ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LISTENING COMPREHENSION MOTIVATION AND LISTENING COMPREHENSION AMONG THE IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

The present study was undertaken to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension (LC) and their English listening comprehension motivation (ELCM). It was also aimed at determining the role of gender and years of university study in LC and ELCM. Sixty four Iranian EFL students (32 males and 32 females), majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the Marvdasht Azad University participated in this study. They included freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Participants' listening comprehension motivation was measured by English listening comprehension motivation scale (ELCMS) developed by Hsu from Chang's Intrinsic Motivation Orientation Scale (2001). A portion of TOEFL test of language proficiency constructed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS, 2001) was used to determine listening comprehension proficiency level of the participants. The results revealed that the relationship between ELCM and LC was positive and significant. That is, the higher the level of ELCM of the students, the higher the score they attained on the LC test and vice versa. This result indicates that ELCM enhances foreign language listening.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the years of university study contributed to the level of listening proficiency. That is, the level of LC proficiency increased as a function of years of university study. Concerning the relationship between ELCM and years of university study, no correlation was found. In addition, in this study the data showed no significant difference between males and females' listening comprehension motivation scores.

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INTRODUCTION

For many years, listening skills did not receive priority in language teaching since it was widely assumed that listening skill is a passive skill, one that should not be thought apart from the other language skills. However, in 1970's, researchers began to understand the importance of listening comprehension (LC) in language development and placed more value on listening skills in their language instruction approaches (Asher, 1977; Gattegno, 1972; Krashen, 1982; Lozanov, 1979; Terrell, 1982). This recognition has inspired researchers to review the factors that may influence LC. Rubin (1994) reviewed more than 120 studies and came to the conclusion that five major factors influence LC: (1) text characteristics, (2) interlocutor characteristics, (3) task characteristics, (4) listener characteristics, and (5) process characteristics. Goh (1998) identified factors that affect learner's LC. The five most important factors were vocabulary, prior knowledge, speech rate, type of input, and speaker's accent. Goh (2000) also identified ten second language (L2) listening problems: five of the problems relate to the perception phase of listening, three to the parsing, and two to the utilization phase. Both more- and less-proficient listeners experienced similar problems. However, research on L2 LC has paid little attention to one of the important dimensions of the listening process, the listener's point of view (Lynch, 1998, as cited in Kim, 2000). One of the listener's individual personality and point of view that can affect LC is motivation which has not received the research attention it deserves. Without having an interest in and a motivation for learning, students get bored with taking part in listening classes. Subsequently, this feeling leads them to acquire passive attitude toward this skill and causes them to make less progress in LC. By taking into account these gaps, that LC still remains a young field that merits greater research attention (Rubin, 1994) and that, to the author's knowledge, no inquiry into relationship between listening comprehension and listening comprehension motivation and individual differences such as gender, and years of university study has been carried out to date in Iran, the author was inspired to carry out above-mentioned research among Iranian EFL learners. The following research questions formed the basis of the study.

1) Is there a significant difference among learners with different years of university study in terms of their performance on the LC test?

2) Is there a significant difference between males and females in their performance on the LC test?

3) Is there a significant difference among learners with different years of university study in terms of their English listening comprehension motivation?

4) Is there a significant difference between males and females in terms of their English listening comprehension motivation?

5) Is there any correlation between Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension motivation and their listening comprehension?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The subjects for this study were sixty four students of Teaching English as a foreign language at Shiraz Azad University in the first semester of Iranian academic year 2010/2011. Of the 64 participants, 50% were males and 50% were females. With respect to years of university studythe length of university study, the participants consisted of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The participants were conveniently sampled as going through randomization was not practical. The consent forms of the subjects were obtained before the study began.

Instruments

The two instruments used to collect data from the subjects included: a) A portion of TOEFL test of language proficiency constructed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS, 2001) was used. The test given to the students consisted of 20 listening questions which aimed to measure their listening comprehension. The attempt was to choose a test that was not available to the students; b) the Persian version of the English Listening Comprehension Motivation Scale (ELCMS) to assess the level of students' motivation for practicing English listening comprehension. The items used in the ELCMS were developed by Hsu from Chang's Intrinsic Motivation Orientation Scale (2001) (see Appendix A). This motivation scale consisted of 24 statements which were scored on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Persian version of ELCM questionnaire was employed, since the author wanted to become sure that the subjects of the study do not have any difficulty in understanding instructions or questionnaire's items. He approved of the similarity between the two versions. The reliability index of the LC test was 0.77, which is high

enough to be satisfactory. The internal consistency of the Persian version of ELCMS administered in this study, which was measured through Cronbach alpha, was .92.

