The Relationship between Intermediate EFL Learners' L2 Listening Performance and their Meta-cognitive Awareness Strategies

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Abstract

According to Vogely (1998), listening as one of the most important means of communication plays a very crucial role in acquisition of foreign language since this skill accompanied by reading feed learners with the necessary information (Serraj & Noordin, 2013). The present study investigated the relationships between metacognitive awareness strategies and listening performance. Fifty-six EFL students, both male and female, took part in this research. In order to make the participants homogeneous, Cambridge Placement Test was run and 30 learners were selected as the final participants. After homogenizing the students as intermediate ones, the valid questionnaire of Metacognitive Awareness Listening Comprehension (MALQ) by Vandergrift et al. (2006) was administered to the 30 intermediate students. Having administered the questionnaire, the researcher asked the subjects to sit for an IELTS listening test taken from Cambridge IELTS. Results indicated that the metacognitive awareness strategies as well as its sub-categories of planning and evaluation, problem solving, mental translation, person knowledge, and directed attention had a significant relationship with learners' listening performances, illustrating that Iranian EFL learners would utilize all the strategies while dealing with listening performances. The results of this study may provide insights into helping EFL learners to increase the level of their confidence. The outcomes also can help language instructors to realize the highly and lowly used strategies so that they can elaborate on them and help learners to attach more attention to the unused or less used strategies and stabilize the others.

Keywords: directed attention strategy, listening performance, mental translation strategy, metacognitive awareness strategies, planning and evaluation strategy, person knowledge strategy, problem-solving strategy

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INTRODUCTION

Listening is known as an important and vital skill which has a crucial role in developing language. The importance of listening comprehension in language acquisition cannot be underestimated since the most important part of producing language is perception. According to some researchers like Carter and Nunan (2002), there are some obstacles for most students in listening classes which make this skill stressful and disastrous to them. For instance, keeping up with audio while comprehending the meaning is really troublesome for students. Guessing and inferring the meaning during listening is an obstacle which stops students from getting and keeping up with the next part. Beside, pronunciation problems facing the students can be a hinder for listening comprehension. Unfortunately, most students are not familiar with the correct pronunciation of some words due to incorrect teaching and pronouncing. Students lag behind to understand the unfamiliar word thus they miss other parts. Through this skill, we can enrich learners' mind with primary needed input of language (Brown, 2007). A little research and pedagogical attention in the past bears the testimony that researcher didn't take listening much serious. But at present, more researchers have spent their time on developing listening comprehension because they have touched the vital role of this skill in improving language acquisition (Sadeghi & Zare, 2006) . An eloquent example of this fact is Nunan (1998) who believed that listening is the basic and fundamental means of communication, without which it's impossible to have effective communication.

As mentioned before, listening skill is one of the most efficient parts of language development that used to be a neglected and unfruitful section in this regard. Authorities in the educational system of Iran didn't pay much attention to listening in their EFL educational settings, thus they didn't exert too much pressure on students to go on such activities a lot (Sabbaghan & Ansarian, 2013). Some Iranian researchers like Hosseini (2007); Jahangard (2007); Razmjoo and Riazi (2006), in their studies acknowledge the fact that oral and aural skills have lower positions and are less stressed in Iranian EFL textbooks.

The use of listening strategies in listening comprehension has been investigated a lot recently. Strategies help students a lot by paving the way for comprehension process to be much easier. Thus, it makes learning not only enjoyable but also more effective. Several studies have been conducted for listening strategies (Fujita, 1984; Goh, 2002; Vandergrift, 2003). A study conducted by Hsueh-Jui (2008) showed that listening strategies had a close and significant relationship with learning style. Also, the mentioned study indicated a significant difference between the listening strategy use and the students' attainment levels.

Moreover, in the study conducted by Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011), the relationship among motivation, metacognitive strategy use and listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners was explored and based on the result of their study this assumption is highlighted that there is a significant relationship between EFL learners' listening ability and their (metacognitive) strategic knowledge since metacognitive listening strategies

increase the EFL learners' listening test performance. Also, an investigation by Amin, Amin, and Aly (2011) revealed that there is a positive relationship between strategic listening and listening test performance.

Meta-cognition is known as a process in which a person tries to achieve the goal of cognitive process by monitoring, arranging and controlling the cognitive processes. In other words, meta-cognition is one's knowledge of cognitive processes and all the information and aspects related to that which consequently help learning and comprehending processes (Flavell, 1976; 1979).

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), meta-cognitive strategies are "higher order executive skills that may entail of planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of activity"(p. 44). As mentioned before meta-cognition is a process which showed the ways of using strategies to students in order to enhance their language learning and language evaluating.

