

Comparing Intermediate EFL Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Listening Comprehension Strategy Use

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Abstract: Language learning strategies are the thoughts and actions that learners employ to accomplish a learning goal. Extensive research has identified strategies used by students of a variety of second or foreign languages, but limited research has been carried out with regard to the listening comprehension strategy use of the students. The purpose of the present study was to compare intermediate EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of listening comprehension strategies. The research design for this study was descriptive. One research question led the study: Is there a difference between the intermediate EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of using six types of listening comprehension strategies including memory-related, cognitive, metacognitive, social, affective, compensation strategies? In order to answer the above questions, listening strategy use of the learners was assessed through a Farsi translation of Oxford's Inventory for Language Learning. The participants of the present study were 90 female students from two language institutes of Tabriz. The results showed that there was no difference between the students' and teachers' perceptions of listening strategy use.

Key words: Listening comprehension • Listening strategies • Perception

INTRODUCTION

During the last twenty years, there has been an important variation within the field of language learning and teaching, resulting in more emphasis on learners and learning rather than teachers and teaching. This means that how learners process new information and what kinds of strategies they employ to understand, learn or remember the information have been the main concerns of the researchers dealing with the area of foreign language learning [1].

Research into Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) started in the 1960s and in particular, progresses in cognitive psychology affected much of the research done on LLSs [1]. In fact, cognitive domain of human behavior is of key importance in the acquisition of both a first and a second language. Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian [2] state that in cognitivist theories learners are considered as active processors of information whereas in behaviorist theories of learning learners are described as passive receivers of information. In cognitivist theories, learners make use of strategies. O'Malley and Chamot [3] define Language Learning Strategies as the particular thought or

behaviors of processing of information that learners use to assist them comprehend, learn, or maintain new information. Oxford [4] points out that LLSs are particularly vital for language learning since they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is crucial for developing communicative competence. LLSs include four skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing, yet, in the present study the focus will be on listening comprehension strategies.

Listening plays a crucial role in the communication process, in general and in language learning in particular [5]. It helps learners benefit from different aural and visual texts in L2 available through network-based multimedia [6]. According to Lynch and Mendelsohn [7], listening involves making sense of spoken language, normally accompanied by other sounds, with the help of our background knowledge and the context in which we are listening. In particular, listening strategies (LSs) are conscious attention of the learners' to their comprehension processes so as to construct meaning [8]. In fact, teachers can help language learners improve their listening competence by equipping them with useful listening strategies and skills [6]. According to Oxford

[9], LSs assist learners become more autonomous. Autonomy entails deliberate control of one's own learning processes. It is argued that LSs improve learners' self-efficacy and their perception that they can effectively complete a task or series of tasks [9], which in turn can enhance their autonomy. According to Chamot and Kupper [10], from the research to date, it is clear that all language learners make use of some types of LLSs. However, the students' and teachers' perceptions of the strategy use can be different, a point which has rarely been dealt with in an Iranian EFL context. In fact, teachers need to be aware of the strategies learners use in order to adapt their instruction. Thus, the present study aims at comparing intermediate EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of listening comprehension strategy use. To this end the following research question was posed:

Is there a difference between the intermediate EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of using 6 types of listening comprehension strategies including memory-related, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies?

The related null hypothesis was that "There is no difference between the intermediate EFL students' and teacher's perceptions of using different listening comprehension strategies".

Initially, it seems necessary to define different types of listening comprehension strategies which are focused in this study. Oxford and Crookall [11] define strategies as follows:

- *Affective Strategies* are techniques like self-reinforcement and positive self-talk which assist learners get better control over their emotions, attitudes and motivations related to language; 2) *Cognitive Strategies* are skills that consist of manipulation or transformation of the language in some direct way, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note taking, formal practice with structures and sound, etc.; 3) *Compensation Strategies* are behaviors employed to compensate for missing knowledge of some sort, e.g., inferring while listening or reading, or using synonyms while speaking or writing; 4) *Memory Strategies* are techniques purposely tailored to assist the learner store new information in memory and retrieve later; 5) *Metacognitive Strategies* are behaviors employed for monitoring, arranging, planning and evaluating one's learning. These beyond the cognitive

strategies are used to supply executive control over the learning process; and 6) *Social Strategies* are actions involving other people in the language learning process, e.g., questioning, cooperative with other peers and developing empathy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To carry out the present study, the researchers randomly selected a convenience sample consisting of 92 female students and 20 EFL teachers at two language institutes in Tabriz, who were teaching those students at the time of data collection. They all came from a bilingual background (Turkish and Persian). The students were from different age groups. There were three stages of data collection. At first, in order to make sure about the language proficiency levels of students, the researcher gave a language proficiency test (PET) to the students and then based on the results, the students who scored 1 SD higher or lower than the mean were selected.

