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**THE EFFECT OF SELF REGULATED STRATEGY
DEVELOPMENT INSTRUCTION ON THE LISTENING
PERFORMANCE OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN
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Chapter One

Introduction

1. Introduction

When we think of learning a language, traditionally we think of learning four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening is listed first not only because it appears first in natural first language acquisition but because it is used the most. “On average, we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read and five times more than we write” (Cook: 2001, p. 52).

While the importance of the listening skill for developing language competency has long been recognized, the actual mechanisms for listening comprehension have been only vaguely described. Listening has often been classified as one of the skills of reception rather than production like speaking, making it seem a passive skill. However, as Rivers (1983) points out listening comprehension is a very active skill. Far from being an act of reception, it involves the construction of a message from phonic material.

Research into speech perception has shown that listening comprehension involves far more than mere decoding of the sounds. Rixon (1983) in the discussion of speech perception identifies three stages: First, the listener must recognize that the sounds are an actual message and not just noise. This recognition means to the listener that the sounds are elements of the language system. In the second stage the listener identifies sounds along with lexical and syntactic forms by segmenting and grouping them. The third stage involves recoding in order to retain the auditory

message in long-term storage. These stages are necessarily rapid and overlapping. Whether the process of listening comprehension is as described above or in some other form, it is certainly an active process involving cognitive processing.

So, listening is an important part of foreign language learning process. It has also been defined as an active process during which listeners construct meaning from oral input (Bentley & Bacon, 1996). Listening skill develops faster than the other three skills and could affect reading and writing abilities in learning a new language (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Vandergrift, 1997). According to Feyten (1991), in daily communication, people allot 45% of time to listening, 30% to speaking, 16% to reading, and only 9% to writing.

Listening comprehension means the process of understanding speech in a second or foreign language. It is the perception of information and stimuli received through the ears. For foreign language learners, it may easily cause confusion and misunderstanding if they cannot comprehend what people intend to express. (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992).

It is common knowledge that listening in English is an active skill requiring listeners to deal with a variety of complicated tasks such as discriminating between sounds and interpreting stress and intonation. It is also known that listeners use a variety of mental processes to give meaning to the information they listen to. These mental processes that listeners use to understand spoken English can be described as listening comprehension strategies. As indicated by Cohen (2000), many researchers in the field of second and foreign language (L2) listening agree on the idea that listeners often do not handle listening tasks in an effective way of using listening comprehension strategies. For a better understanding of listening strategies, especially cognitive ones, it is necessary to explain language learning strategies first. In this study, learning strategies are

behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed, and enjoyable (Oxford, 1989). Cognitive Strategy Instruction (CSI) is an instructional approach which emphasizes the development of thinking skills and processes as a means to enhance learning. The objective of CSI is to enable all students to become more strategic, self-reliant, flexible, and productive in their learning endeavors (Scheid, 1993). CSI is based on the assumption that there are identifiable cognitive strategies, previously believed to be used by only the best and the brightest students, which can be taught to most students (Halpern, 1996). Uses of these strategies have been associated with successful learning (Borkowski, Carr, & Pressley, 1987, Garner, 1990). Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model (SRSD) is an implementation model for cognitive strategy instruction. According to Read (2005) “The goal of SRSD is to make the use of strategies habitual, flexible, and automatic”. The model is based on research work by Graham, Harris, Read, Ryan, Short et al (2005). Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model is based on well-established theory and has been thoroughly validated (Harris & Graham, 2005). The SRSD instructional model includes six stages (Graham & Harris, 2005; Harris & Graham, 1996). Stage 1: Develop background knowledge (during this introductory stage, the primary goal is to ensure that students will successfully understand, learn, and apply the strategy .The main focus of this introductory stage is to ensure that students have necessary knowledge or skills to understand, learn, and execute the listening strategy and self-regulation techniques.). Stage 2: Discuss it (The primary purpose of this stage is to ensure that students are motivated and willing to learn the new strategy. The students and the teacher discuss the strategy used to carry out specific listening tasks. The discussion includes the purpose, benefits of the strategy, and how and when to use it. At this stage, students make commitment to learn the strategy and be active participants as collaborators throughout the process. Teacher can also address students’