PROCEDURE

Prior to the initiation of the study, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study to demonstrate that the study would be of value to the participants as well as to the entire field of EFL instruction and learning. The participants were also provided with the necessary information about what they were required to do in the study. The current study was conducted in two stages during one of the class meetings of the participants with the approval of their instructors. In the first stage, LC test was administered in the classroom. In the second stage, the ELCMS was distributed among the subjects. The confidential nature of the study and the respondents' anonymity were described to all of the participants.

Data Analysis and Results

The data gathered on the characteristics of the participants under study were analyzed by the following statistical methods, using version 16.0 of SPSS for windows, which is a special software package developed for statistical analysis in the social sciences.

1) The reliability index of the ELCMS questionnaire as well as that of the LC test was obtained using Cronbach alpha.

2) A Pearson correlational analysis was run to test the correlation between ELCMS and LC test scores.

3) T-tests and ANOVAs were run to detect the effects of gender and years of university study on LC and ELCMS.

Descriptive statistics of the LC obtained is displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics for the LC scores

No. of participants	No. of items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
64	20	1	18	8.12	4.13

As can be observed in the above table, the participants' scores on the test ranged from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 18, with an average score of 8.12 and a standard deviation of 4.13. Based on the range (17) and the SD (4.13), the scores are slightly spread along the horizontal axis. The analysis of the scores of different groups of the participants on LC test revealed the descriptive statistics presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Descriptive statistics for different groups of the participants on LC

	N	Mean	SD
freshmen	16	4.25	3.87298
Sophomores	16	6	0.7303
Juniors	16	8.8125	0.83417
Seniors	16	13.4375	1.99896

According to the LC test results, the mean of participants' results increases as the years of university study goes up. Table 3 displays descriptive statistics for males and females' scores on the LC test.

TABLE 3
Descriptive statistics for two sexes on the LC test

	N	Mean	SD
males	32	8.5312	4.48643
females	32	7.7188	3.76944

As can be seen in this Table, the average score of males is 8.5312 with a standard deviation of 4.48643 and that of females is 7.7188 with a standard deviation of 3.76944. Descriptive statistics for the ELCMS scores are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Descriptive statistics for Listening Comprehension Motivation Scale

No. of participants	No. of items	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
64	24	48	84	65.712 5	7.13817

As can be seen in the Table above, the scores ranged between 48 (the score indicating the lowest motivation level in this study) and 84 (the score

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indicating the highest motivation level in this study), with an average score of 65.7125. Quite a wide variability in the scores is shown by standard deviation (7.13817). Table 5 reveals the descriptive statistics for different groups of the participants' scores on LCMS.

TABLE 5
Descriptive statistics for different groups of the participants' scores on LCMS

	N	Mean	SD
freshmen	16	63.6875	8.25202
Sophomores	16	64.125	7.15425
Juniors	16	68.0625	5.75579
Seniors	16	66.975	6.85152

According to the results of LCMS questionnaire, the mean score of the freshmen is 63.6875 with a standard deviation of 8.25202 and that of the sophomores is 64.1250 with a standard deviation of 7.15425. Juniors' average score is 68.0625 and the standard deviation of their scores is 5.75579. Finally, the mean of the seniors' scores is 66.9750 and the standard deviation of their scores is 6.85152. Table 6 displays descriptive statistics for males and females' scores on ELCMS.

TABLE 6
Descriptive statistics for two sexes on the LCMS

	N	Mean	SD
males	32	65.7062	8.03139
females	32	65.7188	6.24879

As can be seen in this Table, the average score of males is 65.7062 with a standard deviation of 8.03139 and that of females is 65.7188 with a standard deviation of 6.24879. To determine the possible effect of gender on LC and FLCA scores, two independent t-tests were run. Table 7 presents the results of the t-test for the LC scores.

TABLE 7
T-test results for the males and females' scores on the LC test

	N	M	SD	T	df	sig
males	32	8.5312	4.48653			
				-0.784	62	0.436
			3.76944			
females	32					
		7.7188				

The data reported in Table 7 reveal no significant difference between males and females' listening comprehension scores (t= -.784 p> 0.05). This means that males and females have performed similarly on the listening comprehension test. Table 8 summarizes the results of the t-test for the males and females' scores on the ELCM questionnaire. .

TABLE 8
T-test results for the males and females' scores on the LCM Scale

	N	M	SD	T	df	sig
males	32	65.7062	8.03139			
				-0.007	62	0.994
females	32	65.7188	6.24879			

As far as the impact of gender on LCMS scores is concerned, the results showed no statistically significant difference between the males and females' scores (t= -.007, p> 0.05). To determine the role of years of university study on LC and ELCMS, two one -way ANOVAs were conducted for both separately. Table 9 shows the results of one-way ANOVA for LC.

