

Original Research Article

The Relationship between Metacognitive Awareness and L2 Listening Comprehension Performance in Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study delved into the relationship between metacognitive awareness and second language (L2) listening comprehension performance in junior high school students. Moreover, the relationships between subcomponents of metacognitive awareness (i.e., planning, problem solving, monitoring and evaluation) and L2 listening comprehension were scrutinized. To this end, 106 junior high school students from six intact classes were selected. After selecting the participants, their level of proficiency was checked through Oxford Placement Test. Next, they were requested to answer a listening comprehension test. One week later, the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) was administered to the participants. The results revealed a significantly positive relationship between L2 listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness ($r = 0.316$, $p < .01$). The results also showed the highest correlation coefficient between problem solving and listening comprehension ($r = 0.374$, $p < .01$). The results imply that EFL teachers should consider not only cognitive variables, but also metacognitive variables in EFL listening comprehension.

Introduction ¹

Listening comprehension can be influenced by metacognitive knowledge (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Jerotijevic Tisma, 2016). Metacognitive knowledge is referred to being aware of thinking processes (Edwards et al., 2014). Metacognition is a term which includes a critical awareness of one's way of thinking or the human's capability in being aware of his or her psychological processes (Nelson, 1996).

Furthermore, there is a complicated link between metacognitive awareness and self-regulation (Mareschal, 2007). Thus, metacognitive awareness promotes the learners' listening self-regulated capability (Vandergrift et al., 2006). It can be accomplished somehow that learners' metacognitive knowledge influences task analysis and monitoring which are the fundamental episodes in self-regulation (Wenden, 1999). Anyway, some assume metacognitive as a prior condition for self-regulation to happen or exist (e.g., Shimamura, 2000). Moreover, it has been proposed that increasing the awareness toward metacognition in L2 learners with different listening comprehension abilities can help them comprehend the message better (Ghorbani Nejad & Farvardin, 2019; Vandergrift et al., 2006).

Although listening has been regarded as a key skill affecting other aspects of language learning (Lingzhu 2020; Sekkal, 2020), it has been overlooked in Iranian public schools. Despite listening comprehension vital role in L2 learning, in language institutes and high schools of Iran, English language classes still focus on other language skills than listening. Moreover, most of the previous studies have been done at tertiary level, and thus the present study endeavored to detect the relationship between metacognitive awareness and L2 listening comprehension performance in junior high school students. Accordingly, two main

objectives were pursued in this study; it was aimed to examine the possibility of a relationship between metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension performance in junior high school students. Moreover, this study was aimed to know if there is a relationship between subcomponents of metacognitive awareness (i.e. planning, problem solving, monitoring and evaluation) and junior high school students' L2 listening comprehension.

Literature Review

Metacognitive awareness in listening is considered as learners' cognition assessment, their ability to understand the listening demands, and their specified strategies to the task (Vandergrift et al., 2006). These strategies are planning and evaluation, mental translation, person knowledge, problem-solving, and directed attention. Problem solving is stating or describing exactly a problem; specifying the reason of the problem; recognizing, concentrating, and deciding on other choices for solving; and accomplishing a solution. Mental translation is considered as the strategy to refrain from if one desires to be a skillful listener (Vandergrift, 2005, 2006, 2007).

In connection with the effectiveness of metacognitive instruction on improving English learning some experimental studies have been conducted which some of them are reported here. Tavakoli, Hashemi Shahraki, and Rezazadeh (2012) analyzed the relationship between language learners' metacognitive awareness and their performance in IELTS listening test. The participants were arranged in 34 less and 32 more-proficient listeners based on their performance in the IELTS test. The results showed that (1) there was a relationship between listeners' metacognitive awareness and their performance in listening test; (2) in comparison with the less-proficient listeners, more-proficient listeners demonstrated obviously higher level of using problem solving and directed attention strategies; and (3) in using planning and evaluation and person knowledge strategies, less differences were observed between the more- and less-proficient listeners.

In a similar vein, Movahed (2014) tried to analyze the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy instruction on listening performance, metacognitive awareness, and listening anxiety in beginning EFL learners. The results of this study revealed that the experimental group did better than the control group, so the positive impact of metacognitive strategy instruction on learners' listening performance, metacognitive awareness and listening anxiety were confirmed. Webb (2017) later examined the effects of a metacognitive approach on teaching L2 listening. The participants were first-year high school students from a vocational program and the control group was made up of elementary program students. In general, the treatment group showed less motivation to study than the second group showing higher motivation. During seven sessions, the treatment group ($n=16$) was presented with training in the method, and the control group ($n=21$) was provided with more traditional exams during six classes. In this research, listening Preliminary English Test (PET), listening Swedish National English Test, and the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) were utilized to collect data. The findings showed that although both groups significantly improved their results on the listening competence test, the treatment group did not improve more than the control group. Second, despite the obvious pedagogical strategy the students had acquired, they did not realize that they were using more strategies. Third, regardless of receiving explicit instruction in listening strategies by one of the groups, the students of two groups did not report perceiving any lack of compatibility or similarity between two methods of learning how to listen. Finally, the students both in the treatment group and control group reported increasing listening anxiety after the instructional period, but the level of anxiety was less increased in the treatment group.

