comprehension of an authentic radio language sample; she also found that the use of translation coincides with higher proficiency levels in the students. She found that "the use of authentic text certainly provides the potential for allowing students to reach an important level of cognitive processing" (1992b, p.331), and that "some listeners progressed beyond mere comprehension to the point of learning new information, lexis, or of evaluating the content of the passages" (1992b, p.331). Giving attention to the importance of context in listening leads to another question: What might we find about the use of this top-down cognitive strategy in informal listening situations? Bacon states that in her study, "listeners who varied their strategies were more successful than those who did not" (1992b, p.319). This might lead to a further question: which ones of the most prevalent of these strategies tend to be used together more in different context; and, what other (i.e., demographic, proficiency level) factors coincide with this?

Another popular strategy besides translation is elaboration, defined by O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper as "relating new information to information that has previously been stored in memory, or interconnecting portions of the new text" (1989, p. 432). They expound:

Elaboration is a particularly significant strategy because of the benefits for comprehension and retention that have been demonstrated with its use. Furthermore, elaborative strategies may be considered a superordinate category for other strategies such as inferencing, transfer, deduction, imagery, and summarization (O'Malley et al., 1989, p. 423).

They also cite monitoring as a "key process that distinguishes good learners from poor learners" (O'Malley et al., p. 422).

In listening comprehension, monitoring consists of maintaining awareness of the task demands and information content. Two metacognitive strategies that support monitoring are selective attention, or focusing on specific information anticipated in the message, and directed attention, or focusing more generally on the task demands and content (O'Malley et al., p.422).

A metacognitive strategy such as monitoring can obviously consist of many supporting strategies, such as listeners' identifying the topic of discourse. This top-down cognitive strategy (identifying the main idea or topic) can be exercised in pre-listening, during listening, and in post-listening (Bacon, 1992). Finding out how often topic identification is used with translation, and in what variations they are used according to other factors (like proficiency level or gender of the student), could offer conclusions regarding the efficacy of students' use of these in different contexts.

Although some studies boast using authentic input, even by Bacon's own definition (1989b, p.544), these are still "formal" contexts, not offering information on "informal" contexts. Furthermore, Schmidt-Rinehart (1994) assert that "given the inherent differences between oral and written discourse, it is imperative to investigate comprehension using listening passages that approximate natural speech" (p.180). They recommend: "future studies should directly compare the effects of different types of speech-that which simulates a radio announcement, a television interview, a friendly conversation, an academic lecture, etc" (p.186).

In order to bridge the gap between research and instructional practice, Bacon and Finneman recommend, although the pedagogical trend is clearly in the direction of increased use of authentic input in language instruction, a clear understanding of the mechanisms of interaction between learner and authentic texts is required to provide the basis for sound pedagogical use of authentic input. (1990, p.459.)

2.10 An analogy to the reading skill

As other language skills have historically received more attention than the listening skill has, it seems practical to approach the listening skill by examining what has been done with other language skills. Specifically, since listening requires such a meshing of cognitive and metacognitive features, a discussion of how these are utilized in reading with "think-aloud protocols" is in order. This provides a framework within which to approach such a dense topic.

One study that addresses think-aloud protocols offer examples of them: Instructions encouraged participants to read aloud and to state whatever was on their mind as they read. Examples... included emotional reactions ("I'm bored"), statements about prior knowledge ("This was covered in class"), evaluations ("I don't understand this"), and irrelevant thoughts (There is noise in the hallway) (Barnett, 1998, p.5).

