



Journal of Educational Sciences

Journal homepage: <https://jes.ejournal.unri.ac.id/index.php/JES>



P-ISSN
2581-1657

E-ISSN
2581-2203

A sociocultural approach to effective listening skill development for Malaysian EFL students: A Literature Review

Annisa Permata Islami, Mohd Rashid Bin Mohd Saad

Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 50603, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 21 June 2023

Revised: 28 March 2024

Accepted: 04 April 2024

Published online: 24 April 2024

Keywords:

Sociocultural Approach;
Effective Listening Skills;
Development;
Malaysian EFL Students;
Literature Review

ABSTRACT

This literature review explores the development of effective listening skills among Malaysian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students through a sociocultural lens. Recognizing the significance of sociocultural factors in language learning, this study examines various theories, strategies, and interventions pertinent to enhancing listening proficiency in this context. By synthesizing existing research, the review elucidates key socio-cultural influences on listening skill acquisition and offers insights into tailored pedagogical approaches to optimize listening skill development among Malaysian EFL learners. Thus, internationalization has become a desirable trend among learners to further their future study or professional world where English is the medium of instruction. As a result, Malaysian students look for strategies to help them overcome their academic comprehension challenges. This paper explores and better explains EFL Malaysian students' academic listening challenges and strategies to motivate stakeholders to support in furthering their studies overseas or in the working world. Thus, this paper reviews related literature on academic listening strategies through the traditional literature review.

1. Introduction

Effective listening skills are one of the important aspects of language learning (Ahmadi & Rozati, 2017). In the context of education in Malaysia, where English is studied as a foreign language, it is important to develop good listening skills in order for students to understand and respond appropriately to spoken language. To achieve this, the sociocultural approach has been highlighted in the development of effective listening skills for Malaysian students (Lin et al., 2019).

Vygotsky (1978) argue that the sociocultural approach emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in the process of learning and developing

* Corresponding author.
E-mail: annislami28@gmail.com

listening skills. In the context of English language education, this means providing a learning environment that allows students to interact with fellow students and teachers, both in real situations and through the use of technology and virtual devices. Through these interactions, students have the opportunity to listen and respond to language used in everyday communicative situations, thus expanding their understanding of English and improving their listening skills.

In addition, the sociocultural approach also emphasizes the importance of cultural context in the development of effective listening skills (Marginson & Dang, 2017). In the case of Malaysian students, this means paying attention to local culture and context in English language learning. Through a deep understanding of the diverse culture in Malaysia as well as diversity from other cultures, students are able to relate the language they are learning to their daily experiences, thus strengthening the understanding and relevance of the language.

The application of the sociocultural approach in the development of listening skills can be done through various strategies and methods (Ahmadi & Rozati, 2017). For example, the use of technological tools such as virtual learning communities can provide students with opportunities to interact with fellow students from different cultural backgrounds, thus expanding their understanding of English globally. Moreover, this approach also encourages cooperation and collaboration between students, so that they can support each other in understanding the spoken language. In further review, this paper will explore the effectiveness of the sociocultural approach for the development of listening skills for Malaysian EFL students.

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, the pursuit of effective language skills acquisition stands as a cornerstone in fostering communicative competence among learners (Yilmaz & Gultekin, 2016). Among these essential skills, listening proficiency holds a pivotal role, serving as a gateway to comprehension and communication. However, the development of effective listening skills transcends mere linguistic aptitude; it intertwines with socio-cultural factors, reflecting the broader context in which language operates. In the Malaysian EFL context, where English serves as a vital tool for academic, professional, and social interaction, understanding the socio-cultural dimensions of listening skill development becomes imperative (Nijat et al., 2019; Alakrash et al., 2020).

This literature review delves into the application of a sociocultural approach to the enhancement of listening skills among Malaysian EFL students. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of sociocultural theory and its application to language learning, this review seeks to explore the interplay between social interaction, cultural context, and effective listening skill development. By examining existing research, theoretical perspectives, and pedagogical practices, this review aims to provide insights into how educators can leverage socio-cultural elements to optimize listening skill acquisition among Malaysian EFL learners.