As Oxford's [4] original questionnaire was based on learners' general LSs including listening, reading, speaking and writing strategies but the focus of the study was on listening comprehension strategy use, this questionnaire was modified and then translated into Farsi to facilitate the students' understanding. The content validity of the questionnaire was examined by teachers who had years of experience in teaching listening. Also, in order to clear any ambiguity which participants might find in answering the questionnaire, the 50 items questionnaire was piloted to a group of 30 language learners in a language institute who were randomly selected. The reliability of the questionnaire came out to be $.8415 > 0.05$.

In the main study, the questionnaire was given to 92 students and then the results were analyzed. Finally, in order to get the teachers' perceptions about their students' use of listening comprehension strategies, the same questionnaire was given to 20 language teachers. The students' version of the questionnaire included the items which asked about the students' ideas in the first person singular (e.g., "I sit in front of the class, so that I can see the teacher") while the items in the teachers' version were in the third person (e.g., "s/he sits in front of the class so that s/he can see the teacher"). The results were then analyzed to compare the students' and teachers' perceptions of using listening comprehension strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The design of this survey study was descriptive. In order to compare perceptions of the students' and teachers' with regard to listening comprehension strategy use, the researcher used an independent sample T-test. The descriptive statistics of using all listening comprehension strategies from the teachers' point of view is summarized in Table 1 below.

As it is presented in Table 1, from the teachers' point of view, students at all levels of proficiency used metacognitive listening comprehension strategies most, with the mean of 71% and affective listening comprehension strategies least, with the mean of 53.8%. The frequency of using other strategies were 70%, 67.5%, 66%, 65.1% and 62.5% regarding compensation strategies, cognitive strategies, social strategies, all strategies and memory-related strategies respectively. Moreover, the descriptive statistics of using different listening comprehension strategies from the students' point of view was summarized in Table 2. As it is revealed, metacognitive listening comprehension strategies were used most by students (68.8%) and affective listening comprehension strategies were used least (55.8%) compared to other strategies. Generally, all of the students made use of listening comprehension strategies (62.4%).

As it is presented in Table 2, from the students' point of view, metacognitive listening comprehension strategies were used most, with the mean of 68.8% and affective listening comprehension strategies least, with the mean of 55.8%. The frequency of using other strategies were 65.2%, 62.3%, 61.8%, 62.4% and 60.5% regarding compensation strategies, cognitive strategies, social strategies, all strategies and memory-related strategies respectively.

In order to examine the mean difference between the students' and teachers' perceptions of all listening comprehension strategies use, an independent sample T-test was used. Table 3 shows, the P value is $.257 > 0.05$ and $T = 1.157$. In order to reject the null hypothesis, the significance must be below 0.05. The result shows that there is no difference between the students' and teachers' perceptions of using all listening comprehension strategies. Moreover, the teachers' and students' perceptions of listening comprehension strategy use have been analyzed in terms of different strategies, including memory-related strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. To this end, six

independent sample T-tests were used. The P values for the memory-related, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies were .49, .056, .27, .53, .47 and .16 respectively. As all these P values are above 0.05, it is revealed that there was no difference between the students' and teachers' perceptions of using different listening comprehension strategies memory-related, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, social strategies.