Since the positive effects meta-cognition strategies on enhancing language learning has been generally proven, its effect on listening comprehension cannot be ignored. Rubin (1975) found that thoughtfully-selected videos associated useful strategies increased students motivation in their listening performances, also it improved listening management.

According to a study on a group of inter mediate high school ESL students who were instructed by cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies on their academic listening, those who were under the construction of meta-cognitive strategies outperformed the other groups (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Instructing strategies can enhance initial learning, also helps teachers pave better situation foe their students' learning by matching those learning strategy instructions and listening tasks instead of just providing comprehensible input.

Meta-cognition is known as the process of thinking about ones' beliefs, abilities and thinking. In other words, meta-cognition is human being's ability to be aware of their peer's mental process (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994; Nelson, 1996). Flavell (1976) introduced meta-cognition knowledge as "the knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, e.g. the learning-relevant properties of information or data" (p. 232). He also stated that meta-cognition has an important role on a lot of cognitive activities related to learning and using language like oral communication of information, oral persuasion, oral comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing.

Students can increase their language learning by meta-cognitive strategies. Since it helps them manage, direct, guide and establish their learning efficiently. There are five fundamental stems to investigate and measure meta-cognitive awareness of listening. These steps are as follow: problem solving, planning-evaluation, mental translation, person knowledge, and directed attention (Vandergrift et al., 2006).

The purpose of this study was to explore if there was any significant relation between learners' listening comprehension performances and their meta-cognitive strategies which they employed while listening. In order to achieve this purpose, a meta-cognitive awareness listening questionnaire (MALQ), a 21 item questionnaire adapted from Vandergift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari (2006), a 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6), was also administered to the same population.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Q1. Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' meta-cognitive strategies and their listening comprehension?

Q2. Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of planning and evaluation and their listening comprehension?

Q3. Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of problem solving and their listening comprehension?

Q4. Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of mental translation and their listening comprehension?

Q5. Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of person knowledge and their listening comprehension?

Q6. Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of directed attention and their listening comprehension?

H01. There is no significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' metacognitive strategies and their listening comprehension.

H02. There is no significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of planning and evaluation and their listening comprehension.

H03. There is no significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of problem solving and their listening comprehension.

H04. There is no significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of mental translation and their listening comprehension.

H05. There is no significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of person knowledge and their listening comprehension.

H06. There is no significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of directed attention and their listening comprehension.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 56 EFL students (male and female) at Islamic Azad University of Zanjan and were selected on the basis of convenience sampling. Having been

homogenized via a proficiency test (Cambridge Placement Test, 2010), 30 learners with Intermediate level were selected. Their age ranged between 25 and 45.

Design

The study was an ex-post – facto design, studying the correlation between the dependent variable (listening comprehension performance) and the independent variable (metacognitive awareness strategies).

Instruments

In order to measure metacognitive awareness strategies of listening, Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) by Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari (2006) was administered to the intermediate learners. It was a 21 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6), measuring five factors of planning-evaluation, problem solving, mental translation, person knowledge, and directed attention among the learners. Prior to the main study, this questionnaire was piloted on a similar population to achieve its reliability in Iranian society. Its reliability amounted to .69 (Cronbach's a= .69).

A standard test of listening comprehension from Cambridge IELTS book was used in this study. As it is crystal clear, each mock listening exam includes 40 questions. Having responded to the previous questionnaire, the learners were asked to sit for a listening comprehension test.

RESULTS

Research Question One

Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' metacognitive strategies and their listening comprehension?

A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between meta-cognitive awareness strategies and listening performance. Based on the results displayed in Table 1 (r (28) = 0.85, P < .05 representing a large effect size) it can be concluded that there was a significantly positive and large correlation between metacognitive strategies and listening performance. Thus the null-hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation; metacognitive strategies with listening performance

		Listening Performance
	Pearson Correlation	0.85**
Metacog	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Research Question Two

Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of planning and evaluation (E &P) and their listening comprehension?

A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between planning and evaluation and listening performance. Based on the results displayed in Table 2 (r (28) = 0.83, P < .05 representing a large effect size) it can be concluded that there was a significantly positive and large correlation between metacognitive strategies and listening performance. Thus the null-hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation; Planning and Evaluation with listening performance

		Listening Performance
	Pearson Correlation	0.83**
E &P	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Research Question Three

Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of problem solving (PS) and their listening comprehension?

A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between problem solving and listening performance. Based on the results displayed in Table 3 (r (28) = 0.86, P < .05 representing a large effect size) it can be concluded that there was a significantly positive and large correlation between metacognitive strategies and listening performance. Thus the null-hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation; problem solving with listening performance

		Listening Performance
	Pearson Correlation	0.86**
E & P	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Research Question Four

Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of mental translation (MT) and their listening comprehension?

