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THE EFFECT OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY INSTRUCTION ON LISTENING PERFORMANCE PRE-INTERMEDIATE IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT
The present study aimed at exploring the effectiveness of using Metacognitive strategy in developing pre-intermediate university students' EFL listening comprehension skills. It was hypothesized that using metacognitive strategy based instruction would develop students' EFL listening comprehension skill and its sub-skills. The participants were 58 female, Iranian beginner EFL students, studying English translation and teaching in University of Tonekabon branch, Tonekabon, Iran. After selecting the participants through the TOEFL's listening section as the pre-test, 49 of them were selected and randomly divided into experimental (N=24) and control (N=25) groups. Besides the Nelson's listening section, the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) adapted from Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghodtari (2006) was also administered to both groups. After a period of 10-session strategy instruction to the experimental group based on Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) model of strategy instruction, the experimental and control group's listening performance were compared using the Nelson's listening section as the post-test. Moreover the MALQ was also administered to the experimental group at the end of the treatment in order to investigate the effectiveness of the treatment. Findings of the study were statistically dealt with the Statistical Package for the Social Science software (SPSS) version 17. T-value, mean scores, standard deviation, and degree of freedom were calculated. It was found out that the experimental group achieved more gains in their EFL listening comprehension skill and each sub-skill due to using the explicit language learning strategy instruction.

Keywords: Metacognition, MALQ, TOEFL, Listening Comprehension, EFL

INTRODUCTION
Listening comprehension can be regarded as an important language skill to develop. Language learners are interested in understanding target language (L2) speakers and they want to be able to access the rich variety of aural and visual L2 texts available via network-based multimedia. In addition, as some scholars believe, listening comprehension is at the heart of L2 learning and the development of L2 listening skills can play a significant role in developing other language skills (e.g. Dunkel, 1991; Rost, 2002; as cited in Vandergrift, 2007). The significant role of listening in our perceptions of the world around us and in what we know as communication is undeniable. Unless what is said is comprehended efficiently by the audience, we cannot claim that the communicative goal is reached. So teaching that kind of comprehension is of primary importance (Rivers, 1983). Goh (2008) mentions some positive effects of metacognitive strategy instruction on students' listening performance asserting that teaching students how to use them not only increases their sense of self confidence but also decreases their listening anxiety. Furthermore, listening is an effective skill which can develop faster in comparison to the speaking skill and often can have an effect in the development of reading and writing abilities in learning a new language (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992; Oxford, 1993). As most English teachers in Iran believe, although we may know a lot about the nature of listening and the role of listening inside and outside the classroom, L2 listening has been considered to be an overlooked skill in comparison to three other language skills.

Statement of Problem
Metacognition is the ability to be conscious of one's mental processes. Research shows that metacognitive learners who take conscious steps to understand what they are doing when they learn tend to be the most successful learners. As the proficient use of metacognitive strategies is rare among

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students, more research on metacognitive awareness is essential to find out how students can be taught to apply the cognitive resources in order to activate their repertoire of metacognitive knowledge and strategies and to enhance their learning. Metacognitive knowledge as a kind of declarative knowledge can be consider for classification according to whether it focuses on the learner, the learning task or the process of learning. These three main points are referred to as the person knowledge, the knowledge regarding the strategies which are likely to be effective in achieving goals and undertaking tasks (Flavell, 1976). Till date, little attention has been focused on systematic practice in L2 listening (see DeKeyser, 2007) i.e., on the integrated instruction of a sequential repertoire of strategies to help L2 learners develop comprehension skills for real-life listening (Berne, 2004; Mendelsohn, 1994; Vandergrift, 2004). What's more, when we study the recent research on second or foreign listening instruction, most of them have emphasized the need for assessing the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy training in order to improve second language listening comprehension. Further, it is worth mentioning that new approaches for developing an effective L2 listening have focused their attention on real-life authentic listening by making use of top-down approaches and analyzing the processes taking place during the instruction (e.g. Goh, 2008; Richards, 2002; Vandergrift, 2007). In general, comprehension historically has received only minimal treatment in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL), but it is, in fact, one of the most important skills a second language (L2) learner must master to succeed in academic studies (Jung, 2003). In second language acquisition, listening comprehension used to be considered a passive activity; thus, it did not merit researchers' attention (Jung, 2003; Vandergrift, 2004). It had been assumed that a learner's ability to comprehend spoken language would develop entirely on its own in an inductive way through repetition and imitation. It was assumed that the ability to comprehend spoken language would automatically improve because learners with exposure to the oral discourse would learn through practice. Despite, recognizing the importance of listening strategies for the development of foreign language proficiency, very limited studies have been performed in Iran concerning the strategies employed by Iranian EFL learners in relation to listening proficiency levels. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine how metacognitive strategy training may benefit L2 learners in their development of listening comprehension.