The Malaysian context offers a rich tapestry of cultural diversity, language policies, and educational practices, shaping the landscape of EFL instruction. As such, understanding the socio-cultural nuances inherent in Malaysian society is paramount for tailoring effective pedagogical strategies. This review will navigate through the literature, shedding light on the socio-cultural factors influencing listening comprehension, the role of authentic materials and tasks, teacher practices, and the challenges and opportunities in adopting a sociocultural approach within Malaysian EFL classrooms.

By synthesizing and analyzing existing literature, this review aims to contribute to the discourse on EFL pedagogy in Malaysia, offering valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. Ultimately, by embracing a sociocultural lens in the development of listening skills, Malaysian EFL educators can empower learners to navigate diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes, fostering greater intercultural understanding and communicative competence in English.

2. Methodology

This literature review focuses on the sociocultural approach to the development of effective listening skills for Malaysian EFL students. The database used is Google Scholar. The main keywords used are "Sociocultural Theory", "Listening in EFL", "Effective Listening Skills", "Malaysia Diversity". All papers were retrieved from 2015 until now. However, there are some citations taken from the 19s because this paper requires original theory. By synthesizing and critically evaluating existing research in these areas, a literature review on the sociocultural approach for EFL instruction would contribute to our understanding of effective language teaching practices that promote social interaction, cultural awareness, and communicative competence among learners. In this research, the general flow in conducting a literature review is to follow the ideas of Pautasso (2013) as summarized in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Literature Review Flow Ideas (Pautasso, 2013)

3. Results and Discussion

Sociocultural Approach

Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, developed by psychologist and educational theorist Lev Vygotsky in 1978, emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in individual learning and development. This approach focuses on the role of the social environment in shaping a person's thinking, behaviour and knowledge. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning and development are not limited to isolated individuals, but involve interaction with others in a social and cultural context. In this approach, the social environment is considered as the main source of knowledge and experience gained by individuals. Interaction with others, especially through collaboration and communication, provides opportunities to build shared understanding, solve problems collectively and acquire deeper knowledge.

Vygotsky's sociocultural approach also emphasizes the role of mediation in learning. Mediation is the process by which external or symbolic tools are used to facilitate individual understanding and development. These mediating tools can be language, culture and technology. In an educational context, this approach encourages the use of mediation tools to help students understand complex concepts and solve problems (Swain et al., 2015). Vygotsky's sociocultural approach has important implications in the educational context (Marginson & Dang, 2017; Hegazi et al., 2019; Liu, 2019)). Teachers and educators are regarded as learning facilitators whose role is to help students develop their abilities through social interaction and mediation. Collaboration between students is also emphasized, where students support each other and learn together.

The sociocultural approach to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in language learning. Here's an overview:

Social Interaction: This approach recognizes that language learning is not just about acquiring vocabulary and grammar rules but also about participating in meaningful interactions with others. Learners are encouraged to engage in authentic communication with peers and instructors, which helps them develop both linguistic and social skills.

Collaborative Learning: Collaborative learning activities, such as group discussions, pair work, and cooperative projects, are central to the sociocultural approach. These activities provide opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, share ideas, and solve problems together, mirroring real-life language use situations.

Cultural Context: Language is deeply intertwined with culture, so understanding cultural norms, values, and practices is essential for effective communication. In the sociocultural approach, learners explore cultural aspects of the target

language, such as customs, traditions, and social norms, to gain insights into how language is used in different contexts.

Authentic Materials: Authentic materials, such as newspapers, films, songs, and real-life conversations, are used to expose learners to genuine language use and cultural artifacts. This helps learners develop their language skills in context and promotes cultural awareness.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): The sociocultural approach draws on Lev Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which refers to the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with scaffolding and support from others. Teachers provide appropriate scaffolding to support learners as they engage in challenging tasks, gradually enabling them to work more independently.

Language as a Tool for Communication: Instead of focusing solely on language as a set of structures to be learned, the sociocultural approach views language as a tool for communication and social interaction. Learners are encouraged to use language to express themselves, negotiate meaning, and build relationships with others.

