



**Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University  
Faculty of Humanities**

**The Relationship between Listening Self-efficacy,  
Listening Comprehension, Gender, and Age in  
EFL Male and Female Learners**

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**Reader: Dr. F. Ghorban Dordinejad**

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of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching  
English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)**

**March 2012**

# In the Name of God



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## **Dedication**

To all my family members who always dedicate their own dreams to grant my wishes.

To my dear professor Dr.Meshkat whose support gave me a world of help and encouragement.

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of the present study was to explore the interrelationship between listening self-efficacy, listening comprehension, age, and gender. Sixty upper-intermediate learners including thirty male and thirty female learners of Iran Language Institute in Khorramabad were selected randomly for the research. To gather data from the sample, two data collection instruments including Longman listening test and listening self-efficacy questionnaire were used. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including Mann Whitney test ,independent t-test, and correlation analysis. The results revealed that there was a relationship between listening self-efficacy and listening comprehension. The results also showed that gender did not affect listening self-efficacy and listening comprehension, however the variable of age was negatively related to listening self-efficacy. The implication of the research is that the higher the level of listening self-efficacy is, the higher the level of achievement occurs in listening.

**Key terms:** Listening comprehension, listening self-efficacy, EFL learners, upper intermediate, male and female learners

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

## **1.1. Introduction**

In the 1940s, listening comprehension was investigated as a new field in the realm of language learning following the works of researchers such as Brown and Nichols (Feyton, 1991). Chastain (1988) believes that understanding and speaking a language can be achieved primarily by hearing native speakers' conversations. Many works performed by researchers suggest that language can be acquired through exposure to authentic input, which can mostly be achieved through listening (Carter & Nunan, 2001).

The ability to listen is the most essential skill to ensure a child's success at school in an EFL context. Children develop listening before any other foreign language skills (Smith, 1998; Myers, 2001; Miles, 2002). Learning to listen and listening to learn are vital to lifelong success and should be directly taught. (Hyslop & Tone, 1988; Jalongo, 1995 ; Hoag, 1996; Smith, 1998; Fulk, 1999). When one thinks of learning a language, traditionally he/she thinks 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, one can expect to listen twice as much as he speaks, four times more than he reads and five times more than he writes. (Rivers, 1981; Weaver 1972 cited in Morley p., 70). According to Feyton (1991), in daily communication, people allot 45% of their time to listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and only 9% writing. 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 was often classified as one of the skills of reception rather than production like speaking, making it seem a passive

skill. However, as Rivers (1981) points out listening comprehension is a very active skill, far from being an act of reception.

A number of studies have suggested that learning, in general, cannot be achieved without careful consideration to psychological factors (Carter & Nunan, 2001; Derville, 1966). In all educational environments, students get different grades. Some believe that they get either higher or lower grades than expected. Most of these problems are closely related to psychological factors that have determining effects on language learning, specifically listening comprehension, so affective factors have crucial roles in improving listening comprehension.

Affect involves variables such as attitudes, motivation, interest, learners' beliefs, needs, expectations, and prior experiences (McKenna et al., 1995, cited in Gee, 1999, p.3). The researchers made an attempt to investigate the possible contribution of one of the components related to motivational dimension which, here, is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as a judgment about one's ability to organize and execute the courses of action necessary to attain a specific goal—self-efficacy judgments are related to specific tasks in a given domain (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy is goal directed—self-efficacy assessments direct respondents to rate their level of confidence for attaining a specific goal. Self-efficacy influences the choices individuals make in term of goal choice, the effort expended to reach those goals, and persistence when difficulties arise (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2005). Self-efficacy is a significant predictor of both the level of motivation for a task and ultimately task performance (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Self-efficacy positively predicts performance beyond prior performance and ability (Bandura, 1997; Bandura & Locke, 2003).

This study investigates the interrelationships among listening comprehension, listening strategy use, and listening self-efficacy among both male and female learners in English as a foreign language.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

It is known that listeners use a great number of mental processes to give meaning to what they listen to. While the researcher does not deny the role of intellectual abilities in learning foreign languages, the notion that aptitude plays a predominant role seems to be controversial. In fact, the relevant literature (Bandura, 1986; Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 1994) supports that variation in foreign language learning can be explained by aptitude only to a certain extent. As Chastain (1988) posits, in addition to linguistic aptitude, there must be another equally important variable determining whether or not a student learns a foreign language. Most language teaching approaches lack an emphasis on learner autonomy, feelings, and attitudes (Celce-Murcia, 2001). They view language teaching as an enterprise where the teachers' role is to provide learners with the knowledge and skills they think students need and to assess whether the learners have met the expectations. The students' role is to learn the material taught to them, and, during assessment, to demonstrate what they know. These two roles seem very simplified.

