The Relationship between Listening Anxiety, Listening Comprehension Strategies, and Listening Performance among Iranian EFL University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to explore the relationship between listening anxiety, listening strategies, and listening proficiency among Iranian EFL university students. A total number of 110 EFL language learners participated in this study. Three instruments were used in this study. The instruments were comprised of: (a) Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS), (b) Listening Strategy Questionnaire, and (C) an original TOEFL iBT test by ETS. Based on the results, it was found out that EFL language learners use Meta-cognitive listening strategies the most followed by affective strategies, memory strategies, compensation strategies and cognitive strategies. Moreover, it was found out that all listening strategies were negatively correlated with listening anxiety, which means that as the anxiety level of the participants increases they use listening strategies less and vice versa. In addition, it was found out that compensation and meta-cognitive category of listening strategies positively correlated with listening proficiency, while cognitive category negatively correlated with listening proficiency, suggesting that more proficient participants use more compensation and meta-cognitive strategies but less cognitive listening strategies. In other words, as listening proficiency increases, compensation and meta-cognitive listening strategy use increases and cognitive strategy use decreases. Finally, it was found out that listening is an anxiety-inducing skill and listening proficiency plays a key role in determining the level of anxiety. In other words, as listening proficiency increases, the listening anxiety decreases and vice versa.

KEYWORDS: Listening Anxiety, Listening Comprehension Strategies, Listening Performance, EFL

INTRODUCTION

The role of listening comprehension in language instruction has gradually changed over the past several decades and second and foreign language instructors have witnessed this gradual and steady change in the educational context. Although it took a long time for listening comprehension to gain its prominence in language instruction, it is finally considered as important as other language skills like reading, writing, and speaking and is not denigrated as being a passive skill whose place is occupied by more productive skills anymore. As a result of these changes in the importance of listening comprehension, many researches are focusing mainly on different approaches to teaching listening comprehension and the factors affecting it. Among different approaches adopted for teaching listening comprehension, "comprehension approaches" were among those with more popularity than the others. The proponents of these approaches strongly criticized those simple listening methodologies that just exposed learners to spoken language (Asher, Kusudo, & de la Torre, 1972; Belasco, 1981; Krashen& Terrell, 1983; Postovsky, 1974; Stevick, 1976; Winitz, 1981). Assuming that comprehension provides the input, and receiving suitable input is a requirement for language learning, the proponents of these approaches have asserted that receptive skills, mainly listening, should be the starting point of language instruction. Consequently, ESL and EFL instructors have paid more attention to the role of listening comprehension in the acquisition process.

Nevertheless, research on listening comprehension has overlooked an important aspect of listening process and that is the listeners' attitude towards listening comprehension (Lynch, 1998). Having a brief look into basic descriptions of listening compression, it can be clearly seen that most data tend to be described or discussed in mechanical terms. For instance, input, processing, output. Without considering the learners' emotional states, it will be difficult to explain how speakers interact with each other in real world situations.

Considering this fact, a series of studies (Call, 1985; Dunkel, Mishra, & Berliner, 1989; Faerch& Kasper, 1986; Long, 1989) has revealed that success in listening comprehension depends on both internal and external variables.

They stated that language instructors should not blame their students for low aptitude or lack of effort, but they should be sensitive to some affective factors such as motivation, self- confidence, attitude, and anxiety. One of the major affective factors that has had a crippling effect on students and has made the researchers wonder for quite a long time is "anxiety."

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) defined foreign language anxiety as "the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient" (p. 5). Observations of language classes have shown that students suffering from FL anxiety are more likely to display emotional reactions such as defensiveness or offensiveness, fear of tests, and are prone to assume a passive role in class activities. Therefore, they are unable to use effective learning strategies (Gregersen&Horwitz, 2002).

One of the unique features of listening comprehension skill that distinguishes it from the other receptive skill is "time for processing". In listening comprehension the listener is supposed to decode the incoming information as he receives it and there is not any opportunity for returning back and repeating the information again. This is what causes anxiety in part of the listener because when he sees the incoming information can be heard just once and no repetition is possible, he loses his concentration and gets anxious should he not understand a part of a message. In reading comprehension, it is not the case, though, because the reader can return back and repeat a sentence as many times as he wishes.