A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between mental translation and listening performance. Based on the results displayed in Table 4(r (28) = 0.76, P < .05 representing a large effect size) it can be concluded that there was a significantly positive and large correlation between mental translation strategy and listening performance. Thus the null-hypothesis was rejected.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation; mental translation with listening performance

		Listening Performance
	Pearson Correlation	0.76**
MT	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Research Question Five

Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of person knowledge (PK) and their listening comprehension?

A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between person knowledge and listening performance. Based on the results displayed in Table 5 (r (28) = 0.80, P < .05 representing a large effect size) it can be concluded that there was a significantly positive and large correlation between mental translation strategy and listening performance. Thus the null-hypothesis was rejected.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation; Person Knowledge with listening performance

		Listening Performance
	Pearson Correlation	0.80**
PK	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Research Question Six

Is there any significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' strategy of directed attention (DA) and their listening comprehension?

A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between directed attention and listening performance. Based on the results displayed in Table 6 (r (28) = 0.79, P < .05 representing a large effect size) it can be concluded that there was a significantly positive and large correlation between mental translation strategy and listening performance. Thus the null-hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation; DA with listening performance

		Listening Performance
	Pearson Correlation	0.79**
DA	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It was proved that metacognitive awareness strategies including all its components of planning and evaluation, problem-solving, person knowledge, mental translation, and direct attention had significant relationship with listening performance. That is, the

analysis demonstrated that students with high metacognitive awareness outperformed the students with low metacognitive attentiveness in their listening performance.

This study was in line with Hsueh- Jui's (2008) findings that listening strategies had a close and significant relationship with students' attainment levels. This study was also in agreement with Baleghizadeh and Rahimi's (2011) outcomes that there is a significant relationship between EFL learners' listening ability and their (metacognitive) strategic knowledge since metacognitive listening strategies increase the EFL learners' listening test performance.

According to the outcomes of this study, as Vandergrift (2003) asserts, there is a significant correlation between listening proficiency and listening strategy. In other words, more proficient listeners apply more meta-cognitive strategies in comparison with low-proficient listeners. Furthermore, in line with Liu (2008), this study figured out that listening proficiency has a significantly high correlation with planning strategies of mental translation, directed attention, and advanced organization.

This research re-confirmed Goh's (2008) outcomes that teaching students how to use these meta-cognitive strategies has a lot of positive benevolences such as decreasing students' anxiety while listening, consequently increasing listening comprehension and listening performances. So by enabling students of using these strategies help them feel more competent and confident in their abilities.

In line with Goh and Taib (2006), the findings of this study depicted that person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategy knowledge play a vital role in learners' performance. Improving these important aspects of meta-cognitive knowledge will motivate students to choose the best and the most appropriate strategies to enhance their comprehension, and therefore, their language learning performance.

In accordance with Goh (2008), it was proven that meta-cognitive instruction can potentially heighten learners' awareness of their listening and learning processes and develops learners' ability to use appropriate strategies. In line with previous studies by Liu and Goh (2006), Mareschal (2007), and Vandergrift (2004), this study obviously emphasized that applying meta-cognitive instructions in teaching listening increased language learners' meta-cognitive knowledge which itself enhanced their comprehension and understanding of the purposes of the listening.

However, the findings of this study were against some previous studies such as Chen and Haung's (2012) who reported non-significant relationships between applying meta-cognitive strategies in teaching listening and the performance of learners.

The other corner of the study was to do with metacognitive awareness strategies and their effect on language learning. Regarding the conclusions of the study, the higher use of metacognitive strategies is, the more ambitious the students are to settle language learning. This is on the same route with Goh's (2008) that meta-cognitive strategies can potentially heighten learners' awareness of their listening and learning processes and develops learners' ability to use appropriate strategies. This was also supported by Liu

and Goh (2006), Mareschal (2007), and Vandergrift (2004) that applying meta-cognitive strategies would enhance learners' comprehension and understanding of the purposes of the listening.

The study also concluded that there was a significant and positive relationship between intermediate EFL students' metacognitive strategies in general and its components of planning and evaluation, problem-solving, person knowledge, mental translation, and direct attention in particular and their listening performances.

This research illustrated that more focus is considered necessary to be put on metacognitive awareness strategies. As Goh and Taib (2006) claim improving meta-cognitive knowledge will inspire students to opt the best and the most proper strategies to enhance their comprehension, and therefore, their language learning performance. These strategies are sine qua non for the betterment of listening performance. The findings of this study depict that the students could be more successful listeners if they develop and boost their metacognitive knowledge. This can help all Iranian English students who long to be proficient in prefect performances in their listening tasks.

Teachers might benefit from the findings of the study to employ the metacognitive strategies as a vital tool that would alleviate listening performance and operate as a practical way to improve the quality of the language learning.

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