The relationship between listening comprehension problems and strategy usage among advance EFL learners

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Abstract: The current study aimed to investigate listening comprehension problems and strategies used among Iranian advance EFL learners. Furthermore, this study tried to find the relationship between the participants’ listening problems and strategy usage. Listening problems included input, context, listener, process, affect, and task problems while the listening strategies consisted of cognitive, meta-cognitive, and socio-affective strategies. A questionnaire was administered to collect data from 60 randomly selected Iranian advance EFL learners in a private language institute in Ahvaz, Iran. The outcomes demonstrated that the learners suffered from input and affect listening comprehension problems. Meta-cognitive strategy was the chief listening strategy used by the learners. The relationship between listening problems and strategy usage among the learners was statistically significant and negative. Results suggest that it is important for second language teachers to be aware of the different listening comprehension problems so as to enable listeners to use the appropriate strategies.

Keywords: listening comprehension problems; listening strategies; cognitive strategies; meta-cognitive strategies; socio-affective strategies

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

No one can deny the importance of listening skills in foreign language learning because the key to acquire a language is to receive language input. In spite of its importance in foreign language learning, the teaching of listening comprehension has long been—somewhat neglected and poorly taught aspect of English in many EFL programs. EFL learners have serious problems in English listening comprehension due to the fact that universities pay more attention to English grammar, reading, and vocabulary. Regarding the importance of listening skills and problems learners encounter, this study tried to check listening comprehension problems and strategies used by Iranian Advanced EFL learners. After analyzing the data, it was revealed that the learners suffered from input and affect listening comprehension problems. Moreover, meta-cognitive strategy was the main listening strategy utilized by advance EFL learners.
1. Introduction

Being the two main channels of language input, reading and listening play a vital role in FL learning. The more learners read and listen, the more they are exposed to language. This exposure is what leads to language acquisition (Peterson, 2001). It is therefore safe to say that language learning is contingent on how much learners read and listen to the FL. Listening is even of more importance to language development than reading because it is the most frequently used language skill (Morley, 1999). Through listening, language learners internalize linguistic information without which they cannot produce language (Brown, 2001). Listening is also crucial to the development of other language skills, especially speaking (Rost, 2002).

More importantly, listening comprehension is regarded as an active process through which humans form meaning from passages and link the information which they listen with existing knowledge (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Namaziandost, Sabzevari, & Hashemifardnia, 2018). For EFL learners’ development in learning a FL, mastery of listening comprehension is the first step towards fully acquiring a FL (Ziafar & Namaziandost, 2019). Thus, it is necessary to discover and use suitable techniques and useful strategies for teaching listening comprehension to help learners develop it (Abedi, Keshmirshekan, & Namaziandost, 2019; Rahimi, 2012). To make listening comprehension effective, activities can be done through listening while reading, repeated listening, interactive listening and non-linguistic or semi-linguistic support (Nation & Newton, 2009).

Hasan (2000) believed that “listening comprehension delivers the right conditions for language achievement and development of other language skills” (p.138). Thus, listening is vital and necessary not only as a receptive language skill but also as a tool required for the development of spoken language ability (Namaziandost, Rahimi Esfahani, & Hashemifardnia, 2018; Yıldırım & Yıldırım, 2016).

More significantly, listening in English is an active skill requiring listeners to deal with a variety of complicated tasks, for example, discriminating between sounds and interpreting stress and intonation. Listeners utilize a variety of mental processes to give meaning to the information they listen to. These mental stages can be extensively depicted as listening comprehension strategies. As demonstrated by Altuawiresh (2016), listeners often do not use these strategies effectively and successfully and appear to be unaware of listening strategies. Chamot (2005) argued that less successful language learners do not have the knowledge needed to choose proper strategies. Alqahtani (2015) underscored the importance of these strategies by arguing that awareness is related to effective learning in all learning contexts. Vandergrift and Tafaghdotari (2010) drew the attention to the particular context of second language listening and claimed that strategies have a direct and positive impact on listening performance. Osada (2004) and Sharma (2007) further indicated that one of the distinctive features differentiating successful listeners from unsuccessful ones is their utilization of listening comprehension strategies. Both supported the opinion that analyzing the role of these strategies in second language L2 listening helps learners approach the listening task more successfully.

Despite the growing body of studies on the different aspects of L2 listening, few researches have concentrated on identifying listening problems among foreign language learners (Chen, 2013; Hamouda, 2012). Most schools, as expressed by Hamouda (2012), focus on grammar and vocabulary rather than listening. This study goes one step further by endeavoring to investigate listening problems in relation to listening strategies. Little known about the relationship between these variables among Iranian EFL students.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Listening processing

The listening process is the continuing construction of interpretation to the spoken input. Listening requires the ability to adjust the interpretation in response to new information; this ability is especially crucial in second language/foreign language (L2/FL) listening (Buck, 2001; Chen, 2013). First language listeners may process the listening input naturally without much conscious...
consideration to word-by-word input. Contrarily, most L2/FL listeners need to intentionally decode the subtle elements and construct the meaning of the listening input; comprehension usually breaks down mainly because of listeners’ constrained working memory and linguistic learning (Vandergrift, 2004). Thus, it is essential to think about the complex cognitive process in L2/FL listening instruction, and more intervention is essential in helping listeners to achieve effective comprehension. The present research takes the cognitive processing point of view as the primary theoretical reason for inspecting the L2/FL listening process.