Although anxiety is often associated with fear, frustration, and negative arousal, FL/SL learning anxiety is thought to be a unique type of anxiety peculiar to learning an FL/SL. According to Chastain (1979), since listening is a complex skill, students have the fear of understanding the message and interpreting it correctly. Why many students complain about the difficulties of listening in a FL may also depend on feelings of inadequacy or lack of confidence (Dunkel, 1991).

Likewise, FL listening anxiety might hamper foreign language learning and as a result may cause tension while listening in FL. Christenberry (2003) underlines the problematic nature of listening and asserts that it is an incredibly difficult area to teach properly; thus, it is more likely to cause anxiety. Furthermore, Vogely (1999) clearly emphasizes that one of the most ignored but potentially one of the most debilitating types of anxiety is the anxiety accompanying listening comprehension.

It has been highlighted that learners may feel anxious while listening in the target language due to many factors such as the authenticity of the listening text, incomprehensibility of the listening material, and some external environmental factors like noise and inaudibility (Samuels, 1984; Bacon, 1992b).

Listening in a second language is an integrative language skill, including lexical, grammatical, and phonetic complexities. Also, performance features such as false start, pauses or hesitations, unclear pronunciation and intonation are unique features of this skill (Snow & Perkins, 1979). Furthermore, while listening to a second language, students do not have any control over the topic of the speech, the rate of speech, and the volume of speech. Unlike reading comprehension in which the language learner can repeat a part of the reading as many times as he wishes or go back and forth again and again, in listening comprehension it is not the case and repetition is out of hand. Hence, those language learners who do not have appropriate listening competence, including quick processing of the information, may fail to decode discrete information and as a result lose significant pieces of information. Under such circumstances, when language learners do not have any control over the topic, the rate of speech, and they cannot go back and forth within the text for clarification, they might experience helplessness and apprehension.

According to what is said above most of language learners who are novice may complain that they cannot keep the pace in listening comprehension activities and they do not know what part to pay attention to more. These listeners lag "farther and farther behind the speaker, they try even more desperately to decode, thus missing the redundancies of real discourse that could help" (Meyer, 1984, p. 343). Consequently, they experience "task overload" followed by extreme levels anxiety.

In a research on anxiety, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) found that speaking, listening, and testing situations are anxiety provoking. The results showed that highly anxious language learners fail to distinguish sounds and structures of the input and if the input is an extended one, they cannot remember the content of the input. In Young's interview (1992), Krashen also proposed that incomprehensible input is anxiety provoking. A great body of research also contends that listening comprehension is anxiety provoking and this anxiety adversely affects listening comprehension. (Aneiro, 1989; Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft & Evers, 1987; MacIntyre& Gardner, 1994; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997). In another quantitative study on foreign language listening anxiety, Elkhafaifi (2005) found that listening anxiety exists as a phenomenon distinguishable from general FL anxiety, it negatively affect listening comprehension, and foreign language anxiety can also be attributed to gender, with females being more anxious that males.

However, since the focus of most of the previous studies was not listening comprehension but overall second language ability, their findings cannot be regarded as a representative of listening anxiety in foreign language learning, more to the point, most of those studies measured listening anxiety by the use of a questionnaire primarily designed to measure general foreign language anxiety and just a few items were devoted to input anxiety. Even in the study carried out by Elkhafaifi (2005), listening anxiety was just a part of the study and not the main focus because general foreign language anxiety, the contribution of other factors including gender were also taken into account. Thus, a more detailed study is needed to identify and potentially overcome these problems, and this study is an attempt in the direction with a single construct, listening anxiety.

In order to determine the existence of listening anxiety and its effect on listening comprehension, the researcher in this study employed a Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale with a significant number of items to describe listening anxiety.

This study is also unique because it investigates the relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategies. Most previous studies conducted on listening strategies focused solely on the types of listening strategies that foreign language learners used and did not investigate the relationship between these two variables, listening anxiety and listening strategies. Moreover, most of the studies on listening anxiety have been conducted in the US and it is difficult to generalize the results to other contexts. Thus, it is useful to have different types of participants like Iranians who may have their own anxiety related to foreign language learning.

Therefore, this study examined the existence of listening anxiety and its relationship with listening proficiency, focusing on Iranian EFL university students. In addition, this study tried to figure out the relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategies as well as the relationship between listening proficiency and listening strategies.