Significance of the Study

Since the mid-1970s, learning strategies have been at the center of attention in L2 learning (Anderson, 1991, 2003; Cohen, 1990, 1998; Hosenfeld, 1979; Macaro, 2001; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1993, 2002; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 1991, 2002). The research on learning strategies has highlighted the importance of strategy instruction and its role in making learners more successful in academic career. Oxford (2003) believes that "language learning styles and strategies are among the main factors that help determine how - and how well -our students learn a second or foreign language" (p. 1). When chosen consciously, language learning strategies can act as a key to active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation learning. Accordingly, one way to accelerate the academic language learning is to teach learners how to learn more effectively and efficiently. As a consequence, the goal of strategy training is self-diagnosis, awareness of how to learn target language most efficiently, developing problem solving skills, experimenting familiar and unfamiliar learning strategies, decision making about how to approach a task, monitoring and self-evaluation, transferring successful learning strategies to new learning context, and enabling students to become more independent, autonomous, and lifelong learners (Allwright, 1990; Little, 1991; cited in Oxford, 2003). A good rationale for integrating explicit instruction of language learning strategies into the language curriculum has been provided by Nunan (1996). Language classrooms should have a dual focus, not only teaching language content but also on developing learning processes as well (p. 41). The current study addresses the need for further research in the area of systematic teaching of listening strategies. She believed that learners need to be able to actively and selectively choose the strategies most applicable for a given listening situation and evaluate strategy effectiveness in their everyday learning tasks. As Carrier (ibid) indicated in her study, students can benefit from instruction in strategies for academic listening in a variety of settings and incorporating many types of media. This study adds to the growing body of research of how pre- intermediate EFL

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students pursuing academic study may benefit from explicit metacognitive teaching of listening strategy. Results of the study provide insight into participants' self-perceptions of their use of listening strategy both before and after systematic classroom instruction.

Research Questions

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

Q: Is there any significant difference in using metacognitive listening strategies, based on Metacognitive Questionnaire (MALQ), by Iranian EFL pre-intermediate learners?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the above questions, the following hypotheses were estimated:

H. There is no significant difference in using metacognitive listening strategies, based on Metacognitive Questionnaire (MALQ) by Iranian EFL learners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

Participants

The participants for the study were a group of 59 female Iranian beginner EFL students, between 18 to 21 years old, studying English translation and English teaching in University of Tonekabon. After choosing the participants through the listening section of the TOEFL as the pre-test, 49 of them were randomly assigned to experimental (N=24) and control (N=25) groups.

Instruments

Nelson Proficiency Test

The Nelson proficiency test (series 400 B) was used to assess the subjects' level of proficiency in English. It was used to assess the participants' level of proficiency in English. This test comprised 30 multiple-choice vocabularies, grammar, and reading comprehension items. For ensuring the subjects homogeneity, having administered General English proficiency test, those subjects who placed between one standard deviation above and below the mean were considered as the main subjects for the purpose of this study.

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ)

This questionnaire consists of 21 randomly ordered items related to L2 listening comprehension. The items measure the perceived use of the strategies and processes underlying five factors related to the regulation of L2 listening comprehension. These two factors include Planning and Evaluation (how listeners prepare themselves for listening and evaluate the results of their listening efforts) and Person Knowledge (learner perceptions concerning how they learn best, the difficulty presented by L2 listening, and their self-efficacy in L2 listening).

Data Collection & Procedure

One week before the treatment, both groups were administered the MALQ questionnaire along with some instructions and explanations answering them. After that the listening section of the TOEFL were administered as the pre-test based on which 49 students were selected and were randomly assigned to experimental (n=25) and control (n=24) groups. The experimental group received the instruction while the control group did not receive any treatment. The experimental group participated in 10-session strategy training, held twice a week and lasted for 45 minutes. The interpretation of the information derived from the instrument was based on the interpretation schemes used in published studies (e.g., Henk and Melnick, 1995; Oxford, 1990).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and Finding

In order to answer the first research question regarding the effect of metacognitive strategy training on students' listening performance, the mean scores of both groups on the TOEFL post-test were to be compared together. To do so, first the equality of both groups before treatment had to be proven by comparing the mean scores of both groups in the pre-test. In order to compare two independent means, equality of variances had to be calculated. Comparing the equality of means for two independent groups

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is reached through an independent samples t-test. So a two-tailed t-test was used to compare the means. Since the p-value was 0.257 which is bigger than 0.05 it was verified that the mean scores between two groups were not significantly different and so the control and experimental groups were initially equal considering their listening performance. Table 1 illustrates the statistical analysis for investigating equality of means.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics showing progress in the experimental group