Several studies have sought to help language learners use strategies to increase their comprehension of oral texts. Research on listening strategies includes: work on several languages (ESL most of all, but also French, Italian, Russian and Spanish); work with the types of strategies; work with audio or video texts; work with interactive or transactional listening; work with cognitive and metacognitive strategies; and work considering the relation of strategy use to text, task and setting. An important approach to studying strategy use is contrasting strategy use at several proficiency levels. Identifying various strategy patterns and relating them to different proficiency levels is potentially very useful. Ching-Yi *et al.* [12] in their studies used SILL for collecting data for eliciting Taiwanese college EFL learners' strategy use and the results showed that generally, there was not a big difference among the frequency of each strategy use and approximately all were in medium use level. Defillipis [13] examined second-semester elementary French learners to find the listening strategies of both more successful and less successful listeners. He found that both skillful listeners and unskillful listeners were more similar than dissimilar. Both groups reported using the same list of strategies and the total number of strategies employed by each group was nearly equal. The findings of the present study were approximately in line with the findings of the above mentioned studies. According to the results, all of the students employed all listening comprehension strategies but metacognitive listening comprehension strategies with the mean of 68.8% were used by all of the students more than the other strategies and affective listening comprehension strategies with the mean of 55.8% were used less than the other strategies. This means that all students with different levels of language proficiency use all listening comprehension strategies including memory-related, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Intermediate students used all listening comprehension strategies more than low intermediate and high intermediate students.

Table 1: The distribution of using all listening comprehension strategies of students from the teachers' point of view

		MEM	COG	COM	MET	AFF	SOC	All
N	Valid	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		62.50	67.57	70.00	71.00	53.80	66.00	65.14
Std. Deviation		11.72	10.60	16.22	12.78	10.50	11.67	9.27
Skewness		.605	-.086	-.411	.097	-.199	.120	.401
Std. Error of Skewness		.512	.512	.512	.512	.512	.512	.512
Range		47.50	35.71	60.00	42.22	36.00	40.00	30.43
Minimum		40.00	51.43	40.00	48.89	36.00	46.67	52.69
Maximum		87.50	87.14	100.00	91.11	72.00	86.67	83.12

N=Number of classes, including 92 students. Note: MEM=Memory-related strategy, COG=Cognitive strategy, COM= Compensation strategy, MET=Metacognitive strategy, AFF=Affective strategy, SOC=Social strategy

Table 2. The distribution of using different listening comprehension strategies from the students' point of view

All levels of language proficiency		MEM	COG	COM	MET	AFF	SOC	ALL
N	Valid	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		60.5260	62.3730	65.2482	68.8571	55.8507	61.8552	62.4517
Std. Deviation		4.60449	4.82065	9.87623	8.49887	7.14693	5.85328	4.73326
Skewness		.698	.271	1.007	.483	.103	.487	.684
Std. Error of Skewness		.512	.512	.512	.512	.512	.512	.512
Range		17.92	17.86	36.67	26.30	28.00	23.56	15.77
Minimum		53.75	55.00	53.33	58.52	44.00	52.00	55.40
Maximum		71.67	72.86	90.00	84.81	72.00	75.56	71.17

Note: MEM=Memory-related strategy, COG=Cognitive strategy, COM= Compensation strategy, MET=Metacognitive strategy, AFF=Affective strategy, SOC=Social strategy.

Table 3: Comparing the students' and teachers' perceptions of all listening comprehension strategy use

Group Statistics	Perception	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
All strategies	Students	20	62.4517	4.73326	1.05839
	Teacher	20	65.1452	9.27729	2.07447

N=Number of classes

Independent Samples T-test

	Perception	Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		Sig. (2-tailed)
		F	Sig.	t	df	
All strategies	Student	9.935	.003	1.157	28.264	.257
	Teacher					

Peters (1999, cited in 14) found no difference in the number of strategies used by successful and less successful listeners, but a difference lay in the degree of successful use. Proficient listeners seemed to understand how to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies, using them in a varied way. Goh (1998, cited in 14) reported that listeners with higher ability used a greater number of strategies, especially meacognitive strategies. On the other hand, lower ability listeners failed to use specific strategies that higher ability listeners did use successfully. O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper (1987, cited in 13) working with intermediate level ESL students at the secondary level, found significant differences between successful and unsuccessful listeners. ESL effective listeners tended to use self-monitoring, inferencing and