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationships that may exist between listening comprehension and listening anxiety. It is theoretically significant because unlike other common trends that focus on the output or the actual performance, this study focused on an aspect that has yet received minimal attention. It tried to explore the effect of affective variables like anxiety on listening achievement. It is also important to understand the feeling processes that the listener undergoes while interacting with listening comprehension and the extent the influence exerted by affective factors like anxiety affect the students' performance.

This study is also of significance in that it tries to explore the relationship between listening anxiety and listening proficiency along with the listening strategies listeners with different levels of anxiety use while listening to the listening comprehension materials. Although many studies have been done in the area of listening strategies, few, if any, have correlated the relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategies in EFL contexts. The study is practically remarkable because if a relationship between anxiety level and the use of listening strategies is found, it can inform EFL teachers about the strategy use of listeners with different anxiety levels and the extent to which those strategies can promote or hinder their comprehension process.

This study is also significant in that it investigates the relationships between listening strategy use and listening proficiency. As the history of language teaching profession has witnessed, the majority of teaching methods have focused on the outcome or the actual performance of listeners and few of them have ever considered those variables that may directly or indirectly affect that actual performance. Hence, the number of research done in this area is scarce. So it is worth a special attention in part of language researchers.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between listening anxiety, listening strategies and listening proficiency among EFL university students. If any relationships among these variables are found, the results will be of great benefit to EFL language teachers concerned with teaching listening for having a more fruitful instruction. To this end, the following research questions were raised.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the type and frequency of listening strategies used by participants?
2. Is there any relationship between the types and frequency of listening strategies and anxiety level of students?
3. Is there any relationship between the types and frequency of listening strategies and listening proficiency of students?
4. Is there any relationship between listening anxiety and listening proficiency?

METHODOLOGY
PARTICIPANTS

110 students (65 females and 45 males) who had enrolled in a two-month long TOEFL preparation course at Amirbahador Authorized TOEFL test center in Tehran participated in this study. For the purpose of this study five intact classes were used. The students' age ranged between 20 and 30. Before registering for the TOEFL preparation course, all of these students had already passed conversation courses up to the advanced level. Getting the minimum score of 70 from the TOEFL placement test administered by the center was the main requirement for registering for these classes.

INSTRUMENTS

The instruments used in this study consisted of a) foreign language listening anxiety scale (FLLAS), b) listening strategy questionnaire, and c) an original TOEFL iBT listening test developed by ETS.

In order to measure the participants' level of anxiety, FLLAS was used. This questionnaire, developed by Satio et al. (1999) was primarily developed to measure foreign language reading anxiety, but it has been adapted and used by many different researchers including Elkhafaifi (2005) and Vogely (1998) to measure foreign language listening anxiety as well.

In order to examine the listening strategies that the participants adopt while listeningto an audio passage, the listening strategy questionnaire was employed. Thequestionnaire is based on previous studies, including Oxford (1990), Teng (1996), andCohen & Chi (2002). In order to measure participants' listening proficiency, the researcher administered the listening section of an actual TOEFL iBT test.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

SPSS version 17 was used to analyze the data. The research questionnaires were all Likert type. In order to identify the learners' characteristics concerning listening anxiety, listening strategy use, and listening proficiency; descriptive statistics including mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency table were employed. In order to answer the research questions of this study, altogether, the researcher used descriptive statistics for research question 1, computed Pearson's product-momentcorrelation for research question 2 and 3 and Pearson's product moment correlation along with the independent sample T-test for research question 4.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
INVESTIGATING RESEARCH QUESTION 1

Table 1 shows the Means of Strategy Group Categorizations of 110 participants. The strategies are ranked from 1 to 5 based on their means and how frequently they were used by the participants; it shows that the participants used "meta-cognitive" listening strategies the most (mean=3.8), followed by "affective" listening strategies (mean=3.45), "memory" listening strategies (mean=3.369), and "compensation" listening strategies (mean=3.67), while "cognitive" listening strategies (mean=3.27) were the least extensively ones used by the participants.

Table 1.*The mean Scores of listening Strategy Group*

Strategy groups	Total Means	Ranks
Meta-cognitive Strategies	3.8	1
Cognitive Strategies	3.27	5
Affective Strategies	3.45	2
Memory Strategies	3.369	3
Compensation Strategies	3.367	4

INVESTIGATING RESEARCH QUESTION 2

The results of Pearson's product-moment run on the data correlation presented in Table 2 showed that there was a statistically significant and negative correlation between all categories of listening strategies and listening anxiety.