current negative or interfering beliefs at this stage). Stage 3: Model it (students are shown exactly how to use the new strategy .Good modeling allows the student to see an "expert" learner employing the strategy. In "think-aloud" process, the teachers or the students verbalize their thought processes as they perform a strategy. Modeling increases students' knowledge of the steps of the strategy and improves their cognitive and metacognitive knowledge of the strategy through exposure to the way a skilled learner implements and regulates strategy use. Note that a good think-aloud goes well beyond merely presenting the steps in a strategy-it provides students with the "why" and the "how" of various strategy steps (i.e., the knowledge and self-regulation processes associated with the performance of steps). Stage 4: Memorize it (students become familiar enough with the steps in a strategy that they can use automatically. Memorizing the steps that constitute the strategy is probably the quickest and easiest of the stages of SSRD. The goal is for students to identify the steps of the strategy and use them automatically. For fluent and effective use of a strategy, the students must be able to focus their energy and attention on the task at hand not on struggling to remember the steps of what they are doing). Stage 5: Support it (students gradually assume responsibility for using the new strategy In this stage, the teacher and the student(s) work together collaboratively and practice using the strategy until the student is able to perform the strategy effectively and independently. During this stage, teachers and students repeatedly model strategy use and discuss how, when, and why to use the strategy. A key aspect of supporting the strategy is the "scaffolding" or "scaffolded instruction" process. The process of scaffolding is like teaching a child to ride a bike. No one would put a child on his or her first bike, give them a push and expect them to ride well. Instead, we normally use a process where we start with extensive supports, which are gradually removed.). Stage 6: Independent performance (students consistently use a strategy over time, in multiple settings, and

with a variety of tasks. In this stage, a student should be ready to use the strategy independently. The teacher's main task will be to monitor the student's performance and to check on proper and consistent strategy use. Monitoring performance is critical. Recite that the goal of strategy instruction is increased performance. De La Paz and Graham (2002) state that SRSD share some common features with other types of instructions. For instance, teachers' providing think-aloud demonstrations to help students gain independence using the target strategies is a common feature for both SRSD and other types of instructions. However, what makes SRSD unique is teaching the procedures for regulating use of the strategy. These procedures typically include goal setting, self- instructions and self-monitoring.

1.1.Statement of the problem

In teaching listening comprehension we must be careful not to go to extremes, either by being too much concerned about theories without thinking about their application to teaching, or by following frozen routines in the textbook and explaining new words, playing the tape recorder, and asking/answering questions. It is essential for a teacher to have an overall understanding of what listening is, why it is difficult for foreign-language learners, and what some solutions may be. Some teachers think that listening is the easiest skill to teach, whereas most students think it is the most difficult to improve (Harris & Graham, 2005).

This contradiction tells us that there are some things about teaching listening that need to be explored. Perhaps those who say it is "the easiest to teach" mean that it does not require much lesson preparation and all they need to do is to play the tapes and test the students' comprehension. But is there nothing more to teaching listening than testing? We must find out all

we can about how listening can be improved and what activities are useful to this end and then use this knowledge and these activities in our classrooms.