Barnett's study also provides conclusions regarding the use of metacognitive skills. Barnett concludes that the most important theme revealed through qualitative analysis of the think-aloud protocols "...was that the quality of the approach was what really mattered, not simply the presence of the categories. For example, prior knowledge could be used to facilitate comprehension or it could interfere with understanding the author's point" (1998, p.2). It is important to take

information about the other language skills into account when approaching the listening skill. This is a sensible approach because, since there is proportionally so much more available information about the other skills than about listening, we can avoid “re-inventing the wheel” by starting with the basics of what has already been tried and discovered in regard to the other skills. When tenets regarding the other language skills effectively transfer to listening, research can be more productive. Themes evident in the other skills may provide preliminary clues as to what to expect from listening. For example, knowing that “relying on personal experience was a double edged sword” (Barnett, 1998, p.9) with the reading skill, we may be better prepared to deal with similar themes that may arise upon investigation of listening. In fact, much academic research about listening strategies has pointed out the same problem with background knowledge: that it is only effective when used in appropriate ways (Bacon, 1992; Schmidt-Rinehart, 1994; O’Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989). This may raise the question of exactly what “appropriate” means for language students of varying proficiency levels and what research might reveal about particular listening strategies used simultaneously, separately, and in varying contexts.

A notable conclusion Barnett offers based on think-aloud protocols is that “self-regulation ... (was) characteristic of the good students in this study” (1998, p.9). Another study that addresses strategy instruction in regard to the reading skill found that “effects of metacognitive and cognitive strategy instruction were effective in enhancing reading comprehension” (Salataci, 2002, p.3). The same study, however, warns that “...although the think-aloud protocol technique is a widely used method to investigate the reading processes of learners, sometimes students do not report all the strategies they employ, especially in their L1” (Salataci, 2002, p.13).

2.11 Summary

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Campbell and Cleland (1999), states that the qualitative research is conducted from minority populations, and sampling size is small; and the qualitative research is focused on the intermediate process between reason and result, need to understand many details in this process. For this study, the researcher was found three students from China and learning ELC in USM. These three participants have the different ELC learning experience and English grade. According to Vandergrift (1999), ELC as a separate and important component of language learning, it is need the learners master a certain number of vocabulary and grammar, so the researcher choose the Chinese students from highest level is level four in language center of USM.

3.2 Data collection

The research is focus on the self-study problems and self-learning strategies, so the location of data collection is selected in the outside of classroom by researcher. Therefore, this study will around the two key research questions, what are the ELC problems faced by the students from China in USM? And what are the ELC strategies used by the students from China in USM? This research method is using in-depth interview and collect data on individuals’ personal experiences and perspectives. There are three steps to collect data. In stage one; the researcher gathered information on exposure in general, such as read materials, finds problems form conversation in normal study. Based on the first step, due to the participants living in the

different place, as a result, the researcher mostly using interview techniques, the data revealed that almost have the ELC problem and themselves strategy. Thus, in step two, research techniques such as semi-structured interviews with research questions and observation have been used. Step two reviewed the data of exposure from participant on ELC learning and research questions as stated in Chapter one. In the third step a much focused in-depth study has been conducted. The final step is to transfer field notes and data gathered for analysis, interpretation and presentation. The result of this analysis shall be reported in Chapter four and partly in Chapter five in terms of finding’s summary.

3.3 Sampling procedure

As mentioned earlier, the research sample as the subjects consists of three students in USM. These three participants were randomly selected in level four class of language centre; all of participants are students from China. And the researcher is using the sample marks that are PTC1, PTC2 and PTC 3 to replace the name of three participants. PTC 1 and PTC 3 are learning English level four in school of language of USM, and they are come to Malaysian is half year, both of them is 18 years old; PTC 2 had passed English level four and stayed in Malaysian eight months, the age is 19 years old. All of them are high school graduate students from China. Fatherly, in order to satisfy the degree entrance requirement of USM, they must get at least 5.5 points from IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or get B from English level four class in language centre of USM. Therefore, these three participants are pay attention to English learning, especially in ELC.

3.4 The instrument

According to Silverman (1993) interviews in qualitative research are useful for gathering facts, assessing beliefs about facts, identifying feelings and motives, commenting on standard of action, present or previous behavior, and eliciting reasons and explanation. The interview effect may influence the research findings as the subjects may well articulate what they think the researcher may want to hear. Furthermore, in order to open dialogues, all of interview is using Chinese language. The researcher as the translator will translate all of interview content in English. As Abdul Rashid Mohamed (1999:4) forewarns, “during the translation process, some data may have been lost and the English conversation would have a lot of hesitations, errors and mistakes which need to be reread and rewrite”. Therefore, the researcher believes that using Chinese language will get more detailed information from participants, and may truly affect the research result.