elaboration strategies. In another study, Teng [14] examined the listening comprehension strategies used by 51 freshmen university students in Taiwan. They were at low-intermediate level of EFL. Oxford's [4] SILL questionnaire was adopted to investigate the frequency and the pattern of the use of these strategies. The findings revealed that all of the students employed compensation strategies more often, cognitive strategies were the next and affective strategies were the least often used. Vandergrift (1992, cited in 13) examined differences in strategy of novice and intermediate listeners. He found that intermediate listeners used metacognitive strategies more than novice listeners. O'Malley *et al.* [16] examined the range of the LSs between high school students. The findings of their study revealed that intermediate level

students used more metacognitive strategies than students at the beginning level of proficiency. However, the other findings of this study were not in line with the findings of these studies. According to the results of the ANOVA tests, there was a significant difference among listening comprehension strategy use of students at different proficiency levels. The results showed that the mean difference of using memory-related strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective and social strategies at three levels of language proficiency were the same. i.e., there was no significant difference between them. But, the mean difference of using cognitive listening comprehension strategies and listening comprehension strategies in general differed at three levels of proficiency i.e., there was a significant difference among them. Zarafshan and Sadighi [17] also explored the effects of attitude, motivation and years of study on the use of LLSs by Iranian EFL university students. The participants of the study consisted of 126 freshmen and seniors majoring in English Translation and Teaching English at Shiraz Islamic Azad University. The analysis of the results revealed that the subjects of the study reported to employing social, metacognitive, affective and compensation strategies more frequently than memory and cognitive strategies. Also in this study, attitude proved to influence the use of LLSs significantly. That is, learners with positive attitude used LLSs more frequently than those with negative attitude.

Regarding the students' and teachers' perceptions of listening comprehension strategy use, the study carried out by Griffith and Parr [18] showed that students' and teachers' perceptions did not match at any point with regards to LLSs. Nunan's [19] study also revealed that there was clear mismatch between learners' and teachers' views. Kazempour [20] examined the frequency of the use of LLSs among 144 students at Maragheh University using questionnaire and having interview. She found that there were clear mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions towards four language skill in the use of LLSs. The finding of the present study was not in line with the findings of the mentioned studies. According to the results of the independent sample T-tests, there was not a significant difference between the students' and teacher's perceptions of listening comprehension strategy use, i.e., there was a clear match between the students' and teachers' perceptions at any point.

O'Malley *et al.* (1989, cited in 14) studied the students with unequal general proficiency who had unequal linguistic knowledge. The results showed that

listening ability was not linked to strategy use. Nambiar (1996, cited in 21) studied LSs use among beginning, intermediate and advanced learners in Malaysia to find the association between strategy use and proficiency level and discovered that three groups used similar strategies but their using of the strategies were different. The advanced learners had high self-esteem in the choice of strategies and did not employ compensation strategies. But, both of the intermediate and beginner learners made use of affective strategies when they had difficulty in understanding the task. Lai also (2005, cited in 21) examined this research among students in Taiwan and found that proficiency level has a significant effect on strategy choice and use. The more proficient learners utilized more strategies particularly metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Generally, the results obtained from this study also showed that there was a significant relationship between language proficiency levels and listening comprehension strategies used by Iranian EFL learners.

CONCLUSION

An emphasis on listening comprehension, as well as the application of listening comprehension strategies, will help students to capitalize on the language input they receive and to achieve greater success in language learning. LSs are useful tools for learners because they open up more reliable and less frustrating routes to language learning success. However, knowledge about listening comprehension strategies is still restricted, because most research concentration regarding LLSs has been devoted to those involved in reading, writing and speaking. The main purpose of this study was to investigate what listening strategies were used most or least among intermediate EFL learners from both teachers' and students' point of view.

The findings derived from the study suggest some pedagogical implications for instruction and curriculum development. First, teachers should try to become more aware of their students' listening comprehension strategies that they are (and are not) using, so that teachers can develop teaching strategies that are compatible with their students' ways of listening. Second, the findings of this study can help syllabus designers of EFL setting to develop the right source of materials, matching learners' strategy use. Third, this study can help learners to have some knowledge about their teachers' view points and it helps them to avoid some misunderstanding that may occur due to the lack of such

knowledge. And finally, language curricula, materials and instructional approaches should incorporate diversified activities to accommodate the various characteristics of the learner found in the foreign language classrooms.

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