Most English teachers' method of teaching listening is merely to have students do some listening exercise or simply to give listening test without any instruction. But listening is not an easy task for listeners, and teachers may be able to do more to facilitate their students' listening comprehension. In most of the classrooms, the common way to teach listening is to have students listen to some language tapes, and then the teacher asks a few comprehension questions. Did the students understand? No? Well Ok, play the tape again. Ask the question again. Did they understand? No. Ok, well . . . tell them to practice and one day they'll get used to English and will be able to understand. Practice practice! Practice makes perfect. Underwood (1989) states seven causes of obstacles to efficient listening comprehension. First, listeners cannot control the speed of delivery. "Many English language learners believe that the greatest difficulty with listening comprehension is that the listener cannot control how quickly a speaker speaks" (Underwood, 1989, p. 16). Second, listeners cannot always have words repeated. This is a serious problem in learning situations. In the classroom, the decision to whether or not to replay a recording or a section of a recording is not in the hands of students. Teachers decide what and when to repeat listening passages; however, it is hard for the teacher to judge whether or not the students have understood any particular section of what they have heard (Underwood, 1989, p. 17). Third, listeners have a limited vocabulary. The speaker may choose words the listener does not know. Listeners sometimes encounter an unknown word which may cause them to stop and think about the meaning of that word and thus cause them to miss the next part of the speech. Fourth, listeners may fail to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another, giving an example, or repeating a point. Discourse markers used in formal

situations or lectures such as "secondly," or "then" are comparatively evident to listeners. In informal situations or spontaneous conversations, signals are vaguer as in pauses, gestures, increased loudness, a clear change of pitch, or different intonation patterns. These signals can be missed especially by less proficient listeners. Fifth, listeners may lack contextual knowledge. Sharing mutual knowledge and common content makes communication easier. Even if listeners can understand the surface meaning of the text, they may have considerable difficulties in comprehending the whole meaning of the passage unless they are familiar with the context. Sixth, it can be difficult for listeners to concentrate. In listening comprehension, even the shortest break in attention can seriously impair comprehension. Conversation is easier when students find the topic of the listening passage interesting; however, students sometimes feel listening is very tiring even if they are interested because it requires an enormous amount of effort to follow the meaning. Seventh, students may have established certain learning habits such as a wish to understand every word. Teachers want students to understand every word they hear by repeating and pronouncing words carefully, by grading the language to suit their level, by speaking slowly and so on. As a result, they tend to become worried if they fail to understand a particular word or phrase and they will be discouraged by the failure. It is necessary for students to tolerate vagueness and incompleteness of understanding (Underwood, 1989). As we have gone through the stages of SRSD, it could be concluded that these problems lie at the very heart of inefficiency in the way that listening is being taught in Iran. So, as the researcher pointed out by using strategies in a proper way we can eliminate some of these problems or at least minimize its effect on listening comprehension.

1.2. The aim of the study

Not all the problems described above can be overcome. But this does not mean that the teacher can do nothing about them. Teaching listening skill is one of the most difficult tasks for any ESL teacher. This is because successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice. It's frustrating for students because there are no rules as in grammar teaching. One of the ways to aid listening can be teaching listening strategies.

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model (SRSD) on listening performance of Iranian EFL students.

1.3. Significance of the study

Strategy instruction is a powerful student-centered approach to teaching that is backed by years of quality research. In fact, strategic approaches to learning new concepts and skills are often what separates good learners from poor ones (Scheid, 1993).

In addition, strategy instruction supplies students with the same tools and techniques that efficient learners use to understand and learn new materials or skills. The findings of this study help students integrate new information with what they already know, in a way that makes sense-making it easier for them to recall the information or skill at a later time, even in a different situations or settings.

Cognitive strategy training is not part of many listening course books or curricula and teachers do not seem to pay attention to strategies while teaching listening. Listening does not receive its importance and students do not seem to be sufficiently trained about the listening strategies (Seferoglu & Uzakgoren, 2004). In the institute involved in the current study, listening and

speaking constitute only 15% of the overall evaluation. Goh (2008) emphasizes that more research is needed to investigate the role of cognitive instruction in listening performance in different contexts.

Considering the purpose of this study, the researcher aims at investigating the effect of Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model (SRSD) on listening performance.

1.4. Research question

Considering the purpose of this study and in an attempt to trigger more research in the field of L2 listening in Iran, the research question for this study has been formulated as follows: Does Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model (SRSD) instruction has any significant impact on the listening performance of Iranian EFL learners?