Effective teachers ought to look for and find ways to motivate their students, encourage them, teach them learning skills, and also teach them ways to continue learning outside the classroom and away from the teacher (Rubin & Thompson, 1994;

Wenden, 1991). It is necessary for teachers to help students learn to recognize their emotional temperature and lower their affective filter when it is interfering with learning (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; De Serres & LaFontaine, 2005; Oya, Manalo & Greenwood, 2004). The theory of an affective filter states that successful second or foreign language learning depends on the learners' feelings and attitudes. A negative attitude acts as a filter, and prevents the learner from making use of input, thus limiting success in language learning (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1996; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). In an effort to make the language learning experience as successful as possible, language practitioners have to look for concrete ways to assist their students to learn more effectively by empowering them to take responsibility and to manage their own learning. Successful language learners have acquired the skills necessary to enhance learning and to develop autonomy and a sense of personal agency.

There is still a need to improve teaching by focusing on how learners conduct learning tasks in second language acquisition (Rivers, 2001; Mondada, 2005; Noels, 2005). Studies have been conducted on learners' self-efficacy and its relationship to English language achievement, and found that the subjects' achievements corresponded to their perceptions of their own ability (Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Huang & Chang, 1996). According to Pajares (2000), those beliefs that individuals create and develop to be true are important factors in their success or failure. He defines self-efficacy as students' judgments of their academic competence. In reviewing the literature, it seems that although many studies have been done on self-efficacy in second and foreign language learning settings, research on self-efficacy in foreign language listening, especially in Iran is still lacking. Self-efficacy is one of important affective variables

that influences task choice, effort, persistence, resilience, and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Graham (1995) believes that the acquisition of new skills has been related to efficacy beliefs individuals create for themselves.

Schunk (1995) stated that when students are engaged in activities, they are affected by personal (e.g, goal getting, information processing) and situational influences (e.g., rewards, feedbacks). These provide students with idea of how well they have learned. Self-efficacy is enhanced when students perceived they performed well. Eccles's (1987) model of educational and occupational choice posits that cultural milieu factors such as students' gender or age stereotypes are partly responsible for differences in course and career selection and in confidence beliefs and perceived value of tasks and activities.

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

Although several studies have investigated the relationship between affective factors and language ability few studies have considered the relationship between self-efficacy and learning ability, and even fewer researchers have explored any relationship between listening comprehension and self-efficacy. The knowledge of the relationships among attitudinal factors such as self-efficacy, listening comprehension, gender, and age requires additional research. This study provides more insights into the constructs that may be associated with the development of second and foreign language ability.

This study also provides opportunities for second and foreign language teachers to know the extent to which it may be necessary to involve affective factors into their



programs and help their students develop a positive attitude towards their language learning experience.

#### **1.4. Research questions**

1. Is there a relationship between listening self-efficacy and listening comprehension?
2. Is there a difference in listening self-efficacy between male and female learners?
3. Is there a difference in listening comprehension between male and female learners?
4. Is there a relationship between EFL learners' age and listening self-efficacy in EFL learners?

#### **1.5. Research hypotheses**

1. There is no relationship between listening self-efficacy and listening comprehension.
2. There is not any difference in listening self-efficacy between male and female learners.
3. There is not any difference in listening comprehension between male and female learners.
4. There is not a relationship between EFL learners' age and listening self-efficacy in EFL learners.

## **1.6. Definition of key terms**

*EFL*: English as a Foreign Language. The role of English in countries where it is taught in schools as a subject without being used as the language of instruction in that country's educational system nor as a language of daily communication in government, business, industry, etc, within that country (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1996).

*Listening self-efficacy*: Listening self-efficacy refers to the beliefs, or confidence, that listeners have in their capability to successfully listen in specific situations, which may influence audiologic rehabilitation outcomes (Sherri L. Smith, 2011).

*Listening comprehension*: Listening comprehension is regarded theoretically as an active process in which individuals concentrate on selected aspects of aural input, form meaning from passages, and associate what they hear with existing knowledge.

*High intermediate level*: This level is the fifth level of the overall six level of learning English as a foreign language taught in Iran Language Institute. Although four main skills are emphasized in this level, the main focus is on advanced grammar and words. Those learners learning English in this level are supposed to be able to express themselves in English to a large extent after passing 12 semesters of learning English. This level consists of twenty-one 120-min sessions.

## **1.7. Limitations of the study**

This study was carried out with participants enrolled in the English program of Iran Language Institute located in the center of Khorramabad. This institute is largely attended by young learners who are really interested in learning English as a foreign

language. Other learners in other situations and places, especially school students are not included in this study; so generalizing the findings beyond this sample to other populations should be done carefully.

Furthermore, this study used a survey where students rated themselves, which is an indirect method of gathering data used by foreign language learners. Whereas surveys reveal what language learners believe they do, they cannot uncover what the learners actually do. Surveys are taken at a time remote from the language task, a fact that may raise some skepticism as to their claim to truth. Self-efficacy, being an internal attribute, is difficult to isolate and study exhaustively by means of some objective instrument. Survey items used to measure it may touch on some other constructs, such as motivation and self-esteem, which are often confused with self-efficacy. One potential problem with research where participants rate themselves is the extent to which individuals can objectively rate themselves, especially in a subjective area such as self-efficacy. Some participants may inflate or underestimate their strategy use or their self-efficacy levels.

# **Chapter Two**

## Review of Literature