Based on the literature reviewed above, a positive mutual relationship between the English learners' metacognitive awareness and their language learning has been found. However, a paucity of research is observed on the relationship between metacognitive awareness and L2 listening comprehension performance of high school students. Thus, this study aimed to delve more into this issue, and the following research questions were answered in this study:

Q1. Is there any significant relationship between metacognitive awareness and L2 listening comprehension performance of Iranian junior high school students?

Q2. Is there any significant relationship between subcomponents of metacognitive awareness (i.e. planning, problem Solving, monitoring and evaluation) and L2 listening comprehension performance of Iranian junior high school students?

Methods

Participants

First, a total of 140 high school students were selected from six intact classes at two junior high schools in Ahvaz, Iran. All participants were in grade nine. The participants' proficiency level was controlled by using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT,

Allan, 2004). OPT was applied to identify the participants' homogeneity. Lastly, 106 participants who showed the equal proficiency level (i.e., low-intermediate) were selected. The participants' age ranged from 15 to 16.

Instruments and Materials

Listening Comprehension Test

The listening section of Preliminary English Test (PET), a 25-item Cambridge test, was used to test the participants' L2 listening performance. The given time was 30 minutes. The listening section of PET comprises short exchanges, longer dialogues and monologues which are heard twice by respondents. For each part of the test, a specific time was allotted to look through the questions and check the responses. One point was regarded for each correct item with the maximum possible score of 25. This test was also done as an experiment with a group of 30 junior high school students at another school. The reliability of the test was also calculated through Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .84$).

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) elaborated by Vandergrift et al. (2006) was the second instrument which was utilized. MALQ is composed of 21 items assessing five subparts of metacognitive listening strategies; items 5, 7, 9, 13, 17, and 19 test problem-solving strategies; items 1, 10, 14, 20 and 21 are assigned to planning and evaluation; items 4, 11, 18 are allocated to mental translation; items 3, 8, 15 test person knowledge; and items 2, 6, 12, 16 are utilized to test the directed attention strategies. The items are pursued by a 6-point Likert-scale (from 1 being strongly disagreed to 6 being strongly agreed). As distinguished by Cronbach's alpha, the reliability coefficient of MALQ (0.83) suggests this Questionnaire as a reliable instrument. In this study, the Farsi version of the questionnaire that has been transliterated and validated by Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011) was used (see Appendix). The translated version was piloted on 50 high school students, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability index is 0.81.

Data Collection Procedure

To carry out the present research, the researchers attended two high schools in Ahvaz, Iran and selected 106 intermediate students by administering the OPT. One week later, they were asked to answer the listening comprehension test. The time taken for this test was approximately 30 minutes. After one week, the MALQ was administered. At the end, the collected data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

In this research, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, version 22, was used. Before proceeding to analyze the data, the scores distribution normality was checked. In the next step, Pearson coefficients between test scores were calculated. Then, multiple regressions were applied. The alpha level was adjusted at 0.05.

Results and Discussion

First, scores distribution normality was assessed through Shapiro-Wilk test of normality. All significant values in the tests were more than .05. Then, the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores were calculated (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Metacognitive Awareness	89.41	11.62	53	124	106
L2 Listening Comprehension	17.35	3.17	10	25	106

As Table 1 demonstrates, the mean of the participants' scores on the metacognitive awareness questionnaire were 89.41 and 11.62, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the participants' scores in L2 listening comprehension test were 17.35 and 3.17, respectively. Then, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the scores of the listening comprehension and MALQ to determine the relationship between them (see Table 2). The Cohen's (1988) criterion for interpreting the strength of correlation was followed. Cohen (1988) stated that correlation coefficient of more than 0.50 is strong.