1.5. Definition of key terms

Strategy

A strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a specific goal. Strategy is all about gaining (or being prepared to gain) a position of advantage over adversaries or best exploiting emerging possibilities. As there is always an element of uncertainty about future, strategy is more about a set of options ("strategic choices") than a fixed plan. It derives from the Greek "στρατηγία" (strategia), "office of general, command, and generalship"(Scheid, 1993).

Metacognition

Metacognition refers to one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes or anything related to them, e.g., the learning-relevant properties of information or data. For example, I am engaging in metacognition if I notice that I am having more trouble learning A than B; if it strikes me that I should double check C before accepting it as fact (Flavell, 1976).

Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model (SRSD)

The Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model (SRSD) is an implementation model for Cognitive strategy instruction. The model is based on research work by Graham, Harris, Read, Ryan, Short et al. According to Read (2005) "The goal of SRSD is to make the use of strategies habitual, flexible, and automatic. This can take a lot of time, practice, and effort. The SRSD model is very comprehensive. This ensures that crucial steps are not overlooked.

Chapter Two

Review of literature

2.1. The importance of learning a second language

It's true that English has become a global lingua franca over the past several decades and the importance of learning a second language becomes self-evident. Learning another language gives the learner the ability to step inside the mind and context of that other culture. Without the ability to communicate and understand a culture on its own terms, access to that culture is blocked. In a world where nations and peoples are dependent upon one another to supply goods and services, solve political disputes, and understanding other cultures is paramount. Some exporters give little consideration to the possibility that there might be language and cultural differences between themselves and customers in overseas markets and that their business is significantly affected by ignoring these differences (Stevick, 2003). Lack of intercultural understanding can lead to mistrust, to an inability to cooperate, negotiate, and perhaps even to military confrontation. Intercultural understanding begins with individuals who have language abilities and who can provide one's own nation or community with an insider's view into foreign cultures, who can understand foreign news sources, and give insights into other perspectives. For survival in the global community, every nation needs such individuals. A person competent in other languages can bridge the gap between cultures, promote national security and world peace, and successfully engage in international trade. Because learning a language involves a variety of learning skills, studying a foreign language can enhance one's ability to learn and function in several other areas. Children who have studied a language at the elementary level score higher on tests in reading, language arts, and math. People who have learned foreign languages show greater cognitive

development in areas such as mental flexibility, creativity, and higher order thinking skills, such as problem-solving, conceptualizing, and reasoning. Learning a foreign language can have a direct effect on the development of cognitive processes (Swarbrick, 2002, p. 14). In sum, languages are the main part of culture and each country. Therefore, the importance of learning a second language can make it a relatively easy and wonderful way of absorbing another culture. Learning a second language can not only challenge your mind and fulfill your soul, but it will also allow you to meet and speak with a variety of people locally and worldwide and develop your knowledge, skills, understanding, tolerance and patience.

2.2. Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

The first factor is aptitude. It refers to the special ability involved in second language learning (Chiu, 2006). The relationship between aptitude and second language learning success is a very important one and various studies, such as Garner (1990) and Brown (2001), have reported that aptitude is a major factor determining the level of success of second language learning (Brown, 2001).

Students can have a good aptitude for learning. This can infer various things. First, the understanding of the function of words in sentences. Second, the ability to understand and use grammatical rules. Third, memory of key words, what they mean and how to use them.

An important point regarding aptitude and second language learning is that successful learners may not be strong in all the components of aptitude and can still succeed at learning a second language. For example, some individuals may have strong memories but only average abilities in the other components of aptitude (Rixon, 1986).

The second factor is motivation. The social psychological factor of motivation has been proven to account for differential success in second language learning. A motivated student can be defined as someone who: “Expend effort, is persistent and attentive to the tasks at hand, has goals, desires and aspirations, enjoys the activity, makes attributions concerning success or failure, is aroused and makes use of strategies to aid in achieving goals(Harmer, 2001, p.173).

