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Out-of-Class Listening Activities

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The study is based upon a questionnaire survey which has investigated how a selected group of Korean university students tend to carry out their EFL listening practices in out-of-classroom settings. It discusses a study into the out-of-class listening activities and strategies of 120 Korean learners of English from two different universities. The study finds that 1) the most-common activities are listening to TOEIC or other exam preparation materials, 2) many of the participants exert little effort and time to listening to audio and to watching video featuring native speakers, and 3) favorite study materials and preferred listening device of the participants reflect the state-of-the-art educational technology. The study also explores the individual experiences with the Self-Accessed Language Learning (SALL) facilities on campus as part of out-of-class English listening activities.

[second language listening, strategies/out-of-class learning strategies/self-accessed language learning]

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is a key skill in second and foreign language learning and plays a major role in effective language acquisition. The role aural comprehension input plays in the initial stages of second and foreign language acquisition is emphasized in previous studies (Postovsky, 1974; Vandergrift, 1999, 2000, 2003). Once receiving less attention than the other language skills and inappropriate treatments as a passive skill or a receptive skill, listening skill has witnessed itself acknowledged as an important active skill in Second language (L2) and Foreign language (FL) acquisition research and pedagogy.

Listening, of the four skills, is perhaps the most difficult as 1) the listener has no control over the presentation rate of auditory information, 2) listening, unlike in reading, prevents the listener from returning to and reprocessing the aural information (Laviosa, 1991). Owing to these difficulties, many of them exert much effort and time to listening to audio and to watching video featuring native speakers. Listening, however, remains one of the least understood processes in language learning, even though it is recognized that listening

plays a critical role in communication and in language acquisition.

For many English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, listening instruction at school alone cannot provide sufficient input for the development of listening skills. In the case of Korean EFL learners, it is hard to meet native speakers and in-class listening is almost ignored. In an attempt to compensate for the shortcomings or inadequacies of in-class listening activities, many students might have to rely on independent outside listening activities. In reality, an increasing number of EFL audio and video materials are available, and many of the EFL students may be able to watch authentic materials for the purpose of both entertaining themselves and improving their listening skills. Their effort, however, requires attention, understanding, and guidance from their teachers and EFL researchers.

Much research examined those factors affecting L2 and FL listening comprehension (Boyle, 1984; Brown & Yule, 1983; Rost, 1990) and identified strategies language learners employ in the process of L2 and FL acquisition (Bacon, 1992; Conrad, 1985; O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989; Rost and Ross, 1991; Vandergrift, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2003; Vogely, 1995). And yet, there exists a paucity of information on functional practice strategies or out-of-class language learning activities in relation to L2/ FL listening.

Given the fact that more is known about what L2 learners and teachers do inside classrooms than what learners do outside the classroom to improve L2 (Pearson, 2003), the current study is aimed at 1) identifying out-of-class listening activities employed by Korean EFL college students, and 2) raising awareness of researchers and teachers on the nature of the independent outside listening activities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Much interest has been expressed in the strategies language learners use. Chamot (1995) says that over one hundred strategies have been identified in a number of language learning strategy studies. The literature reviews studies on 1) identified listening strategies and 2) functional practice strategies.

1. Identified Listening Strategies

Researchers have identified a number of strategies L2/ FL learners use in their listening comprehension. Those identified strategies vary by researchers but show a great deal of similarity between them (Mendelsohn, 1994).

Murphy (1987) identified ESL college students' listening strategies based on think-aloud protocols. He classified their listening strategies into four major groups. They include

recalling, speculating, probing, and introspecting, among which recalling turned out to be the most often used strategy. The first three groups belong to a category of a cognitive strategy and the last group is a category of a meta-cognitive strategy. His study identified a total of twelve strategies under the four groups. The study indicates that ESL students know and use mostly cognitive strategies rather than meta-cognitive strategies.

In the study by O'Malley et al. (1989), they identified the three most important listening strategies such as self-monitoring, elaboration, and inferencing. Rubin (1988 cited in Mendelsohn, 1994) adds two more important listening strategies: storyline strategy and cognate strategy. The storyline strategy is useful when used for watching a video as learners try to determine the main plot or storyline and the cognate strategy is often helpful when learners can recognize some of the words or phrases in a target language are similar to their native language.