In this research, the semi-structured interviews have been used as the information gathering techniques. The semi-structured interview uses open-ended questions, and all conversation is guided by research questions that researcher would like to explore in-depth. The interview can be either scheduled or unscheduled, and could be carried out in a formal or informal setting.

In this section, there are some examples of semi-structured interview questions that the researcher used in this research:

1. Do you have any comprehension problems in English listening practice?
2. Did you overcome these problems?
3. How do you overcome these problems?
4. What kind of good method are you still using in English listening comprehension practice?

5. Do you think that method can effectively improve your listening comprehension? Why?

During interview, if the participants' answer is not clear and detailed, or the participants talking is far from main topic, some probing questions will be used. This is also recommended by Grove, Fraser, & Dunne (2002) in qualitative research that the probing questions will be help participants think more deeply about the issue at hand, and the good probing questions should be general, brief and widely useful, move thinking from far to near main questions, but avoid yes or no responses. Also from the Daielson's work, in which she called this probing questions is like the meditational questions. These probing questions are designed to follow the main research questions if the participants are digression. The following question will be asked:

1. Why do you think this is the case?
2. What would have to change in order to improve your ELC ability?
3. I noticed that you were (describe the action, such as, still having the same reason, changing the different listening method), what were you thinking about that?
4. How did you determine to use this method?
5. What anything else do you remember?

The probing questions will be connected the main questions during interview, and help researcher to piece together various kinds of data and ponder over participants. So that is still like some words form Grove, Fraser, & Dunne (2002), the probing question is very helpful in interview process.

3.5 Data collection procedure

In order to carry out the research and collect data, the researcher needs to find the participants and invite the interview time. The initial preparation is very important, as it is very crucial to have a smooth rapport between the researcher, the participants and setting. It would also act as an introduction and background which introduced in Chapter one, to the research as well as framing a befitting role for the researcher and the subject. The initial preparation has been done in two weeks. Data collection process or stage two is the data collection process during one month. Data analysis has been carried out current with the data collection process. Interview is the main method in data collection. Follow-up and oversight in any points have been done fairly to cover and double-check everything. The final stage is the data's checking and predicting that a much more focused on the data analysis and continue to further research. All the trivial notes, audio and video recording has been transferred for analysis, interpretation and presentation. All of data collected will be discussed in Chapter four and five of this research.

3.6 Data analysis

In qualitative research, raw data is like Vierra et al (1998) argued that the transcripts of interviews or notes from archival material. Data analysis on the other hand is a process of categorization, description and synthesis. The researcher will begin data analysis soon after data collection commences. The purpose of data analysis is to reduce the large quantities of data to manageable, intelligible units and discern relationship among these units. After data collection procedure has been done, all the information will be transcribed, typed and translated for further explain and analysis. Data reduction is necessary for the description and interpretation of the phenomenon in this research. So in the three stages that are data preparation, data collection process and data's checking and predicting, the data analysis needs to follow these questions,

- What need to do for these data?
- How to process and analysis these data?

3.6.1 Data preparation

According to Strauss (1987), in the preliminary stage of categorization process, each listening protocol and observed listening behavior will be analyzed using the method of constant comparison. In the first stage is research preparation, all of data is the basic information of interview participant and the place of data collection. The freely communication using in this stage, after talked with one or two students from China in USM, the researcher will put down the dawn on paper would lead the interview direction and generation ideas. The researcher is gathering the students' responses, English teachers suggestion and introduction of English learner from China in language center of USM, sorted into three categories are ELC ability, English class setting in language center and short talking in focuses of ELC learning. Also Strauss (1987) augured that the literature reviewed in this study will be revisited to compare emerging categories with those of previous study of listening in second language learning. The purpose of this stage is to find the suitable participant and get the first hand information of ELC learning experiences and problems.