Pre-Test	N	Mean	Sd	Df	T-value	Sig
Experimental Group	25	19.34	3.52	47	1.22	0.257
Control Group	24	18.56	4.21			

After the homogeneity of the two groups before treatment was confirmed, it was needed to check whether there was any change in students' listening performance after the treatment. So a paired t-test was employed to compare the mean scores of the experimental group before and after the treatment. As indicated in table 2, the p-value was estimated to be 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05 and so it was concluded that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group before and after the treatment. Based on these results it was evident that the listening performance of the students in the experimental group was significantly improved through strategy instruction.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics comparing control and experimental groups' post-tests

Post-test	N	Mean	Sd.	Df.	T-Value	Sig.
Experimental Group	25	21.02	4.23	43	2.61	0.000
Control Group	24	19.83	4.56			

And finally the mean scores in the control and experimental group post-test were compared using an independent t-test. As illustrated in table 3, the p-value was 0.000 that is less than 0.05, and so it was quite clear that the experimental group had significantly outperformed the control group and so the positive effect of strategy instruction on students' listening performance was verified. Investigating the second research question, the data obtained from the pre and post administration of MALQ were compared using t-test. The items related to each 2 factors in the MALQ (planning and evaluation, person knowledge) were as follows:

Table 4: Factors of MALQ and their related items

Factors	Items No.	Total(12)
Planning and evaluation	1,3,4,7,9,10	6
Person Knowledge	2,5,6,8,11,12	6

The questionnaire is a 6-point likert scale ranged from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), partially disagree (3), partially agree (4), agree (5), to strongly agree (6) and so the scores for each item vary between 1 to 6. After transferring scores to the appropriate row, the mean was calculated for each factor to measure students' awareness on each factor before and after the treatment. Then the general mean of the pre-test and post-test was calculated and compared. Since the level of significance turned out to be less than 0.05, it was concluded that there is a significance difference between students' metacognitive awareness before and after the strategy instruction and so the positive effect of the treatment on students' metacognitive awareness was verified. The results have been presented in the above table.

Discussion

The results of the study indicates that metacognitive strategy instruction has a positive effect on students' listening performance which is consistent with the findings represented by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), Graham and Macaro (2008), Goh and Taib (2006), and Vandergrift (2002, 2003a). When students learn how to plan, monitor, and evaluate themselves in a listening task, they can manage their own

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learning and so become self-regulated and much more competent in their performance. As Vandergrift (2002) states "teaching for metacognition provides language learners with the knowledge and tools for meaningful transfer of learning so that they know how to listen to and understand authentic texts outside of the classroom". The findings also demonstrates that metacognitive strategy training can be strongly effective in increasing students' metacognitive awareness to deal with listening tasks much more tactfully, to plan in advance for the strategies to be used and to be aware and responsible for their own learning. The students' degree of MALQ also decreased through the period of strategy instruction. So finding a way to deal with such a destructive factor in the process of learning is quite vital. When students feel more comfortable and relaxed, they can learn much better.

Conclusion

So it's a time for teachers, especially those in Iran, to replace the traditional product-oriented methods of teaching listening with the process-oriented ones with a greater focus on strategic listening which is much more promising in students' progress. Metacognition is a mode of instruction that focuses on «the interactive nature of reading», rather than a passive way of receiving information from the text through word identification and task analytic learning (Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977; as cited in Dole *et al.,* 1991). It contains a number of components that help students construct their learning styles from a dependent to an independent way with planning, monitoring, motivation, organization and self-regulation. Students profit from this effective, meaningful and self-regulated learning.

According to Ormrod (1990), if students have self-regulated concepts, they will know what they want to accomplish when they read or listen. They will bind their goals with a specific learning to advance their longer-term goals. They will show self discipline, put work before pleasure, diligently complete assigned homework in class or at home. They will use a variety of strategies to keep themselves on task. In addition, metacognitive strategies help students «outline logical organization of a text, whether written or oral», distinguish a relationship between cause and effect, understand the problem and solution, and make comparisons (Hughes, 1989). Like this, students can become aware of and develop good listening processes to improve their comprehension. If students' reading comprehension in an EFL context like Iran can be improved by putting metacognitive strategies into practice in the context of listening, they will mostly benefit from meaningful learning and be propelled into multidimensional application in any realm of the educational field. In sum, as the results of this study showed, metacognitive strategies can advance Iranian EFL learners from the beginning level to a higher level of listening comprehension. If teachers in both contexts modify learning strategies to fit students' special needs and adapt these listening strategies to facilitate academic learning, the learners will elevate their language proficiency levels and develop much higher listening achievement.

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