The most widely acknowledged information processing model in the listening process is presumably drawn from Anderson’s (2000) three-phase comprehension model: perceptual processing, parsing, and utilization. This model has probably been the dominant one adopted for understanding the listening process; for instance, it has been connected to numerous explorations concentrating on the utilization of listening strategies at various stages (Bacon, 1992; Shahrokhi, Malekian, & Sayedi, 2015). Rost’s (2002) listening processing phases of decoding, comprehending, and interpreting addititionally provides a comprehensive understanding of how listeners process the numerous levels of knowledge needed to react to incoming information. This may consolidate the qualities of linear steps and parallel processing, with both bottom-up and top-down processing interacting at the same time.

Anderson and Lynch (1988) depicted bottom-up processing as “listener as tape-recorder” that includes a decoding or text-based process and top-down processing as “listener as active model builder” that includes a knowledge-based process (P. 21). However, the issue of whether there is more bottom-up or top-down processing has involved conflicting perspectives (Field, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Vogely, 1998). It is proposed that effective listening comprehension depends on the mix of and the balance between both bottom-up and top-down strategies (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005), while the nature of that balance may fluctuate based on various diverse variables (e.g., the content, assignment, speaker, listener, and input processing factors). Therefore, it is essential to test these variables to better understand the issues students may experience during input processing and assist students in finding the most ideal approaches to tackle listening challenges that impact comprehension.

2.2. Listening problems

Listening problems are defined as the internal and external characteristics that might interrupt text understanding and real-life processing problems directly related to cognitive procedures that take place at various stages of listening comprehension (Goh, 2000). As listening comprehension is an intricate ongoing process that includes the interaction of various factors, many learners find it hard to understand L2 spoken input and have little awareness of why that difficulty occurs. Flowerdew and Miller (1992) investigated English as a foreign language (EFL) learners’ problems in listening to academic lectures. The problems reported by students included the fast speed of delivery, new terminology and concepts, difficulties in concentrating, and problems related to the physical environment. Goh (2000) examined real-time listening problems of English as a second language (ESL) learners using Anderson’s (2000) three-phase model of language comprehension. They found that most problems reported by learners were associated with perceptual (low-level) processing, such as word recognition and attention failure, while relatively few problems were linked to inefficient parsing and failure in utilization (high-level processing). Goh (2000) also pointed out that less proficient listeners have more problems with low-level processing. Hasan (2000) investigated how Arabic EFL learners perceived their problems in listening. Although a range of listening problems pertinent to the factors of task, text, speaker and listener were identified, the most frequently reported problems were constrained to text factors or bottom-up processing, such as fast speech rate and new vocabulary. Moreover, Graham (2006) found that the main listening problems reported by foreign language learners were related to the speedy delivery of text leading to failure in identifying and recognizing words in a stream of input. Thus, the studies suggest that, while the research identified a range of listening problems related to factors of text, task, speaker and listener, the most commonly identified problems are fast speech rate and unfamiliar words perceived by learners. Generalizing from the consequences of these studies, there appears to be a tendency for most learners to falsely assume or blame their listening difficulties on external...
factors of text or task, rather than internal factors such as learners’ anxiety, background knowledge, language proficiency or their ways of processing listening.

Even though the reported problems were related to listener factors or process factors, they were mostly confined to the lower level processing problems such as difficulties in identifying words they know and chunking streams of speech and concentration. This may suggest that most students have constrained knowledge of their ways of dealing with listening input and little awareness of the actual problems occurring during processing. As a result, comprehension usually breaks down at the low-level of processing, which inhibits listeners from arriving at successful comprehension. These listening problems have long been ignored and remained unresolved in the conventional teaching of listening, which simply involves practicing answering the listening test questions and explaining meaning (Field, 1998; Karami & Bagheri, 2014; Shakibaie, Shahamat, & Namaziandost, 2019). It is imperative to guide and assist learners to process listening tasks more efficiently and effectively in order to overcome obstacles that occur during the listening process. One of the most important ways to help learners achieve successful listening is to guide them to raise their awareness of their listening problems and use effective listening strategies.

2.3. Strategies for listening comprehension

In the process of learning EFL, listening is considered one of the hardest language skills to be developed, because when students have to listen, they have to face many difficulties to understand the message completely. Rahimrad and Zare-ee (2015) noted numerous difficulties that can be confronted in listening tasks such as unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, fast speech rate, and unfamiliar or different accents. These are tasks students have to face every day in the classroom. Students listen, but they may not understand the different pronunciations or accents from the speakers. For example, many people who come from different countries speak English as their second language, but they have a particular English accent influenced by their mother tongue, which is hard for people to imitate or to understand (de Palo et al., 2012; Zohrabi & Shokrzadeh, 2017). Also, when students are involved in a listening activity and they cannot understand the meaning of some words, they may lose concentration and stop the activity. Consequently, learners cannot complete the listening task on time.