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TABLE 9
One-way ANOVA results for the LC scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	771.625	3	257.208	50.869	0
Within Groups	303.375	60	5.056		
Total	1075	63			

A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA), using years of university study as the independent variable, revealed statistically significant differences across the level of LC scores of first, second, third, and forth-year students of English, (F=50.869, df=3, p=0.0001). That is, students LC scores appeared to increase as a function of years of university study. In order to locate the difference between the four groups, a post hoc (Scheffe) test was run. The results of this test appear in Table 10. Table 10 displays the results of Scheffe for the LC scores.

TABLE 10
Scheffe Test on the LC scores

(I) Year	(J) Year	Mean Difference (IJ)	Sig.
freshmen	sophomores	-1.75000	0.195
	juniors	-4.56250*	0
	seniors	-9.18750*	0
sophomores	freshmen	-1.75000	0.195
	juniors	-2.81250*	0.009
	seniors	-7.43750*	0
juniors	freshmen	4.56250*	0
	sophomores	2.81250*	0.009
	seniors	-4.62500*	0
seniors	freshmen	9.18750*	0
	sophomores	7.43750*	0
	juniors	4.62500*	0

The above table clearly shows that seniors outperformed other levels. Moreover, the results show that freshmen and sophomores performed rather similarly on the test. Table 11 summarizes the results of the one-way ANOVA for the LCMS scores.

TABLE 11
One-way ANOVA results for the LCMS scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	219.795	3	73.265	1.47	0.232
Within Groups	2990.275	60	49.838		
Total	3210.07	63			

Table 11 reveals no significant difference (F= 1.470 p> 0.05) in level of LCMS experienced by the four groups of students– freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. To ascertain the relationship between the LC and LCMS scores, Pearson correlation analysis was carried out. Table 12 shows the results of the correlational analysis.

TABLE 12
Pearson correlation between LC and LCMS scores

		LC	LCMS
LC	Pearson Correlation	1	.331**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.008
	N	64	64
LCMS	Pearson Correlation	.331**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.008	
	N	64	64

The results displayed in the above table show a significant positive correlation between the LCMS and the LC scores (p-value= .008, p< 0.05), which indicates that students who obtained higher LCMS had higher LC scores and vice versa.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the research questions presented in this article are dealt with one by one. Each question will be answered based on the findings of the study.

First the results indicated that gender did not play a significant role in Iranian EFL students' LC scores. This result was consistent with the outcomes reported by other researchers who investigated the relation between listening comprehension and gender. For example, Markham (1988) found no significant difference between male and female ESL students in their level of listening comprehension. Bacon (1992) looked at university students of Spanish and failed to find a significant relationship between gender and listening comprehension. Kariminian (2001) studied the

effect of speakers' and listeners' gender on listening comprehension among Iranian EFL learners, also found no significant difference between males and females in their level of listening comprehension. Jafari (2008) also found no significant difference between male and female EFL students in their listening comprehension. The results also indicated that years of university study played a significant role in LC scores. It can be concluded that the level of Iranian EFL learners' LC score is affected by years of university study. This appears reasonable as students become more knowledgeable and develop more strategies to understand spoken message as the result of the increase in years of study. This outcome is consistent with results reported by Jafari (2008) who investigated the relationship between listening comprehension and foreign language classroom anxiety among Iranian EFL learners.

Second, the result of t-test concerning the effect of gender as an independent variable on LCMS as a dependent variable showed no significant difference between male and female in their LCMS. This finding is consistent with the outcomes reported by some researchers. For instance, Chen (2007) who investigated ESL students' learning motivations and learning strategies also found no significant differences between female and male students' motivations. However, this finding contrasts with the results of some other studies in which no significant relation between LCM and gender was observed. For example, Hsu (2006) who investigated listening comprehension motivation among Taiwanese students found that females had a higher motivation than males for learning English and practicing English listening. The results also showed that years of university study does not play a significant role in Iranian EFL learners' LCM. Considering the effect of years of university on LCM one-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference among four groups of the learners.