3.6.2 Data collection process

The data has been analyzed after all the necessary data has been gathered through interviews. In this second stage the main job of this research is interviewing three participants from China. In second stage, all of data is the main findings in Chapter 4. The field analysis and normal data analysis are using during and after interview.

The field analysis is the tendency to process the data during the data collection process. Researcher will be analysis the responses from participant during interview, in order to control the interview time and help participants answer deeper and clear. The aim is get the useful data. These probing questions were set in 3.4 that is research instrument.

Normal data analysis will be done after interview. "A rule of thumb is that in analyzing qualitative data can require as much time as collecting the data" Vierra et al (1998: 229). As the table 3.2, data sorting and translation almost done after per-interview, firstly complete type and transcribe. Based on the researcher questions, all of the data has been put into the two categories which are ELC problems and ELC strategies, but the data gathering techniques is using field analysis and document analysis.

3.6.3 Data's checking and predicting

This is the last stage in data collection process, it is included the data analysis in Chapter 4 and check the data again. Followed the two research questions, the collected data need to be checked again, if there are some points or answers are not clear, the researcher may be interview again.

4 Results

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a detailed account of the methodology has been described. In this chapter, the findings of these studies will be presented. The two main research questions are:

1. What are the English Learning Comprehension (ELC) problems faced by the students from China in USM?
2. What are the ELC strategies used by the students from China in USM?

As in most qualitative research, the research questions are usually meant as a guide for the researcher to start and develop the research. These initial research questions are overtaken by more important, relevant and pertinent questions as the researcher learns more about the research. Nonetheless, for the sake of continuity and consistency in report, the initial research question will still be used as an attempt to entice the flow of more relevant enquiries. These questions form part of the answer to the initial research questions. These questions shape the findings of this study.

4.2 ELC problem findings

This section was initiated by research question 1- what kind of problem do they have in the ELC's learning? And by research question 2 - what are the ELC strategies used by the students from China in USM? These questions were posed because the listening comprehension's learning is the main concern in this study. Thus, the data analysis planned to identify the major cause of the listening problem and hence attain the good solution for learners.

The researcher will diagnose the listening problems based on the interviewee information. It will then be explained in three steps which are pre-listening, during listening and post listening.

4.3 Pre-listening problems

The data collection procedure will begin with the pre-listening comprehension. The pre-listening stage was set up to gather background information about students' problems regarding their listening experiences. Participants' experience will be explored by using a set of pre-listening questions. The responses from the students were gathered and categorized into different factors which are as follows:

4.3.1 Lack of vocabulary

PTC1: "... I think the main reason is vocabulary and experience, sometimes the experience compensates the inadequacy of vocabulary..."

PTC2: "...some words cannot be understood such as political, science and new technology terms."

PTC3: "I have memorized a lot of vocabularies, but forgot as time passes as not using or practicing it."

From the participants' answers, it was identified that the main problem is vocabulary. Even though students from China start learning English from primary school, their English is still not adequate for listening comprehension. Thus, even students learned English for more than nine years from primary school until high school; they were reluctant to use it in their daily living. They may read and understand it, but their responses in listening comprehension are much slower than reading comprehension. Another cause is that the participants were not equipped with the new terminology in English, especially in the field of political, science, and new technology. Meanwhile, the pronunciation part will be discussed in the second section, which is during ELC.

4.3.2 Lack of background knowledge

The lack of the necessary background knowledge acquired by the students from China forms another factor of the problem. The different background of society, culture and history, especially those countries using English as their mother tongue compared to China, outline a great social and cultural difference between the East and the West. This brings along the differences in language priority, living habit, thinking style and so on. Related to this problem, three participants have the same answer as depicted by the first participant;

PTC 1: "*Sometimes I cannot understand the meaning of the content, even if I know every vocabulary in the listening material...*"

As there is the lack of background knowledge in ELC, researchers and educators from China suggested English listening teaching to be reformed in 2008. The researcher realized that the lack of background knowledge is a pervasive problem of Chinese students. For some Chinese students who study English in USM, they found difficulty in understanding the learning context even though they know the meaning of every single word.