Since the taxonomy of language learning strategies is available and commonly used in L2/ FL literature, those identified strategies have been categorized and analyzed as cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. Vandergrift (1996, 1997) presents well-explained listening strategies with their definitions and representative examples. He reported a total of 35 strategies under three different strategies: meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, socio-affective strategies. The meta-cognitive strategies contain four categories such as planning, monitoring, evaluation, and problem identification. The cognitive strategies consist of eleven categories such as inferencing, elaboration, summarization, translation, transfer, repetition, resourcing, grouping, note-taking, deduction/induction, and substitution. And the socio-affective strategies include five categories of questioning for clarification, cooperation, lowering anxiety, self-encouragement, and taking emotional temperature. Vandergrift (1997) found that cognitive strategies were most commonly used, followed by meta-cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. Among the meta-cognitive strategies, comprehension monitoring overwhelmed the other categories while elaboration and summarization were reported most as the cognitive strategies.

With an increasing interest in L2/ FL listening strategies, much more strategies will be added to those already identified listening strategies. The process of identifying and classifying listening strategies has expanded into studies on strategy uses by more proficient and less proficient listeners. Joiner (1997) argues strategy use, which enables listeners to compensate for their lack of automatic processing skills by drawing upon the strengths that they bring to the comprehension task, may be of particular importance when beginning and intermediate students attempt to comprehend the many authentic audio and video texts made possible by advances in technology (p. 106).

Next section of literature review presents listening strategy used by L2/ FL learners at different proficiency levels.

2. Functional Practice Strategies

Only a few studies examined the role of functional practice strategies. The terminology of functional practice was first used by Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975). Bialystok (1984), however, made the first attempt to investigate the language learners' use of functional practice strategies. In describing the purpose of language, she explains that functional language is associated with the use of language in communicative situations and most functional situation is widely available outside the classroom. In addition, confining the meaning of practice to "exposure to the language arranged by the learner beyond formal classroom requirements"(p. 25), she defines "functional practice occurs when the language learner increases his opportunity to use the language for communication such as going movies, reading books, or talking to native speakers" (p. 25). Her study examined the use of strategies by 157 Canadian high school learners of French as a second language. The study finds that functional practice strategy plays a critical role in language learning.

Continuing in the vein of Bialystok's research, Huang and Van Naerssen (1987) investigated the role of functional practice strategies in the development of oral communicative abilities. They compared the use of three different strategies including formal practice, functional practice, and monitoring with three groups of high, middle, and low Chinese EFL learners in terms of oral proficiency. The results show that functional practice reveals a significant difference between the high and low groups, which they claim is significant factors in the successful development of oral proficiency.

Pickard (1996) picked out functional practice strategies and investigated their use among 20 German learners of English. The study found that most of the out-of-class language learning strategies were related to the receptive skills of reading and listening. Majority of the participants tried to read current affairs materials and novels on the basis of enjoyment. In out-of-class listening activities, most preferred listening to the radio followed by watching TV programs. Like the advanced participants in the Huang and Van Naerssen study (1987), the German learners, who were proficient in English, attempted to expose themselves to a target language as often as they could.

Malcolm (2004) investigated how Arabic-speaking medical school students maintain and further improve their English proficiency after the end of the mandatory English courses. Based on the questionnaire, most of the participants in her study were found to have improved their English with out-of-class exposure and practice. She concluded that learners who are active and create opportunities to expose themselves to and practice the language are likely to continue to experience success.

These studies indicate that more proficient language learner seek out opportunities to practice their target language outside classrooms, which lends support to what Rubin (1975) claimed that "the good language learner practices" (p.47).

The following research questions guided the present study: 1) What do Korean university students do outside the language classrooms to improve their English listening proficiency? And 2) How do they manage their language learning by themselves?

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

The participants who joined the study consisted of 120 college students from two universities in Korea. Of the 120 participants, 85 were juniors and seniors and 35 were sophomores. They were taking a make-up English course which was offered for those who couldn't meet minimum English proficiency criteria set by individual universities. The participants' average age was 23.7 ranging from 20 to 27. As all of them didn't score more than 650 in a TOEIC test, it is safe to day that they represented a wide range of learners whose English proficiency ranges from beginning to below-intermediate. Thirty nine out of the 120 participants have stayed in English-speaking countries for more than a month for a purpose of language learning.

