The Relationship between Listening Self-efficacy and Metacognitive Awareness of Listening Strategies

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**Abstract**

Recent studies on listening comprehension have focused on finding factors that help EFL learners become more proficient and successful listeners; however, the interrelationship among these factors has been taken for granted in the SLA literature. The aim of the current study was investigating Iranian EFL learners’ listening self-efficacy and its relationship with their metacognitive awareness of listening strategies. Three hundred and seventy-one high-school students participated in the study. They filled in English listening self-efficacy questionnaire (Renzhi, 2012) and Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (Vandergrift et al., 2006). Both questionnaires were administered along with a listening proficiency test (Preliminary English Test, 2010). The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between listening self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness of listening strategies in general. Further, listening self-efficacy was found to be significantly and positively related to planning-evaluation and problem solving strategies and inversely to mental translation strategies. As higher self-efficacy brings about more control over listening tasks and guarantees successful strategy use, particular attention should be devoted to the role of this construct in listening instruction research and practice.

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1. Introduction

Listening comprehension is the least explicit and the most difficult language skill to tackle with. In order to help language learners to listen more competently and to maximize the efficiency of listening instruction in both EFL and

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ESL settings, recent studies have focused on the ways skilful listeners process oral input and spoken message. The findings of these studies show that both cognitive and affective factors influence the way listeners manage their listening task and overcome its difficulty.

One line of research in this framework has paid attention to metacognitive awareness of listening comprehension. This awareness is related to the way listeners think about listening process; plan, monitor, and evaluate the listening task; and tackle the problems they face during listening (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodtari, 2006). It is evident that metacognitive awareness of listening strategies is related to achievement in English (Kummin & Rahman, 2010), English listening proficiency (Shirani Bidabadi & Yamat, 2010), and language learning motivation (Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011). It is now believed that metacognitive awareness and perceived use of listening strategies can help listeners capitalize on the language input they receive, manage their approach to listening, focus on the spoken message, and consequently enhance their performance on listening task (Vandergrift, 2004).

However, success in language learning in general and listening in particular may not just be related to the type of instruction learners receive, the skills they acquire, or strategies they apply. Research on affective factors and motivation shows that other internal factors like internal feeling of confidence can affect learning achievement. One construct that has received considerable attention in this regard is self-efficacy or “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). It is evident in the literature that self-efficacy can guarantee academic performance (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006) and is related to lower anxiety levels (Mecece, Wigfield, & Eccles, 1990), using learning strategies (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990), academic self-regulation (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992), and intrinsic motivation (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990).

While the role of self-efficacy in learning has been investigated by researchers of different disciplines, “less research has focused on self-efficacy beliefs in the context of foreign language learning” (Raooifi, Tan, & Chan, 2012, p. 61). Moreover, very few studies have probed into the relationship between EFL learners’ listening self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness of listening strategies. The aim of the present study thus is twofold. First, the level of EFL learners’ listening self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness of listening strategies will be investigated and then the relationship between these two constructs will be examined.

1.1. Self-efficacy and listening
According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), once a learner faces a particular task, he/she sets his/her own goals, systematically organizes certain strategies, and uses them purposely to attain the desired objectives (Bandura, 2001). In this framework, self-efficacy can be conceptualized as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance” (Bandura, 1997, p. 21).

Self-efficacy beliefs are related to learners’ attributions or the explanations individuals provide, consciously or sub-consciously, about how well they have done a task (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008). Self-efficacy can serve as a primary determinant of learners’ motivation (Bandura, 1986) as learners make more effort when they believe they can produce desired outcome by themselves. Conversely, if learners believe they have no power to produce the desired results, they will not make enough effort to attain learning goals. A large body of research from different fields of study provides support for the predictive and mediational role of the construct self-efficacy in learning achievement (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991) and a greater willingness to face challenges and make efforts to learn (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006).

In spite of the studies that have probed into the role of self-efficacy in language learning, the role of self-efficacy in listening comprehension is still in need of research. “An argument less frequently made ... is that effective listening ... depends on learners’ self-efficacy for listening, on their confidence in their ability to make sense of the input to which they are exposed” (Graham, 2011, p. 113). Listening is a difficult skill and a source of frustration among learners (Hasan, 2000) because the natural flow of spoken message and the speed of its delivery create listening anxiety that can create demotivation among learners (Graham, 2006) and lower learners’ self-efficacy.
(Bandura, 1997). “Low self-efficacy may be particularly acute in second language listening because it is a less physically ‘observable’ skill than, say, writing, and thus seems less controllable” (Graham, 2011, p. 114). A few empirical studies done in this regard show that listening self-efficacy is positively related to listening proficiency (Chen, 2007) and inversely related to listening anxiety (Mills, et al., 2006).