The correlation between cognitive listening strategy use and listening anxiety was (r = -.353, *p*< 0.01); the strength and direction of the correlation is -353, which is statistically significant at 0.01 level showing that with an increase in anxiety level, there will be a decrease in cognitive listening strategy use and vice-versa. The correlation between meta-cognitive listening strategy use and listening anxiety was r = - .31 [1] *P*<[0] .01; the strength and direction of this correlation is - .311, which is statistically significant at 0.01 level showing that with an increase in anxiety level, there will be a decrease in meta-cognitive listening strategy use and vice-versa. Moreover, the correlation between compensation

listening strategies and listening anxiety was r = -.357, *p*< 0.01; the strength and direction of correlation is - 357 which is statistically significant at 0.01 level showing that with an increase in anxiety level there will be a decrease in compensation strategy use and vice-versa. Also the correlation between memory listening strategies and listening anxiety was r = -.281 · *P*<[0] .01 ; the strength and direction of correlation is - .281 which is statistically significant at 0.01 level showing that with an increase in anxiety level there will be a decrease in memory listening strategies and vice-versa. Ultimately the correlation between affective listening strategy and listening anxiety was r = -.280, *p*< 0.01; the strength and direction of correlation is -.280 and it is statistically significant at 0.01 level showing that with an increase in anxiety level, there will be a decrease affecting the listening strategies.

Table 2.*Correlation of listening strategy use and listening anxiety*

		Cognitive	metacognitive	compensation	Memory	Affective	Anxiety TOTAL
Anxiety TOTAL	Pearson Correlation	-.353**	-.311**	-.357**	-.281**	-.280**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**..000**	**.001**	**.000**	**.003**	**.003**	
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

INVESTIGATING RESEARCH QUESTION 3

Pearson's product-moment correlation presented in Table 3 showed that among the five categories of listening strategy, "compensation" and "meta-cognitive" categories positively correlated with general listening proficiency and "cognitive" category negatively correlated with general listening proficiency, but there was no statistically significant correlation between "memory" strategies and "affective strategies The correlation between "cognitive" category of listening strategy and general listening proficiency was r = -355, *p*< 0.01; the strength and direction of the correlation is -355, a and it is statistically significant at 0.01 level indicating as the listening proficiency increases, cognitive strategy use decreases and vice versa. The correlation between "meta-cognitive" category of listening strategy and general listening proficiency was r = .207, *p*< 0.01; the strength and direction of the correlation is .207, and it is statistically significant at 0.01 level indicating that as the listening proficiency of students increases, the learners use more "meta-cognitive" strategies and vice versa. The correlation between "compensation" category of listening strategy and general listening proficiency was r = .198, *p*< 0.01; the strength and direction of the correlation is .198, and it is statistically significant at 0.05 level showing that this category of listen strategy is used more extensively by more proficient listeners. In other words, the more proficient the listener, the more reliant they will be on compensation category of the listening strategy. The correlation between "memory" category of listening strategy and general listening proficiency was r = 0.68, *p*< 0.01; the strength and direction of the correlation is 0.68, but it is not statistically significant at 0.05 level indicating that this category of listening strategy does not correlate with general listening proficiency. furthermore, the correlation between affective category of listening strategy and general listening proficiency was r = .110, *p*< 0.01; the strength and direction of the correlation is .110, but it is not statistically significant at 0.05 level again indicating that this category of listening strategy does not correlate with general listening proficiency.

Table 3. Correlation of listening strategy and general listening proficiency

	cognitive	metacognitive	compensation	memory	Affective
Pearson Correlation	-.355**	.207**	.198*	.068	.110
TOEFL Scores Sig. (2-tailed)	000	.037	.038	.478	.254
N	110	110	110	110	110

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

INVESTIGATING RESEARCH QUESTION 4

To test this hypothesis, the researcher first correlated listening anxiety and listening proficiency using Pearson's product moment correlation to see if there is a relationship between these two variables. As Table 5 shows there is a negative correlation between listening anxiety and listening proficiency. The strength and direction of correlation is $r = -.350$, and it is statistically significant at 0.01 level showing that as the proficiency level of the students increases, their anxiety level decreases and vice versa.

