

***IN THE NAME OF  
GOD***



**SHEIKHBAHAE UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**EFFECT OF LISTENING STRATEGY TRAINING  
ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' LISTENING  
COMPREHENSION AND USE OF STRATEGIES**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE**

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE CONTENT, FORMAT AND QUALITY OF  
PRESENTATION OF THE THESIS SUBMITTED BY

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ENTITLED:

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OF M.A. IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IS ACCEPTED AND  
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## ***Abstract***

This study aimed to investigate the effects of listening strategy training on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension and use of such strategies. This work, employing an experimental methodology, was conducted among 60 adult EFL learners from a language institute in Isfahan, Iran, as participants. The participants, who were selected based on the results of a placement test, were assigned to an experimental and a control group; each group consisted of 30 students with the same level of language proficiency. While the control group received no special treatment, students in the experimental group took part in a listening strategy training program for eight weeks, with two ninety-minute sessions each week. A listening comprehension test and a listening strategy use questionnaire used as both pre- and post-tests examined the students' progress. The results revealed that the program had a positive effect on the experimental students' listening comprehension and listening strategy use. In contrast, no considerable change was observed for the students in the control group. Also, the strategies most accountable for the improvement of the students' listening comprehension were identified and ranked based on their effectiveness. Therefore based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that listening strategy training is much influential in promoting the students' listening comprehension and developing the students' communicative skills in real contexts of language use.

**Key words:** Strategies, listening strategies, strategy training, listening comprehension ability

# **Chapter One**

## **Purpose**

### *Overview*

This chapter is concerned with introducing the whole study with an emphasis on the statement of the problem which is of main concern in this work. The importance of listening as one of the four skills of language and at the same time one of the most challenging components in language learning is emphasized. Strategies and strategy training, which are the concepts at the focus of this research, are also described at the very beginning.

# **1. Purpose**

## **1.1. Background**

Listening, mostly overlooked and regarded as a secondary skill, is a means for other skills rather than an end in itself. Until quite recently, listening comprehension was neglected in regard to its place in second or foreign language teaching methodology and development of techniques and materials for employing in classroom. But listening comprehension is now regarded as a prerequisite for oral proficiency and a significant skill in itself. Throughout 1990s, attention to listening in language instruction significantly increased and listening comprehension in second or foreign language instruction became an important field of study. As Celce-Murcia (2001) observes, "Although aural comprehension is now well recognized as an important facet of language learning, much work remains to be done in both theory and practice. Unfortunately, as Brown (1988) observed, a significant number of published courses on listening comprehension and classroom practices in many countries continues to demonstrate that listening is still regarded as the least important skill" (69).

Today the importance and centrality of listening in language learning is well-established. An appropriate listening comprehension program which addresses learners in all levels of instruction is a necessity for second language competence, since aural comprehension is a basis for oral language development (Denes & Pinson, 1963, p. 1). It is important to note that learners can gain so much benefit by improving their listening skill. In particular, listening comprehension lessons are vehicles for teaching elements of grammatical structures and can be used for contextualizing new vocabulary items.

As Mendelsohn (2006) observes, most of what was traditionally miscalled listening instruction should in fact be called listening testing. For him, the distinction between listening instruction and listening testing is that when you instruct, you teach learners how to do something. On the other hand, when you test learners, you do not show them how to do something, but rather you simply have them do it and you evaluate how well they do it. He also argues that most of traditional listening classrooms have the latter form that have the learners listen and ask them some questions without teaching them how to do it (listen), that is they test their listening rather than teaching

them to listen. But here in this study, listening strategies are taught to learners, i.e. how to listen to get the meaning; so this study is a kind of listening instruction, and then the effects of this instruction are investigated by testing.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Listening, which was traditionally regarded as a passive skill with no place in L2 teaching, now is considered an important skill in its own right. It is one of the most widely used skills in daily life which plays a key role in developing L2 communicative ability. Considered the most difficult skill to learn out of the four skills, listening involves a complex process that allows us to understand and interpret spoken messages in real time by making use of a variety of sources such as phonetics, phonological, prosodic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (Lynch, 1998).

As Rost (1994) points out, listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, learning may not begin. He provides three important reasons for emphasizing the importance of listening. 1) spoken language provides a means of interaction for the learner, 2) authentic spoken language presents a challenge for the learners to attempt to understand language as native speakers actually use it, 3) listening exercises provide teachers with the means for drawing learners' attention to new forms (vocabulary, grammar, new interaction patterns) in the language (141-142).

In spite of the fact that listening is highly significant in L2 learning, most learners consider it overly difficult and are unable to make an appropriate use of this important source of input. Some researchers such as Willing argue that this problem may stem in students' lack of knowledge of listening strategies and their use. Since 1970s, researchers have addressed the need for strategy training in response to the students' lack of knowledge of the cognitive tools and strategies available to them. For instance, Willing (1987) attributes students' learning problems particularly to the use of inadequate and inappropriate learning strategies, in addition to other learning factors. Assessing the needs for strategy training, Cohen (1998) notes that 'the ultimate goal of strategy training is to empower students by allowing them to take control of the

language learning process' (70). He thus outlines three major objectives of strategy training: to develop the learners' individualized strategy systems, to promote learner autonomy, and to encourage learners to take more responsibility for their own learning. This study thus evaluated the effects of strategy training on EFL learners' listening comprehension and their use of strategies in real contexts.