Additionally, it is more difficult to complete the listening activity when students do not have prior knowledge about the topic, because the information is unknown to them. Students lose time trying to complete the task. But among all the difficulties that have been mentioned before, the one that causes the most impact on EFL learners is fast rate of speech (Bidabadi & Yamat, 2011; Nasri, Namaziandost, & Akbari, 2019; Pourhosein & Ahmadi, 2011; Zohrabi & Shokrzadeh, 2017). When students are involved in a listening task, in the majority of the cases they need the speaker to speak slowly, and the teacher then plays the audio material more than once. It is necessary and crucial that students learn how to achieve the development of the listening comprehension skill to acquire the new language and to understand the message completely. One way to ease the difficulties learners experience while listening in a second language is to help them develop listening strategies. Although listening carries the heaviest burden of oral communication, studying listening comprehension strategies alone did not attract the attention of researchers until the past few decades, mainly because listening was considered to be a passive skill (Vandergrift, 2004). Therefore, the use of listening strategies is helpful to develop the listening comprehension skill required to learn and retain information.

2.4. Experimental backgrounds

In the eyes of many researchers and learners of English, listening is a complex and active mental process that involves perception, attention, cognition, and memory. During the process of listening comprehension, various factors may affect learner listening ability. Lists of general factors have been identified (Hayati, 2010) while the role of specific factors has also been examined. A portion of the current research is related to factors and difficulties listeners experience while learning their L2s.

Goh (2000) examined the listening comprehension difficulties of the English as a Second Language (ESL) learners using Anderson’s (2000) three-phase model of listening comprehension. Data were
gathered from the learners’ self-reports in their diaries. Although both higher and lower ability level listeners showed similar difficulties in listening comprehension in all three phases (perceptual, parsing, and utilization), lower ability level students had more problems even with lower level processing.

Moreover, Graham (2006) investigated a group of English students’ perceptions toward listening comprehension in French and found that listening comprehension was the skill with which they felt they were the least successful. Their main problems included failure in coping with the rate of delivery of speech, low level of perceived listening skill, and being unaware of the role of listening skills and strategies. Graham suggested that getting the learners to have more listening practice would only further add to their sense of failure. Instead, she suggested that teachers be aware of the learners’ difficulties in listening comprehension and help them develop more appropriate listening strategies by practicing more bottom-up as well as top-down processing.

Mahmoud Ghoneim (2013) emphasized the problems students face when listening to the English language, the mental processes they actuate in listening comprehension, and the strategies they utilize in various stages of comprehension. Moreover, the researcher tried to reveal whether there were any discrepancies among advanced and intermediate learners in their utilization of the listening strategies. Data were gathered applying the think aloud technique in which learners were asked to state any issue they encountered within a listening comprehension activity and show what they were thinking to resolve the problem. The results showed that advanced and intermediate participants encountered the same problems with various percentages, and activated three linguistic, connecting, and comprehension-gathering processes. The advanced students, more than the intermediate students, utilized top-down strategies.

In the context of EFL learning, Noroozi, Sim, Nimechisalem, and Zareian (2014) investigated the Iranian tertiary level EFL learners’ listening strategy. They used the Listening Strategy Use Questionnaire (LSUQ), which categorizes listening strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective categories. Based on the results, on average the respondents reported low levels of self-perceived use of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies. The results indicated a serious need to focus more on the students’ listening comprehension skills in general and their listening strategies in particular.

Juan and Abidin (2013) conducted research with Chinese international students in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) on their English listening comprehension problems. The shortage of background knowledge of English vocabulary was the major trouble that Chinese students faced, resulting in lower comprehension in listening process. Another problem the students encountered was native speaker’s accent, which interfered with listening adequately to the content.

Similarly, Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian, and Nimechisalem (2015) aimed to explore the listening comprehension problems of a group of EFL learners. Survey method was followed to collect data from a group of Iranian tertiary level EFL learners (n = 100) using the Listening Comprehension Processing Problems Questionnaire. The results indicated that the learners experienced moderate to high levels of difficulty in all three categories of listening comprehension problems, namely perception, parsing, and utilization.

Yaseen and Nimechisalem (2016) investigated listening comprehension problems and strategies usage among Kurdish EFL undergraduates. Additionally, it tested the relationship between the learners’ listening problems and strategy usage. More specifically, the listening problems included input, context, process, affect and task problems while the listening strategies consisted of cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies. Through a survey, a questionnaire was used to elicit data from 165 randomly selected undergraduates in Iraqi-Kurdistan universities. The findings showed that the learners suffered from input and context listening comprehension problems. Meta-cognitive strategy was the major listening strategy used. The relationship between listening problems and strategy usage among the learners was significantly negative and
negligible, \( r = -0.186, p < .05 \). The findings generally imply that it is important for instructors of a second language to take note of the different listening problems that exist among listeners so as to enable them to apply the appropriate strategies.

2.5. Statement of the problem and study purpose

Listening comprehension is problematic for most foreign language learners. Researchers attribute this to factors involving characteristics of the listener, text, task, and process (Rubin, 1994). Goh (2000) empirically recognized several impediments that hamper EFL listening comprehension. These are affective barriers, habitudinal barriers, information processing barriers (e.g., processing speed, input retention, interpretation), English proficiency, strategic barriers (e.g., having problems conducting the proper strategies), belief barriers (e.g., attending to every word or demanding full comprehension of text), and material barriers (e.g., difficulty level of materials, text genre, topics).