Table 2. *Correlation Coefficients between the Scores of Listening Test and MALQ*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. L2 Listening Comprehension	–						
2. Metacognitive Awareness	0.316**	–					
3. Planning and Evaluation	0.359**	0.480**	–				
4. Directed Attention	0.194*	0.407**	0.518**	–			
5. Personal Knowledge	0.232**	0.452**	0.496**	0.405**	–		
6. Mental Translation	0.291**	0.460**	0.511**	0.493**	0.383**	–	
7. Problem Solving	0.374**	0.622**	0.539**	0.474**	0.402**	0.445**	–

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As Table 2 depicts, the results showed a significant and positive relationship between L2 listening and metacognitive awareness ($r = 0.316$, $p < .01$). The relationship was moderate. Moreover, there were significant and positive relationships between L2 listening comprehension and sub-components of metacognitive awareness. The highest correlation coefficient was between problem solving and listening comprehension ($r = 0.374$, $p < .01$). To answer the second research question, regression analyses were conducted. Table 3 is the model summary of the regression analysis on L2 listening comprehension as the dependent variable, and metacognitive awareness as the independent variable.

Table 3. *Model Summary*

	Model	R	R ²
Note:	1	0.411	0.169

Predictor: metacognitive awareness; Dependent Variable: L2 listening comprehension

As Table 3 illustrates, R² was 0.169 which implies that metacognitive awareness accounted for about 17% of the variance in L2 listening comprehension test scores. The Beta value was also computed (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Regression Analysis*

	Beta	T	Sig	Note:
(Constant)	---	3.460	.007	Dependent Variable: L2 listening comprehension
Metacognitive Awareness	0.115	2.611	.021	

comprehension

As Table 4 displays, the Beta value of metacognitive awareness as the predictor variable was significant (Beta = 0.115, $p = .021$). This means that metacognitive awareness as the independent variable accounted for about 11% of the variance in L2 listening test scores.

The significant relationships seen between the listening comprehension scores and metacognitive knowledge can be due to the fact that if students are aware of their abilities, language proficiency, and language functions, consequently they can use language in different contexts more appropriately. In addition, the results were in line with Mohammadian et al. (2016). The results pointed out that metacognitive strategy instruction fostered the experimental group's listening metacognitive awareness more than the control group's learners. Metacognitive listening instruction can have positive effects on boosting young learners' metacognitive awareness in listening and enhancing listening comprehension. The results of this study echoed the statement made by Vandergrift (2007), who proposed that the metacognitive sequence of planning, monitoring, and evaluation can direct students through the mental processes of effective listening comprehension. It can be claimed metacognitive awareness improves through instruction as Goh (2018) in a small-scale research found the participants' use of planning; directed attention, selective attention, and deductions were facilitated by the instruction.

The results of Pearson correlation analysis also specified the significant and positive relationships between L2 listening comprehension and sub-components of metacognitive awareness. The highest correlation coefficient was seen between

problem solving and listening comprehension ($r = 0.374, p < .01$). This study is supported by Rahimi and Katal (2013) who examined the possible effect of metacognitive instruction on promoting the metacognitive awareness strategies in 50 Iranian EFL learners. They found a significant increase in the metacognitive awareness of the experimental group through the analysis of the learners acquired scores in MALQ. Goh (2018) suggested that easily understandable teaching the strategies such as prediction, comprehension monitoring, evaluation, and requesting transparency to young learners help them to enhance their rather limited metacognitive knowledge. However, some researchers believe metacognition could be elicited through blending metacognitive instruction into different subjects without explicit instruction (Georghiadis, 2004; Guan, 2015).

Metacognition can help participants built up a sense of autonomy through the practice of reflection. Students can learn about their own learning style, enjoy the process of self-appraisal and show willingness to keep using the methods they work out by themselves (Abdellah, 2014). Piaget (1976) stated that children at the age of around 11 to 12 already begin to develop the ability to reason logically, to form hypotheses and test them, and to think abstractly. In other words, they have begun to develop the ability of reflection, which is the basis of metacognition.

Conclusion

The obtained results suggest a significant association between MALQ and L2 listening scores. The findings also showed that among the subcomponents of metacognitive awareness (i.e., planning, problem solving, monitoring, and evaluation), problem solving had the highest relationship with listening comprehension. It can be concluded those who have metacognitive awareness can monitor their learning process; consequently, they can learn English language more successfully. Therefore, it is recommended that language teachers teach their students in the way they be able to control their learning.