Overall, the sociocultural approach to EFL emphasizes the interconnectedness of language, culture, and social interaction, providing learners with rich opportunities to develop their language skills in authentic contexts. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach has been adopted in various fields of education, including language learning. In language learning, this approach emphasizes the importance of social interaction, contextual language use, and assignments that require collaboration. Through social interaction, students can improve their ability to communicate, understand the language, and expand their knowledge of the culture associated with the language being learned.

Listening Skill in English as Foreign Language

Listening skills for English as a foreign language involves understanding and applying principles that support the development of effective listening skills in the context of foreign language learning. This theory recognizes the importance of listening skills as one of the main aspects in acquiring good language proficiency (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Basically, listening skills for English as a foreign language include several important aspects (Akbari & Razavi, 2016). The first is the importance of thoroughly understanding the context of the communication and the material being listened to. Deep understanding includes understanding the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, as well as the entire text spoken in English. The second is the importance of acquiring the ability to recognize and understand different sounds and accents in English. This involves understanding the variations in intonation, word stress, and vowels in English. In this case, culture plays a big role. This is because each accent is produced by a different culture. So, if EFL students get exposure to various cultures, this will be very helpful in improving effective listening skills.

Effective Listening Skills with Sociocultural Approach

Effective listening skills are the ability to understand, interpret and respond to information received through hearing. In the sociocultural approach, the development of effective listening skills is seen as a result of the social interactions and cultural contexts in which individuals engage. The sociocultural approach emphasizes the importance of the social environment in shaping effective listening skills. According to this approach, individuals learn and develop listening skills through interactions with others in a rich social and cultural context. In social interactions, individuals have the opportunity to acquire varied listening experiences, receive feedback, and build shared understanding.

Effective listening skills in a sociocultural approach involve several important aspects (Akbari & Razavi, 2016). First, understanding the social and cultural context is key in effective listening. Individuals need to understand the social norms, values and cultural practices that exist in their community. This helps them interpret information correctly and respond accordingly. Furthermore, collaboration and communication in social contexts play an important role in the development of listening skills (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). In interaction with others, individuals can learn how to communicate well, follow the flow of conversation, ask relevant questions, and provide appropriate responses (Ahmadi & Rozati, 2017). Through collaboration, individuals can expand their understanding of different points of view and enrich their knowledge.

The sociocultural approach also recognizes the role of language in the development of effective listening skills. Language is used as a mediating tool in understanding and responding to information heard. In social interactions, individuals use language to communicate, convey thoughts and feelings, and build shared understanding. Understanding vocabulary, sentence structure and other language conventions is important in effective listening skills. In addition, the sociocultural approach underlines the importance of modeling and guidance in the development of listening skills. More experienced individuals can assist other individuals in improving their listening skills. Through the provision of feedback, advice and support, individuals can improve their listening skills and develop more effective strategies.

Teaching Listening Skill with Sociocultural Approach to EFL Malaysian Students.

The population in Malaysia has exceeded 30 million people, reflecting its widely recognized diversity and inclusiveness. According to Gul and Zhang (2016), the country has ethnic diversity that includes Malay, Chinese, Indian, and also indigenous cultures. The rich cultural diversity is not only visible in society, but is also reflected in Malaysia's education system. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses in Malaysia, cultural sensitivity plays an important role. English education in Malaysia is not only to develop language skills, but also to enhance understanding of various cultural perspectives.

The cultural diversity that exists in Malaysia provides various advantages for students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses. This cultural diversity includes various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and indigenous cultures, which enriches their learning experience (Kiss & Rimbar, 2017). One of the main advantages is that EFL students in Malaysia have direct access to culturally diverse resources (Kiss & Rimbar, 2017). They can interact with various texts and materials in English that represent different cultures in Malaysia. This provides an opportunity for them to broaden their understanding of the cultural context, norms, values and practices in a diverse society (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021).