To overcome these sources of difficulty, foreign language learners are required to be strategic listeners. The area of strategic listening has not so far received the due attention in the Iranian context. Likewise, the current study aimed to explore the listening comprehension strategies that Iranian EFL students utilize more frequently when they listen to English material. Moreover, the study explored the relationship between EFL students' listening strategy usage and listening comprehension.

There are two purposes of the present study. The first was to check listening comprehension problems and strategies used among Iranian advance EFL learners. The second was to examine the relationship between listening problems and strategy usage among Iranian advance EFL learners. Thus, the specific research questions guiding the study are: (a) What are the listening problems of Iranian advance EFL learners? and (b) Is there a significant relationship between the listening problems and strategy usage among Iranian advance EFL learners?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

With regard to the subjects, first sampling procedure is discussed. The purposive, convenient sampling was used in this study; purposive in the sense that only advance EFL learners were recruited, and convenient in the sense that the participants were easily accessible ones who were intended to be representative of the whole population as diverse as possible selected from among those who attended English courses at a private Language Institute in Iran. The participants were made to assure that their personal information would be kept confidential. They were informed of the fact that they are selected to take part in this research, and the obtained data would be used merely for the sake of research. Also, it should be mentioned that other ethical issues such as originality of research and morality were observed as much as possible. A cross-sectional survey design was utilized to gather information regarding listening strategies. The study was performed in a private language institute in Iran. The researcher selected 60 Iranian advance EFL learners out of 80 from a private language institute in Iran for the target participants of the study. All were native speakers of Persian who were learning English as a foreign language. They were mostly male students because only male participants were available to the researchers. Respondents were age 15–17 years old. Level of English language proficiency was determined on the basis of their scores on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). The following table (Table 1) shows the participants’ general descriptive information of the sample:

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Oxford quick placement test (OQPT)

The researchers employed the Oxford Quick Placement Test as the first instrument of the study to homogenize the learners in the advance level. The test included 60 items in a multiple-choice format which was used to assess the participants’ degree of homogeneity prior to the study. OQPT could aid the researcher to have a greater understanding of what level (i.e., elementary, pre-
intermediate, intermediate, advance) the participants were at. According to this test, the learners whose scores were between 49 and 60 (out of 60) were considered as the advance learners.

3.2.1.1. Questionnaire of beliefs on English language listening comprehension problems (Q-BELLP) (Lotfi, 2012). The Q-BELLP was developed to distinguish listening comprehension problems among Iranian EFL learners. There are forty-items in the questionnaire with six distinct factors: process, input, listener, task, affect and context. The first factor, labeled process, consists of 12 items and reflects learners’ beliefs about listening problems associated with different aspects of listening comprehension process. Process here refers to “the way in which learners use different kinds of signals to interpret what they hear” (Rubin, 1994, p. 210). In fact, items loading on this factor describe learners’ beliefs about problems related to two types of processing identified by Rubin (1994), that is, using cognitive and metacognitive strategies while listening. The second factor, labeled input, consists of nine items and represents learners’ beliefs about problems related to different aspects of aural input. Input here is defined as the target language discourse that reaches the learners’ auditory system (Field, 2008) in unidirectional listening. This factor contains learners’ beliefs about problems related to such input characteristics as vocabulary, speech clarity, grammatical structure of the text, speech rate, prosodic features, accent, pause and text length (Lotfi, 2012). The third factor, labeled listener, comprises 10 items and reflects learners’ beliefs about listeners’ characteristics identified in the literature as having considerable impact on L2 learners’ listening comprehension (Hasan, 2000). The factor hence contains learners’ beliefs about problems associated with characteristics, such as attention, attitude, and memory. The fourth factor, labeled task, includes three items and reflects learners’ beliefs about problems associated with characteristics of listening tasks. Task characteristics refer to “variation in the purpose for listening and associated responses” (Rubin, 1994, p. 199). Items loading on this factor represent learners’ beliefs about listening problems associated with task type and type of responses demanded when answering global and local questions. The fifth factor, labeled affect, consists of four items and reflects learners’ beliefs about problems related to affective dimension of listening. Learners’ beliefs about their affective responses to instances of comprehension failure are reflected in the first two items of this factor. The other two items of this factor reflect learners’ beliefs regarding the level of anxiety they experience in L2 listening. The sixth factor, labeled context, reflects learners’ beliefs about unfavorable characteristics of the learning context affecting listening comprehension. The factor contains two items reflecting learners’ beliefs about the adverse effect of distracters available in the learning context on their listening comprehension. The items under this factor specifically reflect learners’ belief about the listening difficulties caused by such contextual features as inferior machine to play recordings and acoustically unsuitable rooms for the use of recorded materials.