2. Instrument and Data Collection

The current study used a 27-item questionnaire which consisted of background and survey questions written in Korean and composed of closed, Likert-type questions and open-ended questions. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to gather the background data of the participants. The second part was aimed at identifying different types of out-of-class language learning activities. In addition, the last three questions have more to do with their experiences of using Self-Accessed Language Learning (SALL) facilities on campus. The questionnaire was administered to the participants in their regular class hours with the help of instructors in charge of the courses.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents findings from the questionnaire responses, and analyzes and explains the results. Figure 1 shows whether or not they practice listening to English in an out-of-classroom situation. Around 61 percent of them were found to make little efforts to practice and improve their English listening skill outside classroom. Only a third of them said they try to practice listening to English in a situation outside the language classrooms.

These responses show that the Korean college students who participated in this research survey tend to exert inadequate effort and time to improve their listening proficiency even though listening is a key skill in second and foreign languages and plays a major role in language acquisition.

FIGURE 1

English Listening Practice

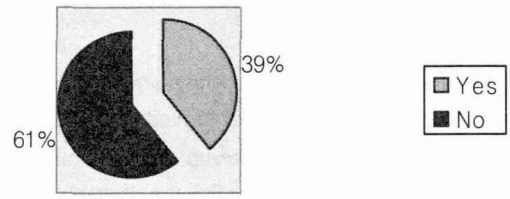


Figure 2 shows the participants' perceived importance of the four English skills. As shown in the figure, a majority of them (n=75) considered speaking the most important skills to develop, followed by listening (n=30) and writing (n=15). Interestingly, no students selected reading as an important skill to develop. The data indicates that the participants give a top priority to developing communicative functions of a language.

FIGURE 2

Perceived Importance of English

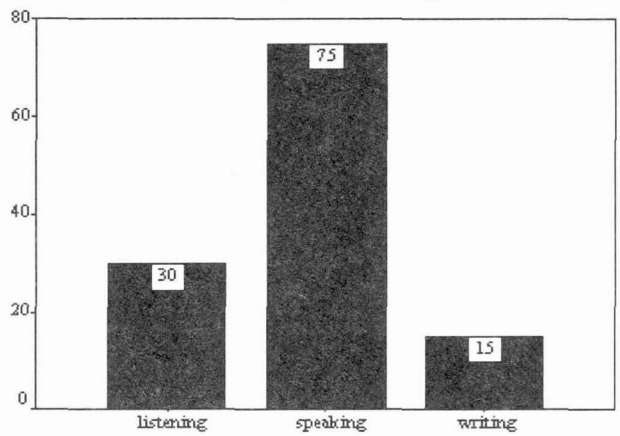


Table 1 reports the participants' favorite device for practicing English listening skill. From the early 1980s to early 2000s, language learners have often used a portable cassette player or a small radio for the purpose of practicing their listening skill. As illustrated in the Table 1, an mp3 player is the most favorite device followed by a cassette player, a

computer, a TV, a radio and a PDP. The data revealed that nearly 50% of them prefer a portable device such as an mp3 player and a cassette player. More interesting is the fact that slightly more than 30 percent favor the mp3 player, which is believed to reflect its growing popularity among people and mark a major shift to a new listening practice device from an old-fashioned cassette player. Given the fact that a majority of publishers provide English language learners with a CD with mp3 files or web pages to download mp3 files, more and more language learners are expected to prefer an mp3 player or more up-to-date one of its kind to practice listening skill.

TABLE 1

Favored Device for Listening Practice

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
TV	16	13.3	13.3
Radio	15	12.5	25.8
Computer	23	19.2	45.0
MP3 Player	37	30.8	75.8
PDP	3	2.5	78.3
Mini Cassette Player	26		100.0
Total	120	100.0	

FIGURE 3

Favorite Study Materials

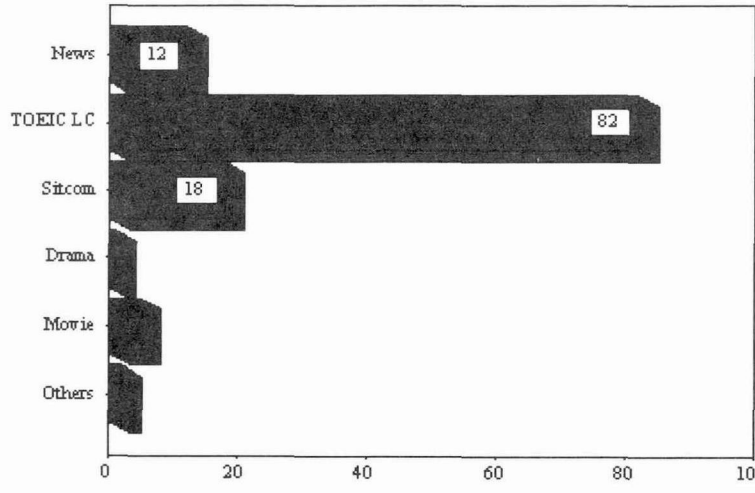


Figure 3 shows the participants' favored study material to practice listening skill. TOEIC