Some experts suggested that low level of listening self-efficacy among EFL learners can be related to the way listening is taught as “in many language classrooms, listening takes the form of an activity to be ‘delivered’ rather than a skill to develop in its own right” (Graham, 2011, p. 114). It is believed that the shift from traditional approaches of teaching listening- that mainly focus on comprehension- to strategy-based listening instruction will boost EFL learners’ listening self-efficacy (Graham & Macaro, 2008), lower their listening anxiety (Goh & Taib, 2006), increase their motivation (Vandergrift, 2005) and ultimately guarantee effective and successful listening comprehension (Field, 2008; Graham, 2008).

1.2. Self-efficacy and language learning strategies
Metacognitive strategies are “higher order executive skills that may entail of planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of activity” (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 44). In this framework metacognitive awareness of listening strategies can be defined as “learners’ cognitive appraisal or the metacognitive knowledge of their perceptions about themselves, their understanding of listening demands, their cognitive goals, and their approach to the task and their strategies” (Vandergrift et al., 2006, cited in Rahimi & Katal, 2012a, p. 84). These strategies include five types of strategies, i.e., problem solving, planning-evaluation, mental translation, person knowledge, and directed attention.

Research on metacognitive awareness of listening strategies is still in its early stages of development. A few studies done in this framework show that there is a relationship between effective use of listening strategies and successful listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 2003), self-regulation and autonomy in listening (Vandergrift, 2002), language learning motivation (Vandergrift, 2005), and using technology for listening (Rahimi & Katal, 2012b).

Studies done in relation to learners’ self-efficacy and language learning strategy use have shown that learners’ self-efficacy correlates with the language learning strategies they utilize in their progression toward learning (e.g., Graham & Macaro, 2008) as learners can influence the task outcome by altering the amount of effort they bring into the task or the strategies they apply when they are doing the listening task (Graham, 2011). It is believed that using learning strategies leads to successful learning which in turn, raises learners’ language learning self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 1990). It has also been noted that learners’ level of self-efficacy could be a key factor in determining their choices of learning strategies which ultimately leads to successful learning. However, more research is required to shed light on the relationship between metacognitive awareness of listening strategies and listening self-efficacy. The current study aims at finding answers to the following questions:

1. What is Iranian EFL learners’ level of English listening self-efficacy?
2. What is Iranian EFL learners’ level of metacognitive awareness of listening strategies?
3. Is there any relationship between EFL learners’ English listening self-efficacy and their metacognitive awareness of listening strategies?

2. Method

2.1. Participants
Three hundred and seventy-one studying in grade three and four high-school in different majors (natural sciences, mathematics, and humanities) participated in this study.

2.2. Instruments
Three instruments were used in this study:

- Preliminary English Test (PET)
- English Listening Self-efficacy Questionnaire (ELSEQ)
• Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ)

2.2.1. PET

Preliminary English Test (PET) was used as the listening task along with ELSEQ and MALQ. PET is part of a group of examinations developed by Cambridge ESOL called the Cambridge Main Suite. PET has three main sections including reading/writing, listening, and speaking. The listening part includes 4 parts ranging from short exchanges to longer dialogues and monologues. The objective of the listening section is to assess candidates’ ability to understand dialogues and monologues in both informal and neutral settings on a range of everyday topics (PET, 2010, p.5). The listening part includes 25 items and lasts 35 minutes.

2.2.2. ELSEQ

Participants’ listening self-efficacy beliefs of performing different listening tasks of PET were investigated through Persian version of English listening self-efficacy questionnaire (ELSEQ) which was developed in accordance with listening part of PET (Renzhi, 2012). ELSEQ assessed how confident learners were when they were answering four types of listening questions of PET (short dialogues, long dialogues, short monologues, long monologues). ELSEQ has 16 items and each item is rated on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all sure) to 5 (moderately sure) and 10 (completely sure). The reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .92. The reliability coefficients of the subsections were found to be .77, .82, .80, and .82 respectively.

2.2.3. MALQ

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) was used to assess language learners’ awareness and perceived use of listening strategies (Vandergrift et al., 2006). The questionnaire contains 21 items and each item is rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) without a neutral point so that respondents could not hedge. The scale has five factors including problem solving (6 items), planning-evaluation (5 items), mental translation (3 items), person knowledge (3 items), and directed attention (4 items).

MALQ has been validated using an Iranian sample (Rahimi & Katal, 2012b). The results of both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses support a five-factor model that explains 61.14% of the total variance of the construct. Reliability coefficients of 0.82 (Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011), 0.85 (Shirani Bidabadi, & Yamat, 2010), and 0.74 (Rahimi & Katal, 2012b) with Iranian samples have been reported. The reliability coefficient of MALQ in this study was estimated to be 0.86. The reliability coefficients of the subsections were found to be .77, .74, .82, .80, and .82 respectively.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 summarizes means and standard deviations of ELSEQ and MALQ and their subsections. As table 1 shows the mean score of participants’ listening self-efficacy is 5.82, while self-efficacy was measured by a 10-point Likert scale, implying that generally the sample had an average level of self-efficacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Mean per item</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELSEQ</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short dialogues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long dialogues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long monologues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short monologues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALQ</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning-evaluation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental translation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person knowledge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directed attention</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examining the means of subsections of ELSEQ shows that the participants’ level of self-efficacy was roughly
higher than average when they listened to long dialogues (mean=6.16). The lowest level of listening self-efficacy is related to listening to short dialogues (mean=5.58).