Pedagogical Implications

A number of pedagogical recommendations and robust implications can be put forth in accordance with findings of this study. The first implication is for teachers who have difficulties in teaching listening skill to EFL learners. The output of this study can be effective for EFL teachers. If teachers are willing to improve the students' English learning, they should consider not only cognitive features, but also metacognitive variables which are very important in learning. That is, teachers should find effective ways to boost their students' metacognitive awareness in order to develop their language achievement. The second implication would be for students and learners. Using metacognitive strategies can accelerate the listening comprehension process of learners. They become in charge of their own learning and move toward efficient learning. Metacognition ability motivate students to recognize how they can learn best. It helps them elaborate self-awareness skills that seem essential as they get older. Metacognition helps children to be active and independent learners. Thus, they will use their metacognitive skills and techniques, not simply in the classroom in front of the teacher, but in any context. Metacognitive skills used in education have a fundamental role in the lives of most students. For instance, Piaget pays particular attention to metacognitive strategies which help students understand better how to become aware of thinking and perform the practical skills (Kagan, 2013).

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

There are some limitations in this study which need to be mentioned. First, students participating in this study were 15 to 16 years old. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the other age groups, and other age groups are offered to be investigated in the future. Second, the number of students participated in the study was curbed to 106 Iranian students; future studies are suggested to include more participants to get more valid results. Third, future studies can investigate the relationship between metacognitive awareness and alternative English language skills. Fourth, in this study only questionnaire was used; next studies can use other instruments such as interview to get more reliable data. In fact, future studies can use mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) to get rich results and insights about the effectiveness of metacognitive awareness. Fifth, the participants were not selected through random sampling, so future studies can consider random sampling to enhance the generalizability of findings.

About the Authors

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Appendix

Farsi version of Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (Baleghizadeh & Rahimi,

نام و نام خانوادگی: _____ سن: _____ تحصیلات: _____ جنسیت: _____ تاریخ اجرا: _____

باسلام

• لطفاً هر یک از عبارات را به دقت بخوانید و گزینه مناسب را در مقابل هر عبارت علامت بزنید.

کاملاً موافقم	تقریباً موافقم	کمی موافقم	کمی مخالفم	تقریباً مخالفم	کاملاً مخالفم	عبارت
						۱. قبل از اینکه شروع به گوش دادن کنم، در ذهنم برنامه دارم که چطور باید گوش کنم.
						۲. وقتی مطلب را نمی‌فهمم رویش بیشتر تمرکز می‌کنم.
						۳. به نظرم گوش دادن انگلیسی خیلی سخت‌تر از خواندن، صحبت کردن یا نوشتن است.
						۴. وقتی گوش می‌دهم در ذهنم ترجمه می‌کنم.
						۵. از کلمه‌هایی که می‌فهمم استفاده می‌کنم تا معنی کلمه‌هایی که نمی‌دانم را حدس بزنم.
						۶. وقتی حواسم پرت می‌شود زود دوباره توجهم را بر می‌گردانم.
						۷. وقتی گوش می‌دهم، مطالبی که می‌فهمم را با اطلاعاتی که درباره آن موضوع دارم مقایسه می‌کنم.
						۸. احساس می‌کنم گوش دادن و درک کردن انگلیسی برایم مشکل است.
						۹. برای فهمیدن مطالب از دانش و تجربیات خودم استفاده می‌کنم.
						۱۰. قبل از گوش دادن، به متن‌های مشابهی که احتمالاً قبلاً گوش داده‌ام فکر می‌کنم.
						۱۱. همین‌طور که گوش می‌دهم کلمات کلیدی را ترجمه می‌کنم.
						۱۲. وقتی تمرکز را از دست می‌دهم سعی می‌کنم دوباره حواسم را جمع کنم.
						۱۳. همین‌طور که گوش می‌کنم اگر بفهمم برداشتم درست نبود زود اصلاحش می‌کنم.
						۱۴. بعد از گوش دادن، به این فکر می‌کنم که چطور گوش دادم و بعد از این باید چه کار متفاوتی انجام بدهم.
						۱۵. وقتی به زبان انگلیسی گوش می‌کنم عصبی نمی‌شوم.
						۱۶. وقتی با فهمیدن چیزهایی که گوش می‌دهم مشکل دارم، رهاش می‌کنم و دیگر گوش نمی‌دهم.
						۱۷. من از معنای کلی متن استفاده می‌کنم تا معنی کلماتی که نمی‌فهمم را حدس بزنم.
						۱۸. وقتی گوش می‌دهم متن را کلمه به کلمه ترجمه می‌کنم.
						۱۹. وقتی معنی کلماتی را حدس می‌زنم دوباره به همه چیزهایی که تا اینجا شنیده‌ام فکر می‌کنم تا ببینم حدس معنی می‌دهد یا نه.
						۲۰. وقتی گوش می‌کنم هر از گاهی از خودم می‌پرسم که از درک مطلبم راضی هستم یا نه.
						۲۱. وقتی گوش می‌دهم هدفی در ذهنم دارم.