is widely accepted as a test of English communicative skills in most of the Korean businesses. Even some universities require a certain amount of TOEIC score as part of the graduation requirements. Reflecting this social trend is also found in the figure 3 below, as many as 82% of the participants were found to study English listening with a TOEIC listening section. It can be inferred from the data that studying a TOEIC listening section is one of the most striking activities employed by the participants as part of their out-of-classroom listening practice.

The section above has so far looked at what the participants do to improve their listening proficiency. They make little use of authentic listening materials to study and improve their English listening proficiency. For many Korean EFL learners, listening instruction at school alone cannot provide sufficient input for the development of listening skills. It implies that they need to pay more attention to practicing English listening skill as in-class listening alone is hardly sufficient for language acquisition or for the development of listening skills (Joiner, 1997).

Table 2 summarizes the responses to the question of "do you want school authorities to offer more listening-related courses?" Approximately 80% of them would like their university to offer more language skill courses focusing on listening skill. Listening proficiency development cannot rely on those listening-oriented courses alone. The data, however, should not be ignored as a large majority of them are desperate for finding ways of how to improve their English listening skill in and outside the language classrooms.

TABLE 2

Need for More Listening-related Courses

	frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly disagree	3	2.5	2.5
Disagree	8	6.7	9.2
Not sure	12	10.0	19.2
Agree	94	78.3	97.5
Strongly agree	3	2.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Table 3 shows the respondents' out-of-class listening activities. What tops the list is "listening to TOEIC or other exam prep materials" (45.8%), followed by "listening to downloaded materials from the Internet" (23.3%) and "watching movies of TV programs" (13.3%). The finding reflects the students' favored study material illustrated in Figure 3.

TABLE 3

Out-of-class Listening Activities

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Listening to radio news or watching TV news in English	10	8.3	8.3
Listening to English music	9	7.5	15.8
Talking with others in English	2	1.7	17.5
Watching movies on TV	16	13.3	30.8
Listening to TOEIC or other exam prep materials	55	45.8	76.7
Listening to downloaded materials from the Internet	28	23.3	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Figure 4 and Table 5 show the summary of reasons of why students make little use of the SALL facilities on campus. Two major reasons are lack of study materials (41.1%) and poor facilities (30.5%), which does not live up to students' needs and expectation. Alarmingly around 15% of the students said they don't use the SALL facilities on campus mainly because language lab facilities are usually locked and only available for regular courses.