It makes sense that those who are motivated to learn the second language will learn faster and to a greater degree than those who are not. Considering most primary schools now have a compulsory second language program, this can result in students who are learning a second language either resenting or being enriched by the learning. This is supported by Gass (1993): If the students’ only reason for learning a second language is external pressure, a student’s motivation may be minimal and result in lack of success (p.11). Furthermore, if students feel that they are not going to need the language in their lives, students may not be motivated and attitudes toward learning that language may be negative (Gass,1993)

The third factor is Personality .Learners’ emotional states have a powerful influence on their behavior and performance in the classroom and other learning situations. There are various theories that claim that personality factors are important predictors of success in second language learning. Personality traits such as extroversion, introversion, risk-taking, independence and empathy have been the basis of discussions and disputes relating to this topic (Ellis, 1986).

Theorists such as Graham, Harris and Mason (2003) have considered empathy to be important and Krashen (1983) argues that an outgoing personality contributes to language learning (Ellis, 1986). Research, such as that done by Krashen (1983), have found that introverts generally

perform better academically whereas an extrovert appears more likely to take advantage of social opportunities for second language input (Chiu, 2006).

Despite these theories, the available research does not demonstrate a clearly defined effect on second language learning. Rather, we all have different and unique personalities and each personality trait can affect our second language learning in different ways (Ellis, 1986).

2.3. Learning Strategies

As in all school topics, learning strategies are a factor of second language learning. One definition of learning strategies is: Steps or actions taken by learners to improve the development of their language skills (Gass,1993, p.265).

Different learning strategies work best for different people when learning a second language. For example, one student may learn vocabulary through writing and practicing the vocabulary using cue cards, whereas another student may only read the vocabulary and learn that way.

It is clear that students can be more successful in second language learning if they adopt particular learning strategies to suit them. Theorists such as Nakata (1999) and Nunan (2001) have found the learning strategies field to have its problems, and some aspects of them are not yet clear. Problems include that it is difficult to separate the conscious from the unconscious and the difficulty of showing what contributions they have on language learning (Gass,1993). As Grass (1993) states, learning strategies is clearly an important area, but there needs to be more theoretically sound research.

2.4. Listening Comprehension

Listening is a process that enables the brain to construct meaning from the sounds heard. It is, however, an internal process, which cannot be observed directly. This means that it is difficult to assess whether the listener has effectively used the skills on a particular occasion, what listening strategies are employed, which source of information is dominantly used, and what problems the listener experiences (Anderson & Lynch, 1988). This distinctive feature of listening might lead to the view that listening is a passive skill in which the listener simply receives a spoken message. Thus, listening remains the least understood and studied in the language teaching/learning area (Rost, 1990)

Nevertheless, listening comprehension has received a considerable attention in the fields of applied linguistics, psycholinguistics and second language pedagogy. Though most of the findings relevant to understanding how listening operates come from research into listening in the mother tongue, many of the conclusions have had important implications for the teaching of listening in the foreign language (Rost, 1990). For example, by analyzing listeners' responses and the skills or strategies used, many writers have given various definitions of listening comprehension. "Listening is the activity of paying attention and trying to get meaning for something we hear" (Underwood, 1989, P. 1). It is a complex process that allows us to understand spoken language. Through listening, we process language in real-time employing pacing, units of encoding and pausing that are unique to spoken language (Rost, 2001). Listening comprehension is also described by Morley (1991, P. 90) as "an act of information processing in which the listener is involved in two-way communication, or one-way communication, and/or self-dialogue communication". According to him, two-way communication refers to interactive listening in which the reciprocal speech chain of speaker-listener is obvious to us. In one-way

communication, on the other hand, the auditory input comes from a variety of sources (e.g. lectures, news, public address announcements, religious services, films). The listener listens to the speaker but does not react. S/he may simply vocalize/sub-vocalize responses. Self-dialogue communication is the one in which the listener takes internal roles as "speaker" and "listener/reactor" in his/her own thought processing without being aware of it.