4.4 While-listening problems

Students experience much difficulty in listening due to the great differences between Chinese and English, which are two-cognate languages. In the ELC practice, if students want to comprehend a message, they must memorize some words or the key words from the listening material; this is the short-term memory. After that, they will go through these words and translate it into Chinese in their working memory. Based on the short-term memory of the participant, students' memorizing problem was found in this study. In searching for the solutions for the listening problems, the following questions guided this study:

1. Could you understand the listening content if the speakers were American or British? Why?

2. Which one do you prefer, the lengthy listening article and short listening article? Why?

3. Do you have a problem in taking notes during ELC's practice? These three questions attempt to address specific problems faced by the students in ELC. From these questions, the researcher found the strategy as the solution to the problems.

4.4.1 Problem of different accent

PTC 1: "...the pronunciation is a problem during the listening comprehension, especially the speed of reading and weakening voice..."

PTC 2: "...listening practice was carried out in the class or at home, all of the pronunciation is standard English, but sometime when hearing the France or foreigners speaking English through radio or listening materials, cannot understand at once..."

PTC 3: "...sometimes the sounds of the listening materials are not clear, such as the accent or dialect used."

These interviews help students identify their weakness in listening comprehension. For the students, they cannot apprehend properly due to the pronunciation of the speakers with different accents of American, British, Australian, Indian or Malaysian English.

4.4.2 The problem of understanding method

It is easy to understand the second language after it has been translated to the mother tongue language of the users. Due to this reason, students were translated every word and lost some important information when they fail to follow the speed of the speaker during the ELC listening.

PTC 1: "...It is very difficult to understand all of the English words during listening... I try to translate every word in order to improve the listening efficiency."

PTC 2: "...cannot translate the unknown vocabulary even if that is the key words... cannot correctly find the key words as soon as possible during listening."

PTC3: "I miss one or two sentences when translating the key word, because the translation speed is slower than the speaking speed."

Translation is a necessary method for ESL learners during their listening process because it assists in their understanding. The problem is they are slow in translation and fail to identify the key words in the listening materials. Thus, it becomes a problem for them when the translations hamper their learning.

4.4.3 The problem of the learning habits

The students have some learning habits problem in ELC. When they were far behind the listening information, they still try to work out the previous information.

PTC 1: "I try to translate or guess the previous word, when I am listening the present sentence..."

PTC 2: "...the information I listen mix with Chinese and English in my mind, it confused me and hard to understand it"

PTC 3: "...cannot listen and translate at the same time, easily lost some sentences when I think the meaning of the last words or sentences."

This situation happen when the learners listening to the present sentence, they still trying to figure out the meaning of the previous sentences. Thus, they missed the meaning of the present sentence. Therefore, the learning habits of the students become an obstacle for them to comprehend the content of the ELC materials adequately as they tend to translate every word during the listening materials.

4.4.4 The problem in lack of patience and perseverance

This is the problem for students especially for those living in a foreign country. When the students try to practice ELC several times but fruitless, they were lost their passion to continue and thus affect their leaning outcome.

PTC 1: "...the long listening materials are difficult for me...cannot memory all and cannot pay attention in the listening practice..."

PTC 2: "...when I listened the difficult sentence or words, there is no confidence to go on...the longest time of listening comprehension is fifteen to thirty minutes...sometimes the interference come from health condition or background noise and so on."

PTC 3: "I cannot pay attention to ELC practice after fifteen minutes because of my tiredness..."

The learning of ECL needs patience and perseverance for continuous practice and understanding. Students felt overloading if the listening materials took more than fifteen minutes and they were ignored or easily give up. They lost their patience and endurance in studying ELC and this becomes a great problem for them to comprehend ELC.