It must be mentioned that the respondents’ levels for all these subscales were studied in terms of 5 Likert scales ranging from never to always. Since each choice in this Likert-scale questionnaire had been assigned a value (Always = 5, Usually = 4, Sometimes = 3, Seldom = 2, and Never = 1), the mean score of each questionnaire item was compared with the average score of the choices (i.e. 3.00). Hence, if the mean score of a questionnaire subscale was less than 3.00, the respondents tended to disagree with that statement. On the contrary, a mean score above 3.00 indicated the respondents’ inclination to concur or agree with that subscale.

| Number | Age | Percentage |
|--------|-----|------------|
| 17     | 15  | 29         |
| 24     | 16  | 40         |
| 19     | 17  | 31         |
| Total  |     | 100        |

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants
The Cronbach’s alpha values of six factors are as follows: Process (.90), input (.86), listener (.87), task (.84), affect (.72) and context (.66) (Lotfi, 2012). Moreover, the reliability of the item survey was assessed by Yaseen and Nimchisalem (2016) using the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient and it was .82, which shows an acceptable internal consistency. Regarding validity, the expert judges were four university instructors who had 5 years of experience in teaching listening courses at university level and developing questionnaires (Lotfi, 2012). According to Lotfi (2012), experts are by definition “people who know a lot about whatever area of psychology, education, linguistics, or language teaching [our] construct belongs to” (p. 510). The judges provided formal expert review to explore the content validity of the questionnaire items.

In the current study, to ensure, the researchers applied Cronbach’s alpha and the reliability calculated was 0.895, which demonstrates a satisfactory internal consistency. Moreover, the validity of the questionnaire in this study was confirmed by five English experts who were taught English for more than 15 years and they were familiar with language skill especially listening comprehension problems.

3.2.1.2. Listening strategies use questionnaire (LSUQ). To elicit strategies (cognitive, metacognitive or socio-affective) that participants used, Listening Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire by Chen (2010) was administered. The questionnaire adapted from Vandergrift (1997) and Goh (2000), contains 32 questions in separated parts. In LSUQ, the participants were requested to answer on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = “strongly agree” to 5 = “strongly disagree”). The questionnaire was translated into Persian by researchers and the Persian version of it was distributed among participants. The LSUQ was created to distinguish listening comprehension strategies among Iranian EFL learners. The reliability of the LSUQ was checked by Shahrokhi et al. (2015) via Cronbach’s alpha coefficient and it was (r = .897). In this study, the Cronbach’s alpha value of internal reliability of the instrument was 0.864 which is acceptable. The validity of LSUQ was confirmed by those who validated Q-BELLP.

3.3. Procedures
In order to elicit relevant data from the respondents, the researchers administered the Oxford Placement Test to realize the participants’ homogeneity level. Then, 60 learners out of 80 were randomly selected as the target participants. The researchers indeed administrated the OQPT to students to determine their level of English proficiency. As one of the researchers was taught in the institute, the students were available to him. It should be mentioned that ethics board approval was not necessary since the researcher was one of the members of the institute. Then, students completed the ethical clearance procedure which included requesting permission from the students’ institution and the students’ written consent. It means that all selected participants filled out a consent letter that showed they voluntarily and satisfactorily participated in this study. Afterwards, the Q-BELLP was administered to distinguish listening comprehension problems among the participants. After that, LSUQ was administered to elicit what strategies (cognitive, metacognitive or socio-affective) participants used. The participants answered Q-BELLP and LSUQ in 30 and 35 min, respectively.

3.4. Statistical analysis
All data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 25). To address the first research question, descriptive statistical methods including mean, frequency and percentage were used to investigate the problems that Iranian advance EFL learners have in listening comprehension. Moreover, Pearson correlation coefficient test was run to check the relationship between listening problems and listening strategy use scores.

4. Results
To answer the question regarding listening comprehension problems, the mean for all items and also for the entire subscales were computed. This scale includes six sub-categories named process, input, listener, task, affect and context problems. Table 2 reveals that the total means related to Input (M = 3.035) and Affect subscales (M = 3.006) were higher than the means of others.
4.1. Process subscale
The highest mean was for the item, “I find it challenging to focus on the text when I have trouble understanding.” (M = 3.056), followed by the item, “While listening, I have difficulty to check my understanding of the text based on what I already know about the topic” (M = 3.009). The lowest mean scores were, “I find it difficult to make a mental summary of information gained through listening” (M = 2.714). So, from this, it can be said that the main challenge encountered when learning a new language is focusing on a text when there is trouble in understanding the given text.

4.2. Listener subscale
The greatest mean belongs to “I find it difficult to remember the meaning of a long listening text” (M = 3.013) followed by “During listening, although some words sound familiar, it is difficult for me to recall their meaning immediately.” (M = 2.988). The result showed that learners find it difficult remembering the meaning of a long listening text.

4.3. Task subscale
In the Task problem sub-dimension, highest (M = 2.997) and lowest (M = 2.891) mean belongs to “I find it difficult to do listening tasks, such as filling a grid, for which I need to draw on specific information from the text.” and “I find it difficult to answer Wh-questions in a listening task”, respectively.

4.4. Input subscale
For input sub-scale, it can be seen that students considered most of the items problematic; however, the item “I find it difficult to understand listening texts in which there are too many unfamiliar words” received the highest mean (M = 3.081). The lowest mean of this sub-category was related to the item “Unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns of English interfere with my listening comprehension” (M = 2.969).

4.5. Affect subscale
All three items of Affect sub-dimension were problematic for the participants. However, if one looks at Table 2, it can be easily observed that the highest mean (M = 3.061) belongs to “If I do not arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed”. Moreover, the item “I find it difficult to reduce my anxiety before doing the listening task” received the lowest mean (M = 2.976).

