

The Impact of Explicit Teaching of Listening Strategies on Iranian EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the impact of explicit teaching of listening strategies on Iranian female EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners' listening comprehension. Fifty students who were studying at a language school were given a listening test adopted from TOEFL Actual Tests. The purpose of this test was to divide all the participants into three low, intermediate, and high groups in terms of their listening proficiency level. To do so, the mean and standard deviation of the gained scores were calculated. Based on the results, thirty students were selected as intermediate. Students were divided in two groups, the experimental and control group. The experimental group received the treatment in the form of three main types of strategies, meta-cognitive, cognitive and social/ affective strategies. After thirteen sessions, each session taking one hour and thirty minutes, a post-test, the same as the listening test which was used as the pre-test, was given to all participants. The results from the T-test indicated that explicit teaching of strategies helped learners improve their listening comprehension.

Keywords: EFL learners; Learning strategies; Cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

The essential role of listening comprehension in communication in general and in EFL context in particular is an undisputable issue. Listening is important for different reasons. First of all, if learners are not able to receive input, they will not be able to produce suitable output. Second, essential part of communication, without listening comprehension is lost. If an individual cannot understand the interlocutor's speech, she would not be able to take part in communication. Despite such a great importance attached to listening, a lot of English learners have difficulty in listening comprehension. Many researchers have made an attempt to find some ways to EFL learners' listening comprehension. In this regard, it seems that one of the problems with acquiring listening skill is lack of knowledge of listening strategies. Most of English learners have difficulty in listening comprehension because they do not employ listening strategies while listening. Many researchers (e.g., Zhang, 2008) argue that a skills/strategies approach is one of the many possible and effective approaches that can help second language (L2) learners to improve their listening comprehension. Despite such a great importance attached to strategies, they are seldom taught explicitly to students; consequently, EFL learners are not familiar with them.

One of the basic categories of strategies among others that which is based on cognitive theory (Liu, as cited in Serri, Jafarpour Boroujeni & Hesabi, 2012) belongs to

O'Malley and Chamot's (1990, 1985). They categorized strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies are self-regulatory strategies in which learners are aware of their own thinking and learning, and plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning efforts. Cognitive strategies are strategies in which learners work with and manipulate the task materials themselves, moving toward task completion. Social and affective strategies are strategies in which students interact with the teacher or other students to solve the problem, or exercise some kind of affective control over their own learning behaviors.

Teaching these listening strategies explicitly may help listeners to learn how to use them. It also may help them be effective language learners. Having such a perspective in mind, the present study explored the effect of teaching cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective strategies simultaneously. Accordingly, the following research question was formulated.

Does explicit teaching of listening strategies improve Iranian female EFL learners' listening comprehension?

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

Thirty students were selected among 50 female participants who were studying English at an Institute in Songhor, a city in Kermanshah, Iran. After taking

Table 1: Experimental and Control Groups Descriptive Statistics on Pre-Test.

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pretestscore	control group	15	16.8667	1.92230	.49634
	experimental group	15	16.8000	1.82052	.47006

Table 2: Independent Sample T-Test for the Experimental and Control Groups for Pretest.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
pretestscore	Equal variances assumed	.212	.648	.098	28	.923	.06667	.68359	-1.33361	1.46695
	Equal variances not assumed			.098	27.918	.923	.06667	.68359	-1.33380	1.46713

Table 3: Experimental and Control Groups Descriptive Statistics on Post-Test.

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
posttestscore	no treatment	15	17.2000	3.36367	.86850
	treatment	15	20.2000	3.74547	.96708

a listening test adopted from "TOEFL Actual Tests", these thirty students, were placed in intermediate group in terms of their listening proficiency. To do so, the mean and standard deviation of the gained scores were calculated. Those participants who scored between one standard deviation below and above the mean were considered in the intermediate-level group. They ranged in age from 15 to 20 years old. The average age of the students was 17.

2.2 Procedure

First, 30 students based on their scores on Oxford Placement Test had already been determined to be at intermediate level by the Institute. A pre-test of listening comprehension from Actual test of TOFEL was administered to make sure if the participants were at intermediate level. Each session, 'Tactics for listening comprehension', was used as the coursebook. It should be mentioned that the same TOFEL test was administered as the post-test at the end of the semester for observing the treatment effect. As the next step, students were divided in two classes. Based on O'Malley and Chamots'(1990) classification, one of the groups received the treatment in the form of three main types of strategies, meta-cognitive, cognitive and social/ affective strategies. The control group did not take the treatment and the usual practice of listening was used. They practiced the typical techniques of listening comprehension such as listening to a conversation and pre-listening and post-listening activities.