4.5 The post-listening problems

This is the final step in the ELC process. There are some factors that had been neglected in the listening content. The inertial mind is the major problem in ELC practice. The students try to translate every sentence or key words during ELC practice, and then practice the exercise which was given. But the learners ignored the context and characteristic of the speakers.

PTC 1: "...a little bit information after listened... actually I am not pay attention to the speakers' voice or characters and speaking context."

The characteristic of the speakers and the unique identity of their voice have been neglected throughout the process. And the listening context also neglected by the students when they tried to translate the content into Chinese.

5. Discussion

5.1 Pre-listening problems and strategies

All of the participants reported the same pre-listening problems during the process of ELC, which is the lack of adequate background knowledge and vocabulary. This finding is consistent with Wu (2004) who reported that in China's Education System, the students were provided with vocabulary and background knowledge merely from textbook and the knowledge of the English language were very limited. As a result, students without the background knowledge of the learning content fail to comprehend the meaning of the listening materials. Therefore, this study found that for the pre-listening for ESL course, students from China need to acquire some basic knowledge of the learning materials and enrich their English vocabulary as an important factor to foster their understanding in ESL.

Furthermore, this study found that there are two helpful pre-listening learning strategies that the respondents found helpful. These two strategies are story and pictures as the 'warming-up' exercises. According the Zhang (2000), these 'warming up' materials should be interesting and able to arouse students' curiosity and attention to follow the lesson; it generates students' morale to study the lesson effectively. From the interview, the researcher found that the best solution to motivate the students to learn is story-telling and pictorial information as the introduction to the lesson. Michael Berman (2003) stated that strategy to use photo, maps, and charts in the learning process able to involve active participant from the learners to seek for questions and answers. Picture could be the materials to enhance students' understanding towards the learning materials as the students actively ask questions to get more information from the learning materials.

5.2 During-listening problems and strategies

There are four problems in the step of during-listening, which are the problem of different accent, understanding method problems, learning habits problems and the listening stamina problems. Firstly, the accent of the speakers in the listening materials become the barrier for the students from China as they could not understand and found it difficult to follow the lesson due to the different accent in English speaking.

Moreover, the students from China tend to translate every single word or sentence during the listening practice. This situation is worse when the students lost their direction to follow the lesson but they are trying to do the translation. Based on the respond from the interview, the students cannot found the key words accurately and their attending to do the translation for better understanding was effortless.

Nevertheless, the researcher found that the learning habit of the students from China was the big problem. In this case, students were insist to do the translation during listening even though it is effortless until it develop in themselves a kind of learning habit which is difficult to change. In the end, the ESL become more like a translation course for them and inhibited their listening process.

The fourth problem is the problem in lack of patience and perseverance. If the listening content is very difficult, students will lost their interested and patient in the listening comprehension.

The findings of this research also showed that there are three strategies used by the learners during the listening process. The first strategy is identifying the main idea during listening. The three participants in this study have good experience in

identify the main idea from the guided sentence or concluding sentence. The second strategy is finding key words from some words or sentences that are repeated many times in the listening content. The third strategy is the speed of the speech; the important information usually spoke slowly and clearly by the speaker.

In order to keep the short-term memory during ELC, note-taking was practiced by the students. Based on Majid (2009) findings, the note-takers' scores is obviously higher than the non-note-takers in listening comprehension. Students normally use English in their note-taking which is easier for them to comprehend and refer to in doing the exercise after the listening. It was found that students used shorthand in their note-taking which is faster and save times.

Another finding of this study was students from China were put in effort to understand the listening materials and they tend to predict the meaning of the words which are unfamiliar for them during the listening process. This has becomes another strategy for them to follow the lesson.

5.3 Post-listening problems and strategies

In the post-listening section, the main problem is comprehension. Based on the problem in the section of pre-listening and during-listening, it was found that students ignored some useful information that can actually help them to deeply understand the content, such as the context and characteristic of the speakers.

The post-listening was the evaluation level through exercises or listening practices several times. Exercises are the important step to improve the listening comprehension skills.