4.6. Context subscale
The last subcategory of listening comprehension problems investigated in this study is context problem which consisted of two items, and both items had a mean of nearly 2.85 which shows that the level of this subscale among the learners is not salient. The highest envisaged context problem as observed in Table 2 is “unclear sounds which interfere with listening comprehension” (M = 2.899). Figure 1 clearly indicates the mean of participants in all of Listening Problem Categories.

4.7. Listening strategies usage questionnaire
The means for each LSUQ are provided in Table 3. The greatest total mean is related to meta-cognitive strategies (M = 3.37), followed by socio-affective strategies (M = 3.28), and the last and total mean belongs to cognitive strategies (M = 3.17).

Figure 2, illustrates the mean of participants’ listening strategy use. As it can be easily observed, the highest mean belongs to meta-cognitive Strategies followed by socio-affective Strategies.

4.8. Relationship between listening strategies and listening problems
Table 4 shows the correlation coefficients for the relationships between the EFL learners’ listening problems and the different types of listening strategies. A value of exactly 1.0 means there is a perfect positive relationship between the two variables. For a positive increase in one variable, there is also a positive increase in the second variable. A value of −1.0 means there is a perfect negative relationship between the two variables. This shows that the variables move in opposite directions—for a positive increase in one variable, there is a decrease in the second variable. If the correlation is 0, there is no
| Subscales | Items                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Mean  |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Process   | 1. Before listening, it is difficult for me to predict from the visuals what I will hear.                                                                                                                  | 2.718 |
|           | 2. It is difficult for me to relate what I hear with something from an earlier part of the listening text.                                                                                                  | 2.899 |
|           | 3. While listening, I have problems making meaningful personal associations with the new information.                                                                                                       | 2.899 |
|           | 4. During listening, I have difficulty checking whether I correctly understand the meaning of the whole chunks of the listening text.                                                                     | 2.801 |
|           | 5. I have difficulty with finding out what the main purpose of the listening task I am going to do is.                                                                                                      | 2.718 |
|           | 6. When I listen to texts in English, I experience difficulty with listening to the main idea of the text.                                                                                                   | 2.812 |
|           | 7. I find it challenging to focus on the text when I have trouble understanding.                                                                                                                                 | 3.056 |
|           | 8. While listening, I find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words.                                                                                               | 2.998 |
|           | 9. I find it difficult to make a mental summary of information gained through listening.                                                                                                                    | 3.001 |
|           | 10. While listening, I have difficulty to check my understanding of the text based on what I already know about the topic.                                                                                 | 2.714 |
|           | 11. I find it difficult to use the context to guess those parts of a listening text that I cannot hear clearly.                                                                                               | 3.053 |
|           | 12. After listening, I find it difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my comprehension.                                                                                                              | 2.926 |
| Total     |                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 2.881 |
| Subscales | Items                                                                 | Mean  |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Listener  | 13. When thinking about meaning of unfamiliar words, I neglect the next part of the listening text. | 2.806 |
|           | 14. I am slow to recall the meaning of words that sound familiar.      | 2.898 |
|           | 15. I find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases I have just heard. | 2.814 |
|           | 16. During listening, although some words sound familiar, it is difficult for me to recall their meaning immediately. | 2.988 |
|           | 17. When I hear the new words, I forget the content which was mentioned before. | 2.802 |
|           | 18. I lose the flow of speech because I concentrate very hard on understanding every word or phrase I hear. | 2.872 |
|           | 19. I find it difficult to remember the meaning of a long listening text. | 3.013 |
|           | 20. I find it difficult to really concentrate on listening.             | 2.856 |
|           | 21. I have difficulty comprehending the listening text because I do not know which strategy to use while listening. | 2.798 |
|           | 22. I have difficulty understanding a listening text because I cannot understand every single word I hear. | 2.811 |
| Total     |                                                                       | 2.865 |
| Task      | 23. I find it difficult to do listening tasks, such as filling a grid, for which I need to draw on specific information from the text. | 2.997 |
|           | 24. I find it difficult to do listening tasks for which I need to combine information to make generalization while listening to the text. | 2.891 |
|           | 25. I find it difficult to answer Wh-questions in a listening task.     | 2.711 |
| Total     |                                                                       | 2.866 |

(Continued)
| Subscales | Items                                                                 | Mean  |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| **Input** | 26. I find it difficult to understand listening texts in which there are too many unfamiliar words. | 3.081 |
|           | 27. I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words that are not pronounced clearly. | 3.018 |
|           | 28. I find it difficult to understand listening texts which have difficult grammatical structures. | 2.991 |
|           | 29. I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak too fast. | 3.011 |
|           | 30. Unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns of English interfere with my listening comprehension. | 2.969 |
|           | 31. I find it difficult to understand the listening text when speakers speak with varied accents. | 2.998 |
|           | 32. I find it difficult to understand the listening text when the speaker does not pause long enough. | 3.008 |
|           | 33. I find it difficult to interpret the meaning of a long listening text. | 2.996 |
|           | 34. I have difficulty understanding speakers with unfamiliar accents. | 3.011 |
|           | **Total**                                                             | 3.009 |
| **Affect**| 35. I stop listening when I have problems in understanding a listening text. | 3.007 |
|           | 36. If I do not arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed. | 3.061 |
|           | 37. I find it difficult to reduce my anxiety before doing the listening task. | 2.976 |
|           | 38. Before doing listening comprehension tasks, I fear that I cannot understand what I will hear. | 3.013 |
|           | **Total**                                                             | 3.014 |
| **Context**| 39. Unclear sounds resulting from a poor-quality CD-player interfere with my listening comprehension. | 2.899 |
|           | 40. Unclear sounds resulting from poor acoustic conditions of the classroom interfere with my listening comprehension. | 2.858 |
|           | **Total**                                                             | 2.878 |