### **1.3. Significance of the study**

This study which evaluated the effects of a listening comprehension strategy training program on the students' observable behavioral changes (changes in their level of listening comprehension and in their use of listening comprehension strategies), was expected to increase the students' strategy repertoire, and change their views towards listening comprehension as one of the main skills every FL learner should acquire.

The present study focused on teaching listening comprehension strategies to EFL students in order to raise a kind of awareness in them of the ways they can learn easier, faster, and more efficiently. When students learn some new and useful strategies, they become motivated to engage in more language tasks and activities and their success in these tasks will promote their self-confidence, and this in turn has some influence on their attitudes towards language learning, and gaining competence in not only listening, but also all integrated language skills. Since listening is one of the two most important sources of learners' input, its promotion and improvement can lead to the improvement of other language components and skills; so dealing with the students' listening problems is one of the concerns of the researchers and teachers, and this study also tried to take a step towards making a change in this respect.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

This study was an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1) Does EFL learners' use of listening strategies change after participation in strategy training program?
- 2) Does EFL learners' listening comprehension ability improve after participation in strategy training program?



3) Which listening strategies account for possible improvement of EFL learners' listening comprehension ability?

## **1.5. Definitions of Key Terms**

**1.5.1. Strategies:** "Mental and communicative procedures learners use in order to learn and use language" (Nunan, 1999). "Any number of specific methods or techniques for approaching a problem or task; modes of operation for achieving a particular end; planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information" (Brown, 2008).

**1.5.2. Listening strategies:** "Learners' deliberate attention to their comprehension process in order to construct meaning" (Cohen, 1998). "The techniques listeners use to collaborate with others, to verify understanding or to lower anxiety" (Vandergrift, 2003).

**1.5.3. Strategy training:** "Training students in the use of learning strategies in order to improve their learning effectiveness" (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). "Explicit teaching of how, when, and why students should employ FL learning strategies to enhance their efforts at reaching language program goals" (Cohen, 1988; Ellis and Sinclair, 1989).

**1.5.4. Listening comprehension ability:** "The ability of the listener to construct meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic resources to fulfill the task requirement" (O'malley, Chamot, and Kupper, 1989). "The ability to understand speech in a second or foreign language and to perceive the information and stimuli received through the ears" (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992).

## **1.6. Outline of the thesis**

This work consists of five chapters, each of which specifies one aspect of the study. The first chapter, as you have seen, went on introducing the research, its background and purpose. The second chapter will turn to the review of related literature, i.e. reviewing the works previously done in relation to the subject of this study. The third chapter will render some information about methodology of the research and in chapter four the results will be presented. Conclusion and discussion about the findings of this study will be rendered in chapter five, and at the end the references

and appendices will support the study with extra information about the resources applied in the project. In the following chapter, the related literature will be reviewed.

# **Chapter Two**

## **Literature review**

### *Overview*

This chapter is centered on the previous research conducted in the realm of this study. Lots of related research performed by Iranian and Foreign researchers is cited with their results and conclusions. The attempt is to enrich this work by providing enough support from the related literature. The researches mentioned in this part are in the fields of listening and its related factors, strategies in general and strategies specific to listening comprehension, and strategy training and its conditions. Factors concerning language learners, who play the central role in this study, are also investigated.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Importance of Listening Skill**

Listening skill is perceived important for various reasons. First, listening is a means for achieving different sources of knowledge. Listening is also regarded as a language skill which determines whether an adult language learner has a competent language performance. In fact, its importance is influenced by the amount of listening input in every day life. This is verified by the numbers Learning Assistance Center of City College of San Francisco (2005) reported. This report states that students at school spend about 20 percent of the whole school hours just listening. If this report involves television watching and conversations, listening accounts for approximately 50 percent of waking hours. The amount of listening time, including the hours spent in class, can be approximately 100 percent. However, the significance of listening is not limited to the learning context. Kreutanu (1998) cited in his study that for company staff at all levels, most problems happening at work is due to their weak listening skills. The study conducted by Wolvin and Coakley (1991) also supported the claim of listening importance. Researchers surveyed the leaders of 500 companies in the United States, asking them questions about their opinion towards the skill that was important for one's carrier growth. Their answer was listening comprehension, since listening comprehension is considered a necessary skill in communication at every level.

Despite the fact that listening is an important skill, its acquisition is not easy, specially listening in ESL and EFL contexts. Therefore, teachers are after methods to enhance the students' listening proficiency. Researchers and educators have long believed in the idea that learning strategies are essential and significant for one to be a successful learner. Studies on learning strategies thus have been conducted widely to determine which strategies are used for improving each of the four skills.

### **2.2. Listening Comprehension**

In 1940s, listening comprehension was investigated as a new field of study in the realm of language learning following the works of researchers such as Brown and Nichols (Feyton, 1991). Chastain (1988) observes that understanding and speaking a language is at the beginning achievable through hearing the conversations of the