Table 4. Correlation of listening anxiety and listening proficiency

		Anxiety
TOEFL Pearson Correlation		-.350** .000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	110
	N	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Then the researcher computed the median of the participant's score in Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) M=60. Those above the median were labeled as high- anxious and those below the median were labeled as low-anxious and those whose anxiety score was close to the median were not put in one of the categories and were not taken into account. Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviation of the proficiency listening test (TOEFL test) scores of the high-anxious and the low-anxious groups. The mean and standard deviation of the low-anxious group was Mean= 21.79 and Standard deviation =3.21; and the Mean and the Standard deviation of the high-anxious group was Mean=19.33 and Standard Deviation= 2.73.

Table 5. *Group Statistics*

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TOEFL	Low anxiety	53	21.79	3.21	.44212
	High anxiety	53	19.3396	2.73822	.37612

As it is clear, the Mean score of the low-anxious group in listening proficiency test was more than the Mean score of the high-anxious group in listening proficiency test, but in order to determine if this difference in Mean score is significant, an Independent Sample t-test was used. As it is shown in Table 6, the Independent Sample t-test showed that the mean difference between the high-anxious and the low-anxious group was statistically significant at 0.5 indicating that the low-anxious participants outperformed the high anxious participants in the listening proficiency test. This implies that anxiety is one of the factors that negatively affects listening proficiency.

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Table 6. *Independent Sample T-test Results*

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
TOEFL	4.226	104	.000	2.45283	.58046

DISCUSSION

In this section, the research questions posed will be discussed in light of findings of the study.

TYPE AND FREQUENCY OF LISTENING STRATEGY USE

The first research question was concerned with the type and frequency of strategies used by the participants. In order to answer this research question, descriptive statistics were used to determine the mean scores of each strategy group used by the participants. The result showed that "meta-cognitive" strategies with total mean of 3.8 was the strategy most commonly used by the participants and "cognitive" strategies with the total mean of 3.45 was the strategy least used. The result is consistent with a study conducted by Noormohamadi (2009). He also conducted a similar study with EFL fresh man university students of Tehran and Allame Tabatabaie University. His study showed that "meta-cognitive" strategy was the strategy which was commonly used among participants. One possible reason for this finding is that English is a foreign language in Iran and the most ignored skill in language classes. So when learners want to listen to the target language, they prefer to preview in order to gain some knowledge about the listening text, prepare themselves prior to listening, and check their comprehension while listening. In this way they feel more confident and secure. Preparation before listening can also dampen their anxiety and by previewing the materials beforehand they can conquer the feeling of apprehension. As the mean score of listening strategy group showed, "cognitive" strategies were used the least by the students. However, in Noormohamadi's study affective strategies were used the least, which was second in the rank in the present study. One possible reason for this incongruity is probably the anxiety level of the participants. Those participants who are low anxious in listening comprehension do not necessarily need to employ affective strategies; while, those high anxious participants use affective strategies more to encourage themselves to keep going.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LISTENING ANXIETY AND LISTENING STRATEGIES

The second research question was concerned with the relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategies. The statistical procedure used to test this hypothesis was Pearson's product moment correlation. Pearson's product moment correlation revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between all categories of listening strategy and listening anxiety. The results suggest that anxiety level has an inverse effect on strategy use. In other words, as the anxiety level of the students increases, their strategy use decreases and vice versa. The result seems to be consistent with those of Yeh (1993) and HSU (2004). Yeh (1993) found a negative correlation between the subjects' English learning anxiety and learning strategies. In other words, he found that the more strategic English learners were, the less anxious they were. He also asserted that English learning strategies are a factor by which we can predict English learning anxiety.

The results of his study also showed that those students who were less anxious in communication and negative evaluation tended to use more cognitive, compensatory, meta-cognitive, and affective strategies. By the same token, HSU (2004) also discovered that less anxious students used more learning strategies than more anxious ones. Gonen (2009) also discovered that when there is an increase in FL listening anxiety, foreign language strategy use decreases and vice versa. In his person interview with students he also supported his findings. His study revealed that high-anxious students usually do not use effective listening strategies and have some concerns while listening in the target language both inside and outside the classroom. Chang (2005) also reached to the same results. Her study on a group of Chinese students revealed that learners' choice of listening strategy was greatly influenced by their listening anxiety. She discovered that striking differences existed in the employment of listening strategies between high anxious and low anxious students while they were taking the listening test and practicing listening outside the class. The main reason behind the negative correlation between listening anxiety and listening strategy is that highly anxious students need self- assurance and related techniques to reduce their anxiety, some of

them can conquer the induced anxiety by employing more strategies and some struggle in vein.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LISTENING PROFICIENCY AND LISTENING STRATEGY USE