*Mean values 1–2.4 (low), 2.5–2.8 (moderate); and 2.9–3.1 (high) level*
relationship between the two variables. The strength of the relationship varies in degree based on the value of the correlation coefficient. For example, a value of 0.2 shows there is a positive relationship between the two variables, but it is weak and likely insignificant. Experts do not consider correlations significant until the value surpasses at least 0.8. However, a correlation coefficient with an absolute value of 0.9 or greater would represent a very strong relationship.
The relationship between listening problems (i.e., process and affect problems) and Cognitive strategies was a perfect uphill (positive) linear relationship ($r = .920$ and .984), and this relationship was of statistical significance. Moreover, process and affect problems appears to have a strong uphill (positive) linear relationship with Socio-affective Strategies ($r = .840$). Likewise, other listening problems were found to have a moderate (positive) linear relationship with Cognitive, Metacognitive, and Socio-affective strategies. Therefore, these results indicated that by increasing the cognitive strategies, process and affect problems would be decreased. To find out whether variance in listening strategies could account for variance in listening problems, one needs to examine the multiple regression analysis (Table 5).

In Table 5, the value given under the R Square column shows how much of the variance in listening problems is explained by listening strategies. The value here is .921, which means that listening strategies accounted for 92% of the variance in listening problems scores. To examine the statistical significance of this result, Table 6 should be consulted.

To compare the predictive powers of Cognitive, cognitive, Meta-Cognitive, and Socio-affective strategies, the values under Beta in the column labeled standardized coefficients should be checked. Looking down this column, one could notice that the largest value was the one for Cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies thus made the strongest unique contribution to explaining listening problems. The relevant Beta value for Socio-affective strategies was the second highest value out there, indicating that it made less of a contribution. The other value was $-0.001$ for Meta-Cognitive; this listening strategy's contributions to the prediction of listening problems was very small.

For each of these variables, the value under the column marked Sig. must be checked. This shows whether this variable was making a statistically significant unique contribution to the equation or not. Cognitive strategies and Socio-affective strategies had a Sig. value less than the significance level (.05); it could thus be concluded that among the three different types of language learning strategies, Cognitive strategies and Socio-affective strategies could significantly predict the listening problems of the EFL learners.

### Table 5. Model summary for multiple regression

| $R$ | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | Std. error of the estimate |
|-----|-------|----------------|---------------------------|
| .958$^a$ | .921 | .928 | 1.68448 |

### Table 6. Statistical significance of the multiple regression results

| Unstandardized coefficients | Standardized coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---|------|
| B                           | Std. error                | Beta |     |
| (Constant)                  | 6.907                     | 2.389 | 2.891 | .005 |
| Cognitive Strategies        | .716                      | .095 | .720 | 7.550 | .000 |
| Meta-Cognitive Strategies   | .000                      | .046 | -.001 | -.009 | .993 |
| Socio-affective Strategies  | .276                      | .123 | .236 | 2.245 | .029 |

The relationship between listening problems (i.e., process and affect problems) and Cognitive strategies was a perfect uphill (positive) linear relationship ($r = .920$ and .984), and this relationship was of statistical significance. Moreover, process and affect problems appears to have a strong uphill (positive) linear relationship with Socio-affective Strategies ($r = .840$). Likewise, other listening problems were found to have a moderate (positive) linear relationship with Cognitive, Metacognitive, and Socio-affective strategies. Therefore, these results indicated that by increasing the cognitive strategies, process and affect problems would be decreased. To find out whether variance in listening strategies could account for variance in listening problems, one needs to examine the multiple regression analysis (Table 5).

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For each of these variables, the value under the column marked Sig. must be checked. This shows whether this variable was making a statistically significant unique contribution to the equation or not. Cognitive strategies and Socio-affective strategies had a Sig. value less than the significance level (.05); it could thus be concluded that among the three different types of language learning strategies, Cognitive strategies and Socio-affective strategies could significantly predict the listening problems of the EFL learners.

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

Listening is vital to educational and academic development for students at any level of education (Wolvin & Coakley, 1991). It has been expressed by researchers that among the four language skills, listening is the most regularly used language ability in the classroom (Vogely, 1998). Both teachers
(Ferris & Tagg, 1996) and students (Ferris, 1998) recognized the significance of listening comprehension for academic success in educational settings. Even though scholars (Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Rost, 1994; Vogely, 1998; Wolvin & Coakley, 1991) posit that listening plays a central role in communication as well as in learning and comprehension, it is important to understand the problems learners of a new language encounter while listening. It is based on this need that this research was conducted. It investigated the listening problems encountered by Iranian advance EFL learners.

Findings of the study support the results of Juan and Abidin (2013) who investigated the English listening comprehension problems of international university learners from China in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) who found that the accent of native speakers prohibited the proper understanding of the listening content by the learners.