In addition, cultural diversity also promotes cross-cultural awareness and a deeper understanding of intercultural differences (Marginson & Dang, 2017). EFL students learn to appreciate different cultural perspectives and develop better cross-cultural communication skills. They become more sensitive to cultural nuances in language, such as idioms, expressions and grammar that reflect different cultural values. Furthermore, interaction with fellow students from different cultural backgrounds is also an important factor in the development of listening skills. In a multicultural learning environment, students have the opportunity to interact and communicate with classmates who speak English with different accents and intonations (Rao, 2019). This helps them improve their ability to understand linguistic variation and train their hearing for different accents and speech styles (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021).

The sociocultural approach to teaching listening skills also emphasizes learning through social and collaborative interaction (Kiss & Rimbar, 2017). In an EFL context, students can learn from listening and speaking experiences with members of other cultural communities. Through these interactions, they can improve their listening comprehension, expand their vocabulary and hone their ability to understand the meaning contained in the context of communication. The integration of a sociocultural approach into the teaching of listening skills for Malaysian EFL students yields promising results. Research indicates that incorporating socio-cultural elements into listening instruction enhances learners' comprehension abilities and promotes more meaningful engagement with the language (Rahimi et al., 2017; Abdollahzadeh et al., 2018)

Improved Comprehension: Studies suggest that employing sociocultural strategies, such as authentic materials and tasks grounded in real-life contexts, leads to improved listening comprehension among Malaysian EFL learners. By exposing students to authentic language use situations and cultural nuances, educators facilitate a deeper understanding of spoken English.

Enhanced Cultural Awareness: Teaching listening skills through a sociocultural lens fosters greater cultural awareness and sensitivity among Malaysian EFL students. By exploring diverse cultural contexts embedded in listening materials, learners develop not only linguistic competence but also intercultural communicative competence, enabling them to navigate cross-cultural interactions more effectively.

Increased Motivation and Engagement: Incorporating sociocultural elements into listening instruction enhances student motivation and engagement with the learning process. Authentic materials, such as podcasts, videos, and multimedia resources, capture learners' interest and provide meaningful opportunities for interaction and reflection, leading to more active participation in listening activities.

Development of Socio-pragmatic Competence: Teaching listening skills within a sociocultural framework enables Malaysian EFL students to develop socio-pragmatic competence—the ability to understand and interpret the social meaning conveyed through language. By analyzing discourse features, non-verbal cues, and socio-cultural norms in authentic listening materials, learners acquire essential socio-pragmatic skills for effective communication in diverse contexts.

Promotion of Collaborative Learning: The sociocultural approach encourages collaborative learning environments where Malaysian EFL students engage in peer interaction, negotiation of meaning, and collaborative problem-solving during listening activities. By working together to make sense of authentic language input, learners co-construct knowledge and develop communication strategies that enhance their listening proficiency.

In conclusion, integrating a sociocultural approach into the teaching of listening skills for Malaysian EFL students offers a range of benefits, including improved comprehension, enhanced cultural awareness, increased motivation, development of socio-pragmatic competence, and promotion of collaborative learning (Singh et al., 2020). By leveraging socio-cultural elements in listening instruction, educators can create dynamic and engaging learning experiences that empower learners to become more proficient and culturally competent users of English.

4. Conclusion

Overall, cultural diversity in Malaysia provides significant advantages for EFL students. They have direct access to diverse cultural resources, increase cross-cultural awareness, and have the opportunity to interact with fellow students who come from different cultural backgrounds. All these contribute to the development of their listening skills and enrich their learning experience in understanding English as a Foreign Language. By utilizing the cultural diversity that exists in Malaysia, English education can become more contextual and relevant. Students can relate English learning to the cultural realities they experience on a daily basis, making it more interesting and meaningful to them. They can see how language is used in different social and cultural contexts, and thus, develop a deeper understanding of the language itself. In addition, cultural sensitivity and effective listening skills are also important in preparing EFL students to interact in an increasingly globalized society. In the era of globalization, the ability to understand and communicate with people from different cultures is becoming increasingly important. By having a strong understanding of different cultural

perspectives and good listening skills, EFL students in Malaysia will be better equipped to communicate and interact effectively in a global context.