FIGURE 4

Reasons of Little Use of SALL Facilities

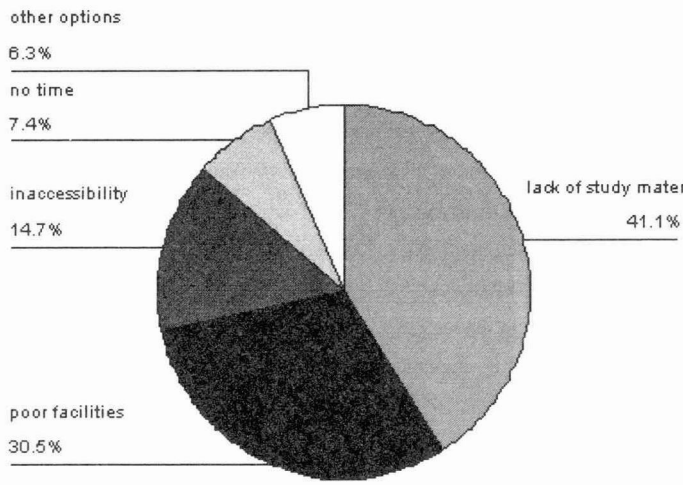


TABLE 4

Interview Summary

Reasons	Responses
lack of study materials	I want to study TOEIC books but there are few of them available in the lab.
	I don't like a cassette tape. I think more computers are necessary for listening to mp3 files.
	There are new TOEFL books I want to study.
	Some cassette tapes are missing. I complained several times but there is no change.
	There are few new books.
	Some pages are missing from the books I usually use.
	I'd like to study movies and sitcoms but there are only a few of them.
	There are many books with tapes and videotapes but they are outdated.
	I'd like to watch American news but those broadcasting facilities are not available.
	I want to study IELTS but there is only one IELTS-related study material.
poor facilities	It is too small for the number of students on campus.
	Some of them don't work at all.
	I can't concentrate because of other students talking. It is too noisy. It is somewhat noisy and no earphones are provided to students.
	It is very dirty because few people use the facilities.
	I think nobody takes care of the facilities as around one third of them are out of order.
	It is terrible facilities. Private language institutes provide students with wonderful modern-style language lab facilities.
	It is too warm and cold to study there.
	I want to have a sound-proof individual space because I usually speak loudly when I practice listening. Due to other students around me in the lab, I can't do that.
inaccessibility	It is often locked.
	It is only open for regular classes.
	When I want to use it, a class is going on so that I can't use it.
	I want to study there but it's locked and I don't know who to ask for a key to the lab.
no time	I don't have time to study there.
	It is far from the library and my department building. So I rarely go there.
	I am busy with other course assignments even though I want to study there.
other options	I usually study in the language lab of the private language institute.
	I know there is a language lab on campus but it is in a poor condition and often locked. So I decided not to go there anymore and instead I practice listening to English at home.
	I decided to use my mp3 player and computer to practice my listening skill.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present study examined what Korean university learners do to improve their English listening proficiency. It further attempted to identify the out-of-class listening practice activities employed by those Korean learners of English. The top three out-of-class listening activities that the participants responded involved a unidirectional approach including "listening to TOEIC or other exam prep materials (45.8%, n=55)," "listening to downloaded materials from the Internet (23.3%, n=28)," and "watching movies on TV (13.3%, n=16)." Noteworthy is the finding that around 46% of the participants chose listening to a TOEIC listening section as their major out-of-class listening activities to develop their listening proficiency. Taking into consideration the claim by Pearson (2003) that choices and decisions learners make about learning opportunities determine the extent of their out-of-class language learning, the exposure of the participants to authentic target language of English is so limited to a unidirectional approach. A meager 1.7% of them chose an interactional approach to improving their listening proficiency. In this instance, the participants in the study were generally extrinsically motivated as a majority of them sought less opportunities to use a target language of English and rather carried out out-of-class activities either for reasons other than interest in language learning in general.

Some previous studies (Bialystok, 1984; Huang and van Naerssen, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Pickard, 1996) claim that successful language learners try to involve themselves actively in the language learning or using task in a number of different ways such as going to movies, watching TV programs in target language, or talking to native speakers or other students. A majority of the participants, however, were found to seek little opportunities to practice and improve their listening proficiency. In an EFL situation where opportunities to interact with native speakers of English and use English for an authentic purpose are limited, extra-curricular language learning or out-of-class language using activities are indispensable for improving language proficiency.

Huang & van Naerssen (1987) and Pickard (1996) found that many successful language learners often employ functional practice strategies which include not only communicating with native speakers of English but also seeking out opportunities to use the target language with other learners. Many of the participants (71%), however, were found to seek few opportunities to talk with other learners in English with a view to using and improving their English proficiency. In a word, what these participants do is far from what Naiman *et. al.* (1978) termed realization of language as a means of communication and interaction. In a study on language learning strategies employed by Malaysian students, Embi, M., Long, J., and Hamzah, M. (2001) found that the more successful English learners reported greater use of out-of-class language learning strategies than the average or less successful English learners, which partially supports the present study finding that low level learners

are hardly active seekers to utilize a wide range of out-of-class language learning and using opportunities. One pedagogical implication is that the low-level language learners like the participants of the study should be assisted to figure out what other out-of-class language learning activities are available and effective to improve their language efficiency because language learning in these contexts requires active self-direction on the part of learners (Embi et al, 2001).

The participants' favored study material to practice listening skill. TOEIC is widely accepted as a test of English communicative skills in most of the Korean businesses. That's why it is no exaggeration to claim that virtually all of the Korean university students are desperate to get high scores in the TOEIC test before they graduate. Studying TOEIC materials may help them improve their scores in listening proficiency but it is doubtful that it may help them improve their listening proficiency in a genuine sense.