The third research question was concerned with the relationship between listening strategies and listening proficiency. The statistical procedure used to test this hypothesis was Pearson's product moment correlation. Pearson's product moment showed a statistically significant positive correlation between "meta-cognitive" and "compensation" listening strategies and listening proficiency and a statistically significant negative correlation between "cognitive" listening strategies and listening proficiency. However, no relationship was found between the two other categories, namely "affective" and "memory" and listening proficiency. These findings corroborate the findings of several other studies.

Vogely (1998) investigating the relationship between listening anxiety and listening proficiency among Taiwanese students, discovered that more proficient students used more effective strategies more frequently than less proficient students. He also found that regardless of the anxiety level, more proficient employed "meta-cognitive" and "compensation" strategies more than less proficient ones. Underwood (1989) claimed that before the listening task begins, students should be "turned in" so that they can predict what will come next. This can be done through different types of preparatory work such as pre listening activities or providing some sorts of listening support to help students process the incoming input easier. Research in this area has shown that (a) more advanced listeners use increasingly varied strategies than less advanced listeners (Murphy, (1987) the better a listener's proficiency, the more "metacognitive" strategies he or she uses (Vandergrift, 1997).

Another finding of this study was the positive correlation between listening proficiency and "compensation" strategy use. This finding is consistent with those by (Edasawa, Takeuchi &Nishizaki, (1990); Heaton, (1990); Hill, (1990);Rieber, (1990, 1991); and Winn, (1991), who concluded that a combination of animation, pictures, sound, and videos aid students in listening comprehension. Also Teng (1997) stated that "compensation" strategies are used more frequently by EFL college students. Change and Hung (1999) proposed that "compensation strategies are the most immediate and direct strategies for the EFL students to bridge the knowledge gap in the process of comprehending English "input" and producing "output".

Another finding of this study was the negative relationship that exists between "cognitive" strategies and listening proficiency. "Cognitive" strategies including translation of the incoming input, taking notes while listening to the target language, and focusing on the content, are strategies used mostly by low proficient students, those whose ear is not tuned to listening in the target language. Also less proficient students usually stick to their first language and they are more prone to word by word translation than more proficient students, as Vandergrift (1993, 1997) mentions less proficient learners bog down as they are preoccupied with inefficient surface processing like translation. No relationship was found between Affective and Memory listening strategies implying that they are not contributive to the success or failure of more proficient or less proficient students

LISTENING PROFICIENCY AND LISTENING ANXIETY

The last research question was concerned with the relationship between listening anxiety and listening proficiency and the mean difference of listening proficiency test between these two groups of anxiety. Two statistical procedures were used to test this hypothesis: Pearson's product moment correlation and independent sample t-test. First, before using an independent sample t-test, Pearson's product moment correlation was used to test the direction and the strength of the correlations between these two variables. Pearson's product moment correlation revealed a significant negative correlation with the strength of -.350. Then, an independent sample t-test was used to compare the means of listening proficiency test between high-anxious and low-anxious groups. The resulting value t=.000, *p*< 0.05 indicated that the difference between these two groups is statistically significant. High-anxious group's mean score in listening proficiency test was 19.33 compared to that of low-anxious group, which was 21.79. Hence, it was supported that more proficient students would exhibit lower anxiety level than less proficient students.

The results are consistent with the definition of Gardner and MacIntyre's (1993) Definition of foreign language anxiety. They defined foreign language anxiety as "the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient" (p. 5). MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) also explained how foreign language proficiency is affected by foreign language anxiety. They believe that foreign language anxiety is the result of repeated negative feeling with second language. They stated that at the beginning, this anxiety will appear in the form of state anxiety, a transient apprehension feeling, but when this apprehension is repeated over a period of time with second language, students start to relate it to the performance in the second language. As a result, a situation-specific anxiety will develop. When it is fully developed, it will negatively affect performance in the second language. As they proposed, this apprehension or foreign language anxiety will vanish as

the proficiency of the students in second language increases.