In this regard, the sociocultural approach in teaching listening skills for English as a Foreign Language in Malaysia is highly relevant. This approach allows students to learn through social and collaborative interactions, use diverse cultural resources, and enhance cross-cultural understanding. Thus, they can develop effective listening skills and gain a deeper understanding of language and culture in a global context. In order to optimize the potential of cultural diversity in Malaysia, it is important for educators and educational policy makers to recognize the critical value of cultural sensitivity and the development of effective listening skills. By creating an inclusive learning environment, utilizing diverse cultural resources, and applying appropriate sociocultural approaches, we can ensure that EFL students in Malaysia have a rich learning experience and are successful in developing their listening skills in English as a Foreign Language.

References

- Abdollahzadeh, E., & Bagherzadeh, M. (2018). The Effects of Sociocultural Instruction on Listening Comprehension Ability: The Case of Iranian EFL Learners. *Journal of Teaching Language Skills*, 37(1), 59-84.
- Ahmadi, S. M., & Rozati, F. (2017). The Impact of Scaffolding and Nonscaffolding Strategies on the EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension Development. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 110(5), 447-456.
- Akbari, O., & Razavi, A. (2016). Using Authentic Materials in the Foreign Language Classrooms: Teachers' Perspectives in EFL Classes. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 5(2), 105-116.
- Alakrash, H. M., & Bustan, E. S. (2020). Politeness Strategies Employed by Arab EFL and Malaysian ESL Students in Making Request. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(6), 10-20.
- Aziz, A. A., & Kashinathan, S. (2021). ESL Learners' Challenges in Speaking English in Malaysian Classroom. *Development*, 10(2), 983-991.
- Gul, F. A., & Zhang, L. (2016). Ethnicity, Politics and Firm Performance: Evidence from Malaysia. *Pacific-Basin Finance Journal*, 40, 115-129.
- Hegazi, M. E., & Shabaan, K. A. (2019). Applying Sociocultural Theory in Teaching English Listening Comprehension to Saudi EFL Students. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(12), 58-66.
- Kiss, T., & Rimbar, H. (2017). Unity in Diversity: How Teachers Address Issues of Culture in Locally Produced EFL Material. *Journal of the Materials Development Association*, 1, 4-11.
- Leong, L. M., & Ahmadi, S. M. (2017). An Analysis of Factors Influencing Learners' English Speaking Skill.
- Lin, T. M., Ansarian, L., Tik, O. L., & Nair, A. B. (2019). The Effects of Problem-Based Language Learning on the Listening Comprehension
-

- Skills of Malaysian Undergraduate Students. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 16(3), 996.
- Liu, M. (2019). *Theoretical Frameworks for CALL Research*. The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology, 21-37.
- Marginson, S., & Dang, T. K. A. (2017). Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in the Context of Globalization. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 37(1), 116-129.
- Nijat, N., Atifnigar, H., Chandran, K., Selvan, S. L. T., & Subramonie, V. (2019). Psychological Factors that Affect English Speaking Performance among Malaysian Primary School Pupils. *American International Journal of Education and Linguistics Research*, 2(2), 55-68.
- Pautasso, M. (2013). Ten Simple Rules for Writing a Literature Review. *PLoS Comput Biol*, 9(7), e1003149.
- Rahimi, M., & Abedi, S. (2017). The Impact of Sociocultural Strategies on the Listening Skill of Iranian EFL Learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 6(6), 232-240.
- Rao, P. S. (2019). The Importance of Speaking Skills in English Classrooms. *Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal (ACIELJ)*, 2(2), 6-18.
- Singh, M. K. M. (2019). Academic Reading and Writing Challenges among International EFL Master's Students in a Malaysian University: The Voice of Lecturers. *Journal of International Students*, 9(4), 972-992.
- Swain, M., Kinnear, P., & Steinman, L. (2015). Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education. In *Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education*. Multilingual matters.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Yilmaz, Y., & Gultekin, M. (2016). The Effects of Sociocultural Instruction on Academic Listening Skill Development. *TESOL Journal*, 7(3), 525-548.

How to cite this article:

Islami, A. P., & Saad, M. R. B. H. (2024). A sociocultural approach to effective listening skill development for Malaysian EFL students: A Literature Review. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 8(2), 302-311.