Given the fact that a Korean EFL situation provides little opportunities for functional practice, using SALL facilities should be given an emphasis. It, however, is very unfortunate that many of the participants, however, make rare or less frequent use of those SALL facilities on campus, complaining of the lack of study materials and poor facilities. Song (2006) found that many universities provide very limited hours of SALL facilities like multi-media labs for language learning purposes even though they spent much money setting up such facilities on campus. It, however, would be a big mistake simply creating SALL facilities on campus and stocking them with some language study materials, and assuming that it is now learners' responsibilities for their own learning. More consistent and careful efforts should be exerted to find learners' needs, goals and styles, provide latest study materials and educational devices, and live up their expectation. Carefully chosen and appropriate language learning materials for a level of proficiency should be identified and provided to learners as Gardner (1999) said that a SALL's effectiveness and its efficiency are largely dependent upon the quality of its resources.

The present study has some limitations. Participants of this study were selected from only two universities. In addition, their proficiency was somewhere between beginning and below intermediate levels. Due to their relative low proficiency of the participants, their out-of-class language learning activities are somewhat limited to such short-sighted attempts as seeking to improve their TOEIC scores. In this sense, further studies are recommended to compare out-of-class language learning strategies by different levels of proficiency of language learners. And it is also recommended to investigate out-of-class language learning activities by learning styles and different majors of universities as students' learning styles vary depending on a major (Kim, K.J., 2007).

The study also briefly touched on the issues relevant to the use of SALL facilities. It, however, was not a main purpose of the study and thus it didn't go as far as investigating the borrowing and use of language learning materials of those SALL facilities. Therefore,

further studies focusing on the investigation of using SALL facilities by language learners are in order as well.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire of Out-of-class Listening Activities

1. Gender: male _____ female _____
2. Major: _____
   Years: Freshmen Sophomore Junior Senior
3. Have you ever stayed in an English-speaking country?
   Yes_____ No _____
   If yes, how long have you stayed there _____ months

Part I

4. Which of the following four skills do you think is most difficult to improve? (Please put numbers from 1 to 4 in the order of difficulty level.)
   Speaking _____ Listening _____
   Reading _____ Writing _____
5. Which of the following four skills do you think needs improvement? (Please put numbers from 1 to 4 in the order of improvement needs.)
   Speaking _____ Listening _____
   Reading _____ Writing _____
6. Which of the following devices do you prefer to practice English listening?
   TV ( ) Radio ( ) Computer( )
   MP3 Player ( ) PDP ( ) Cassette Player ( )
7. Which of the followings do you prefer to improve your listening abilities?
   TOEIC/ TOEFL listening tapes ( )
   News ( ) Sit. Com ( )
   Drama ( ) Movie ( )
   Others _____
8. I practice listening to English outside the language classrooms.

Part II.

strongly disagree disagree not sure agree strongly agree

9. Regular English classes help me improve my listening comprehension.
10. Language classes aimed at improving English listening should be offered more than now.
11. I believe out-of-class listening activities are necessary to improve my listening proficiency.
12. I often watch TV programs to improve your listening comprehension.
13. I often visit Web sites to improve your listening comprehension.
14. I often listen to tape recordings to improve your listening comprehension.
15. I often look for chances to watch movies to improve your listening comprehension.
16. Which of the following activities do you usually do for the purpose of practicing listening skill? (Choose only one)
    - listening and watching news on radio or television
    - listening to music
    - talking with others in English
    - watching movies or TV programs
    - listening to TOEIC or other exam prep materials
    - listening to downloaded materials from the Internet

    Others
17. I often look for chances to attend lectures or talks given by native speakers.
18. I often dictate what I listen to in order to improve my listening comprehension.
19. When talking with native speakers, I think it helps me improve my listening abilities.

20. I often record radio news, other TV programs, or movies to improve your listening comprehension.
21. Teachers in English classes explain strategies of how to improve listening comprehension.
22. I know good ways to improve my listening comprehension in English.
23. I want teachers to give me more strategy lesson on how to improve listening comprehension.

PART III.

24. Do you know where SALL facilities are on campus?
Yes _____ No _____
25. I think that SALL facilities like language labs on campus are important for practicing listening skill.
26. I go to SALL facilities to study English.
27. Describe reasons why you don't use SALL facilities.

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Tertiary

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