Secondly, the manner in which words are pronounced is also one of the problems which learners of a foreign language encounter. The result of this research revealed that learners of a foreign language often find it difficult to understand the meaning of vocabularies which are not correctly pronounced. The respondents of this study agreed that this is one of the major problems they face while learning a foreign language. This finding concurred with the findings of a study which was conducted by Hassan (2000) in an EFL context through a questionnaire to determine students’ self-perceived listening problems. One of the problems identified by Hassan (2000) was problems resulting from the unclear pronunciation of words.

Another major listening problem of learners of a foreign language is speech rate. This was revealed by the results of research as the respondents of this study agreed that they find it difficult to understand a listening text when the speaker speaks fast without pausing long enough to allow them digest and comprehend what they have listened to; the respondents said that this problem alongside very long text amounts to inability to comprehend the text. The findings of this research confirm those of Goh (1999) as well as Flowerdew and Miller (1992) which also illustrated that speech rate is also considered a major problem for L2 learners. Almost all of Flowerdew and Miller (1992) and Goh’s (1999) study, 78% of the participants and participants in both diaries and interviews reported that their essential problem was the fast English speech rate.

The last input problem recognized in this research is the problem of text length. The participants of this study concurred that they find it difficult to understand long texts when learning a new language especially when the long text contains a lot of unfamiliar words. In general, it tends to be said that the fundamental input problems experienced by students are speech rate, text length, unfamiliar accent and inappropriate pronunciation of words (Namaziandost, Hashemifardnia, & Shafiee, 2019).

Problems related to affect and task were also identified in this study as some of the listening problems encountered by learners of a new language. Though these problems had the lowest mean scores, they could not be overlooked as the respondents of this study revealed that they found it difficult to do listening tasks, such as filling a grid, for which they needed to draw on specific information from the text. The respondents of the present study agreed that such a task gives them anxiety and this anxiety they cannot reduce before engaging in the task. The implication of this is that the students can hardly comprehend because they are in an unstable state of mind which will not permit comprehension of the listening text, so it can be said the state of mind of the learner plays a role in the comprehension of a listening text.

It can be noted from the result of this study that all the problems discussed above affect the processing of a foreign language by learners as the respondents of this study agreed that they find it challenging to focus on the text when they have trouble understanding the text. In addition, it can be concluded from the result of this study that while listening, learners of a foreign language find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words, this also
leads the learners to neglect the next part of the listening text because they are often occupied with thinking about the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Regarding the listening problems experienced by students of a foreign language, it can be seen that these learners opt for strategies which they believe can enhance a better comprehension of the listening text; these strategies include cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies. In this study, findings showed that the most frequently used strategy among the respondents of the study which were Iranian English language students is the metacognitive techniques which had the highest mean score among the three strategies measured. These learners state that while learning a new language they listen to keywords and use their experience and previous knowledge to understand the listening text.

It can be deduced from this finding on the utilization of learning strategies that the use of learning strategies by students in this research is commendable as the level of usage for each of the strategies is moderate. This additionally implies that there is still room for improvement on the utilization of these strategies to enhance better comprehension of another language as researchers in this field (Karami & Bagheri, 2014; Rahimirad & Zare-ee, 2015; Vandergrift, 2003) have uncovered that these learning techniques have a vital positive outcome on the learning of a new language.

Conclusively, for a language to be learnt, listening skills are required in view of the fact that listening is a fundamental language skill, and as such all efforts must be intensified towards developing the important listening skills in students of a second language. These listening skills ought to be acquired by students since listening is critical and basic, not only as a receptive language skill but also as a tool needed for the advancement of spoken language ability.

The knowledge obtained from this study has implications for language teachers, materials developers, and other experts in the area of language learning and assessment. Having a full understanding of the difficulties learners encounter during the three phrases of comprehension (Anderson, 2000) and the ways in which they transcend them can help instructors tailor their instruction to the particular needs of their learners or adapt materials in ways that facilitate input processing in order to enhance comprehension. Moreover, the study is vital as it might assist students, as strategic knowledge is part of what must be learned in order to solve problems in listening. If students learn the strategies by themselves through discovery methods, they will acquire a more active approach to problem-solving that may be generalized to other sorts of listening tasks.

Moreover, according to Zohrabi and Shokrzadeh (2017), to improve the current situation of teaching listening, teachers should be informed of their pedagogical perceptions and practices. The role of teacher educators is significant in this regard. Teacher educators can plan training sessions to equip teachers with techniques and resources in teaching listening with a strategy-based and metacognitive focus. They can evaluate student teachers’ practicum performance and highlight differences between the kinds of instructional decisions that student teachers make while teaching listening. Furthermore, material developers can create age-specific activities that activate learners’ strategy use and provide metacognitive learning opportunities both within and beyond classroom context.

Teachers, as adding knowledge to the processes leading to listening comprehension in the foreign language could help teachers to examine what listening entails. After the exploration of the process, teachers can guide learners in the use of alternative strategies for listening. As a result, these processes and strategies may provide insights for teachers to employ in designing the listening components of their programs. On the other hand, developing taxonomy of the strategies used by proficient listeners could help the teachers use these strategies to improve the listening habits of poor listeners.
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