The idea that anxiety level decreases as the proficiency level increases has also been supported by Gardner, Smythe, and Grunet (1977). In one study they compared beginning, intermediate, and advanced students of French on subtests of AMTB before and after an intensive summer-school language course. As they reported, anxiety was pervasive among beginners, in other words, anxiety level was extremely high among beginners but advanced level student did not show a significant amount of anxiety. At the end of the intensive summer course, however, all three groups showed less French class anxiety than they did at the beginning. These findings are also consistent with that of Bailey (1983) who investigated the interrelation between anxiety and learners' performance, and also supported the findings reached by several investigators in earlier studies including studies. Some determined that the anxiety level of Japanese students did not decrease with an increase in language proficiency. As it is explained in Saito's notes, one of the possible reasons of this discrepancy is that in Japanese language classes the emphasis on reading and orthography greatly increases and thus contributed to increased anxiety.

Now, listening or the Cindrella skill as Nunan (2001) put it, the skill which has been mostly ignored in the history of language teaching to take care of itself, comes to be the most anxiety provoking skill among Iranian EFL university students that has an adverse effect on the performance of less proficient students. One of the reasons for this fact is that unlike reading, there is no chance of repetition in listening. So this lack of repetition is one of the main reasons that brings about anxiety. The finding of this study is in the same line with that of Aneiro's (1989) in which there was a significant negative correlation between receiver's apprehension and level of English listening proficiency. Elkhafaifi (2005) who investigated the relationship between foreign language anxiety and students' achievement on the one hand and listening anxiety and listening comprehension on the other hand reached to similar results. His study revealed significant negative correlations among foreign language learning anxiety, foreign language listening anxiety, students' listening comprehension scores and final grades as measures of overall achievement. Also third grade students reported significantly lower level of both foreign language anxiety and listening anxiety than first grade students. It elucidates on this fact that increased proficiency is a predictor of lower anxiety, both foreign language anxiety in general and listening anxiety in particular. Gardner and Mclntyre (1993) put it in perfect words when they assert "as experience and proficiency increase, anxiety declines in a fairly consistent manner" (p. 111).

CONCLUSION

In order to truly evaluate the listening comprehension ability of the students, language instructors are recommended to first lower the anxiety level of the students in such a way that this effective factor does not interfere with their listening performance. Furthermore, language teachers should teach high anxious listeners those listening strategies that they are not familiar with. Also, they should teach the students that employing a single strategy, like translation from English to Farsi cannot be applied to all situations and having a repertoire of listening strategies that can be employed in different situations is necessary. One of the main reasons of listening anxiety among Iranian language learners is the paucity of exposure to listening input. This negative feeling, which is experienced by vast the majority of language learners, can be reduced by providing excessive amount of comprehensible input inside the classroom by language instructors. Language instructors should also remind language learners that making mistakes and committing errors in the process of learning a new language is quite natural and they should not be afraid of taking risks.

As Stevic (1980) proposed, it is the responsibility of language instructors to provide a secure environment for the students to feel safe for running risks and making guesses. Language instructors should point out that high expectations like expecting to understand every single word in the listening passage brings about anxiety. Giving language learners some opportunities to share the feeling that they experience in listening classes can also be helpful because in this way they can come up with some creative solutions for solving these negative feelings. As the findings of this study revealed, listening anxiety and listening strategy move in two opposite directions, so explicit teaching of listening strategies from the earliest stages of language learning by language instructors is recommended.

The materials writers are recommended to provide listening comprehension materials in different levels of difficulty for language learners. As it was mentioned before, one of the factors that induces anxiety among foreign language learners, especially novice ones, is the rate of delivery. Therefore, for elementary level students, materials writers should provide instructional materials as opposed to authentic listening materials. In addition, authentic listening materials include some vocabularies and structures which are beyond the proficiency level of elementary students. Also, the rate of speech in authentic materials is higher than instructional ones that can frustrate the less proficient listeners. They should also allocate some pages of each chapter to explaining about listening strategies

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that can compensate the lack of comprehension.

Further research can replicate this study using different groups of participants with different cultural backgrounds and proficiency levels. It can consider the significance of age or gender in the anxiety level that participants experience. For instance, male vs. females or adult vs. young language learners. It can also compare the anxiety level in private language classes with public ones. Bilingualism and multilingualism can also affect listening anxiety and listening strategy use that can be brought under scrutiny in further research.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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