5.4 Implications

This research has some implications for the English learners and English teachers. The implications of this study were as follow:

1. The importance of improving ELC skill.
2. The importance of teacher's instruction in the ELC class.
3. The importance of further research in ELC listening skill.

5.4.1 The importance of improving ELC skill

This research provided insight for students from China in their ELC's learning. Through this in depth investigation which included two aspects of ELC problems and strategies, it allowed the students to see clearly the problems they faced in the ELC learning. According to the respond of the five students, at least seven ELC strategies was mentioned and suggested to enhance students' comprehension in ELC. Thus, the appropriate use of the learning strategies has the potential for significantly improving students from China in ELC lesson.

5.4.2 The importance of teacher's instruction in the listening class.

The implications of research also provide insight for the instructors who are facing challenges to teach students from China. Prior to the ELC problems and strategies mentioned by the students in pre-, during- and post-listening offer some useful tips in teaching ELC. The findings of this study indicated that ELC learning through the use of the strategies provided by the students can promoted and enhance motivation in ELC learning.

5.4.3 The importance of further research in ELC listening skill
In order to effectively develop ELC listening skill among the students from China, further research is needed to determine how students learn ELC listening skills. Use of the strategies as suggested by the students appears to motivate student, it has the potential to extend the capabilities of good instruction in ELC classroom. Further research in ELC listening skills should

provide data that enable the students to study ELC in a deeper manner and also enable the instructors to use a variety of teaching strategies as to improve the quality of the teaching-learning process.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered for practice and further research.

5.5.1 Recommendations for students' and instructors' practice

1. Students from China need to enrich and improve their English vocabulary knowledge by downloading useful and relevance listening materials from the website and practice frequently in order to facilitate their leaning in ELC.
2. Students from China should practice to communicate in English with the local students for fluently and at the same time, improve their listening skills.
3. Students from China are encouraged to discuss their listening problems with the instructors for further learning and also seek help from the local students who are their classmates.
4. The instructors need to understand that the students' basic linguistic ability is relatively low. In order to improve the students' ELC proficiency, the instructors should encourage the students to constantly improve their English linguistic ability. The students need to be advised that this is a long-term effort and eventually the outcome can be very promising.
5. The instructors need to encourage the students to develop their interest in the cultures of other parts of the world, especially the culture of target language (English). Students need to know the culture and usage of English language to foster their understanding in ELC.

5.5.2 Recommendations for further research

1. The strategies of ELC learning should be extended for further research. This is based on the premise that for effective ELC learning instruction, the instructions has to be customized to cater the need of learners with different problem in study.
2. Further studies should be extended to cover the students with English majors since a considerable number of students from China in Malaysia's universities and college major in English. Differences can be identified between English and non-English majors regarding the problems and preferred strategies.
3. Further studies should be conducted by the survey questionnaires. The information from the responses can be used to compare with the same method using in different group. The method of qualitative cross-validation is necessary for more accurate research findings.
4. Further studies should be conducted to identify the differences between ELC strategies used by Chinese students and students in China. Larger sample are suggested to verify the problems in English learning.
5. Further studies should be designed using experimental research to investigate the relationship of English listening proficiency level and the emphasis in listening comprehension strategy. The methodology can be one-year (two semesters) longitudinal study by applying pre-test and post-test.

6. Conclusions

In light of above findings and discussions, the ELC problem and strategies are found in English learning as the second language in USM. There is the need for further research not only on the issue of students' self learning but also other various problems and strategies. The need becomes even more compelling as English is not only taught in ELC classes but also as the medium skills for other linguistic subjects and cross-

cultural communication. Based on this research, there are seven ELC problems in students' self-learning and five strategies of ELC learning. Further research need to expand the scope of this study, extend the research time in detecting the ELC strategies' practically. In short, this study had shown that Chinese students learning ELC faced pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening problems that need to be addressed and also the have adopted certain self-learning strategies. Therefore this study will provide useful guidelines for instructors to assist these students so that the learning of ELC will be effective, efficient and enjoyable.

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