Further, participants’ mean on MALQ was 4.12, implying an average level of metacognitive awareness as MALQ was measured by a 6-point Likert scale. Examining the means of subsections of MALQ shows that the highest level of awareness is related to problem-solving (mean=4.25) and the lowest level of awareness is related to planning-evaluation strategies (mean=4.02).

3.2. Inter-correlation between variables

Table 2 presents inter-correlations between ELSEQ and MALQ, and their subsections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALQ Planning-evaluation</th>
<th>Directed attention</th>
<th>Person knowledge</th>
<th>Mental translation</th>
<th>Problem solving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELSEQ</td>
<td>.222**</td>
<td>.221**</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.161*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short dialogues</td>
<td>.200**</td>
<td>.191**</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>-.170**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long dialogues</td>
<td>.163**</td>
<td>.178**</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>-.112*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short monologues</td>
<td>.220**</td>
<td>.230**</td>
<td>.109*</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>-.107*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long monologues</td>
<td>.185**</td>
<td>.164**</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.163**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at \( p < .001 \)

* Correlation is significant at \( p < .05 \)

As Table 2 shows, listening self-efficacy is positively related to metacognitive awareness of listening strategies in general and three types of strategies, namely, planning-evaluation, mental translation, and problems solving, while the strongest correlation is related to problem solving.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study revealed that Iranian EFL learners have an average level of listening self-efficacy. The reason of this average self-efficacy can be related to the following factors:

- Listening instruction in Iran’s language classes is based on comprehension approach and it involves testing students’ comprehension based on a text or a dialogue. As Graham (2011) asserts “it is … unlikely to develop self-efficacy for listening through its over-emphasis on ‘testing’ and lack of insight fostered among learners into how to bring about improvement” (p. 114). As students do not have an active role in the process of listening instruction they do not feel confident about their abilities in handling listening tasks. This increases students’ levels of listening anxiety and leads to low level of self-efficacy (Graham, 2006).

- Listening is a difficult skill for EFL learners and if students do not become aware of the cognitive aspects of listening process-through practice or instruction- they cannot understand what happens when they listen and how they can manage the listening tasks. Therefore, they lose their control over the listening task and thus they show low levels of self-efficacy.

It was also found that Iranian EFL learners have an average level of metacognitive awareness of listening strategies. This is in line with the findings of other researchers (Rahimi & Katal, 2012a, b). The medium awareness and perceived use of listening strategies can be attributed to Iranian EFL learners’ limited listening experience and the type of listening instruction they receive at school.

Further, it was found that self-efficacy is significantly and positively related to metacognitive awareness of listening strategies in general. This finding corroborates the findings of other studies and supports the fact that those language learners who have higher listening self-efficacy have more control over their listening task (Graham, 2008), are more aware of their listening strategies and can apply these strategies more successfully in the process of listening comprehension (Graham & Macaro, 2008).
Self-efficacy was found to be positively related to planning-evaluation strategies. Planning-evaluation strategies “represent the strategies listeners use to prepare themselves for listening and to evaluate the results of their listening efforts” (Vandergrift et al., 2006, p. 450). The use of planning-evaluation strategies increases learners’ confidence as they constantly monitor the way they are doing the listening task and evaluate the outcome of the task. Thus students with higher awareness of these types of strategies are more likely to have higher listening self-efficacy.

Further, the findings show that listening self-efficacy was inversely related to mental translation strategies. Mental translation strategies are those strategies that listeners must overcome in order to become skilled listeners. As those learners who have higher self-efficacy have more control over the process of listening, they avoid using counterproductive strategies of mental translation. This finding is in line with other studies that support the fact that higher listening self-efficacy leads to more successful listening (Graham, 2008).

Listening self-efficacy was also found to be positively related to problem solving strategies. These strategies “represent a group of strategies used by listeners to inference (guess at what they do not understand) and to monitor these inferences” (Vandergrift et al., 2006, p. 450). As efficient problem solvers have positive attitudes towards their abilities to solve problems (Lochhead & Whimbey, 1980), are more aware of their strengths and weaknesses when they are doing a task, and monitor and evaluate their problem-solving efforts (Lester, 1994), they show more self-efficacy beliefs about solving a certain problem-here listening to English texts. Further, applying problem solving strategies makes students more autonomous learners who are in control of their learning process (Chamot, Dale, O’Malley, & Spanos, 1992) and thus they show more confidence in doing listening tasks that leads to higher positive listening self-efficacy beliefs.

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