Other scholars have also maintained the active and complex nature of listening comprehension by describing what listeners actually do when they are involved in listening activities. For example, Richards (1985, P. 187) says, "Three related levels of discourse processing appear to be involved in listening comprehension: propositional identification, interpretation of illocutionary forces, and activation of real world knowledge". Rejecting the conceptualization of listening as a passive act, Vandergrift (1999) further describes,

“Listening comprehension is anything, but a passive activity. It is a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance” (p. 168).

This view of listening as a complex and active process is also shared by Rost (2001) and Cook (2001). They argue that as a goal-oriented activity, listening comprehension involves both bottom-up and top-down processing that are assumed to take place at various levels of cognitive organization: phonological, grammatical, lexical and propositional. In bottom-up processing, listeners attend to data in the incoming speech signals, whereas, in top-down processing the

listeners utilize prior knowledge and expectations to create meaning. It involves "prediction and inference on the basis of hierarchies of facts, propositions and expectations" (Morley, 1991, P. 87). All the views given above show that listening comprehension is a hard task, which demands a great deal of mental analysis on the part of the listener. In order to construct the message the speaker intends, the listener must actively contribute skills and knowledge from both linguistic and nonlinguistic resources. These include having an appropriate purpose for listening, social and cultural knowledge and background knowledge (Littlewood, 1981).

To develop this complex but essential skill, students need much support from their teachers. They must be exposed to a variety of input sources in the form of listening opportunities embedded in social and academic situations. Besides, they should be provided with varying listening activities that enable them to employ different strategies and enhance their macro and micro listening skills (Harmer, 2001).

2.5. Importance of Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is at the heart of language learning. Learners want to understand native speakers' language and want to comprehend a variety of L2 multimedia such as DVDs and the Internet. At the same time, listening is an important language skill to develop in terms of second language acquisition (SLA) (Dunkel, 1991; Rost, 2001; Vandergrift, 2007). SLA studies have demonstrated that comprehensible input is critical for language acquisition as well as comprehensible output (Swain, 1995). Rost (2001) mentions that "a key difference between more successful and less successful acquirers relates in large part to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition" (p. 94). In spite of its importance, L2 learners often regard listening as the

most difficult language skill to learn (Hasan, 2000; Graham, 2003). As Vandergrift (2007) points out, one of the reasons might be that learners are not taught how to learn listening effectively. A narrow focus on the correct answer to comprehension questions that are often given in a lesson does little to help learners understand and control the process leading to comprehension. When learners listen to spoken English, they need to perceive and segment the incoming stream of speech in order to make sense of it. The listener cannot refer back to the text in contrast to a reader who usually has the opportunity to refer back to clarify understanding. Moreover, as Stahr (2009) asserts, “spoken language is characterized by assimilation as well as unclear articulation, and lexical units are not necessarily as clearly marked as in written text; this lack of clarity of spoken language makes word segmentation an extremely difficult task for L2 listeners” (p. 582). Consequently, listening can become a cause of anxiety for L2 learners (Elkhafaifi, 2005). How do L2 learners understand spoken English or fail to understand it? To investigate the listening comprehension process can provide useful insights into teaching listening. To know why students may find the listening comprehension task difficult may also provide us with opportunities to alter listening exercises into more effective ones. Learners who learn to control their listening processes can enhance their comprehension. Developing listening comprehension ability would enable the learners to succeed in L2 acquisition in terms of increasing comprehensible input. In addition, appropriate instruction for L2 listening could reduce learners’ anxiety. As a result, since learners’ self confidence in listening comprehension will be enhanced, they will be motivated to access spoken English including conversations with L2 speakers, DVDs and the Internet.