To teach the strategies, the researcher used Chamot's (1989) learning strategies. The allotted time for each session in the institute was an hour and half. As such, each

session lasted for about an hour and half. In all sessions, the same procedure was followed and "Tactics for listening" was used as the coursebook. At the end of the semester, the same pre-test was administered as a post test. It also served the purpose of evaluating students' listening comprehension

3. DATA ANALYSIS

To see whether there was a significant difference in the listening comprehension of the experimental group and control group, a t-test was conducted. By comparing the means of two groups, the researcher was confident that the differences found between the groups were because of the treatment and not due to chance. As it was mentioned earlier, the data was collected from the listening test and participants responses in pre-test and post-test.

The findings of descriptive statistics (Table 1) revealed that there is no significant difference between mean scores of experimental (M=16.800) and control (M=16.866) groups in the pre-test. The estimated p-value for pretest (Sig.= .923) is more than the level of significance ($p = .05$). Therefore, there is no significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the pretest. Table 2 displays the results of the independent samples t-test for the experimental and control groups in pretest.

As it is illustrated in Table 2, the probability figure (Sig. (2-tailed)) is larger than .05 (it is .923), and as the Levene's test does not show any significant difference (it is .648 being greater than .05), we can safely assume that there is not any significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of listening comprehension proficiency level before the treatment.

Table 4: Independent Sample T-Test for the Experimental and Control Groups for Post-Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest-score	Equal variances assumed	.267	.609	-2.308	28	.029	-3.00000	1.29982	-5.66255	-.33745
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.308	27.682	.029	-3.00000	1.29982	-5.66393	-.33607

The findings of descriptive statistics (see Table 3) revealed that there is a significant difference between mean scores of experimental (M=20.20) and control (M=17.20) groups in the post-test. The estimated p-value for post-test (Sig.=.029) is less than the level of significance (p= .05). Therefore, there is a significant difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups in post-test. This shows that teaching listening strategies explicitly and the use of these strategies by students was useful. Table 4 displays the results of the independent sample t-test for the experimental and the control groups in the post test.

As shown in Table 4, since the p level is less than .05 that is $p < .05$ (Sig.2-tailed amounts to .029) it can be deduced that there is a significant difference between the two groups. Because the Levene's test is greater than .05, i.e., .609, and due to the mentioned mean difference of learners' performance as the experimental and control groups (20.20 and 17.20 respectively), it can be said that our subjects in the experimental group have had better listening comprehension compared to the control group. Therefore, we can argue for an explicit strategy teaching module in our language instruction. It could be argued that teaching these strategies contributes to learners' higher chance of dealing with communication problems. Hence the null hypothesis formulated in the study is safely rejected. Therefore, we can say that explicit teaching of listening strategies will be beneficial as far as it leads to more strategy use on the part of students. In other words, explicit teaching of listening strategies has a significant impact on Iranian female EFL learners listening comprehension.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of explicit teaching of listening strategies on the listening comprehension of Iranian female EFL learners. The findings provide a strong support for the claim that employing of explicit teaching in listening strategies does improve the participants' listening comprehension.

As Vandergrift (1997) states, application of listening strategies, helps students to “capitalize on the language

input they are receiving” (p.170) and to achieve greater success in language learning. According to Vandergrift listening strategies can be useful tools for learners since these strategies help learners face less frustrating routes to language learning success. In the same line, Pourhossein Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) state that students do not know what effective listeners do and therefore, teachers are responsible to share that knowledge with them. One of the best way to convey this knowledge is using explicit teaching. By explicit teaching of listening strategies and encouraging students to use these strategies teachers can help students to understand listening tasks and to be more successful in English learning.

The outcomes of the present study may be useful in teaching foreign languages. Since the study showed that teaching listening comprehension strategies help learners improve their listening comprehension; therefore, the EFL curriculum should incorporate some courses that pave the ground for raising EFL learners' awareness of listening strategies. Moreover, EFL textbooks designers can develop some kinds of text which develop these strategies.

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