Third, a significant positive correlation between LCMS and LC was found in this study. This correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. It can be concluded that the higher the level of LCMS, the higher the level of LC and vice versa. This probably indicates that students with higher motivation spent more time, created more opportunities and paid more attention to developing and enhancing their English listening comprehension. Thus, they were more capable of understanding or guessing the main ideas and points of the content they were listening to and as a result they obtained higher scores on their listening comprehension test. This finding is consistent with the findings of Hsu (2006 which showed that there was a high positive correlation between LC scores and LCMS among Taiwanese students. According to Zhang (2000), listening should involve a variety of techniques to motivate students and keep their interests high in the contents. In this

way, students can make good progress in listening comprehension. Also, Dornyei (1990), Gardner and Macintyre (1991), Clement, Dornyei, and Noels (1994) in their studies revealed that motivation is significantly related to second language learning. Failing test might debilitate a student's self-confidence, resulting in anxiety, and a lower motivation for practicing English listening.

Pedagogical Implications

With respect to the results of the present study, a number of pedagogical implications can be provided which might prove useful for language instructors, especially helping them to increase students' level of motivation in the classroom during listening tasks. The present study offers evidence to support the theory that listening comprehension motivation exists in foreign language learning and it has a positive relationship with listening competence. Thus, efforts should be devoted to recognizing factors that can improve EFL learners' motivation. For example, listening text book designers and material developers should provide learners with more real life listening exercises which pave the way to motivate language learners to be involved in listening activities. Students may be motivated to learn and improve their listening comprehension if appropriate listening materials are provided. According to Brown (1994), listening instructions must be intrinsically motivating. He also mentioned that background knowledge plays an important role in the improvement of listening comprehension. Once the lesson content and teaching techniques retrieve listeners' background knowledge and appeal to their interest, listeners are motivated to learn language (Brown, 1994). Teachers should provide positive feedback at every step of listening instruction. As Sheerin (1987, p. 129) pointed out, recurring failure can produce vague but accumulated fear of listening, resulting in a "real psychological barrier to effective listening". Thus, successful listeners should receive appropriate encouraging feedback after finishing each exercise, while unsuccessful learners need to recognize and practice to overcome their weakness with warm support from instructors. Practically speaking, guidance of this kind requires more time and effort from L2 teachers. However, by providing such scaffolding, teachers will give students tools that will allow them to feel they have some control over their listening comprehension. Teachers should try to increase students' motivation in the classroom. In order to achieve such goal, they should try to create an enjoyable, more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom for language learners, prepare and present language activities thoughtfully and carefully based on the learners' needs, produce and develop a warm and friendly relationship with learners, increase the second language self-confidence of

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the learners, make language class bustling and fascinating, and promote learner autonomy.

Limitations

First, it is difficult to measure students' affective variables under the most favorable circumstances because of untruthful or careless responses some subjects may provide. They may be reluctant or unable to report on their own emotional states accurately. Second, it should be pointed out that a correlation between LC and LCM does not automatically imply a direct cause-and-effect relationship because unidentified variables may influence the relationships between LC and LCM scores; therefore, this should be kept in mind when reading the discussion of the results.

Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this study suggest that further research could be undertaken in several ways:

This study can be repeated to validate the current findings and to reveal whether different study conditions or data gathering methods yield similar results.

1) A replication of this study with participants whose mother tongue is not Persian, and who study at different levels (beginner, intermediate, or advanced), would endorse or challenge the findings.

2) The same research with the same procedure can be repeated with other learners using open-ended LCMS questionnaire.

3) Comparative studies with the same procedure can be done on subjects who are studying at other universities and those who study English at private institutes.

4) Learner background and the cultural knowledge of students are some of other factors to consider in the future studies on motivation and listening.

All in all, continued research is needed to further clarify the relation between language motivation and listening comprehension. New findings will increase the understanding of teachers and researchers about the importance of motivation in listening settings, and it is hoped that these

deeper insights will help L2 learners to enhance motivation and increase language achievement.

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Appendix A

English Listening Comprehension Motivation Scale

The following statements are about your own attitudes, concepts, or situations of learning English listening comprehension. Please circle the scales in terms of how well the statements reflect your actual experience,

thoughts, and feelings when you when you are learning listening comprehension.

Directions: Please respond to the following questions using the scale provided:

(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) neutral (4) agree (5) strongly agree

1. I like English listening materials that can arouse my interest in learning.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

2. I do not like to develop English listening comprehension because it makes me too much time.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

3. I think that the person who has great ability in English listening can find a well-paid job more easily.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

4. I often feel bored when learning English listening comprehension.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

5. In order to improve my English listening comprehension, I will try to do the homework well and often spend time practicing it.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

6. I often feel nervous and uncomfortable when learning English listening comprehension.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

7. I often notice the materials and activities concerning English listening comprehension; for example, English program in the radio, English listening materials and tapes, CDs, and various English listening comprehension examinations.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

8. I like to learn English listening comprehension because it is very important, and I feel confident of learning it well.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

9. I think that English listening comprehension will not be helpful to me in the future.

<div align="center">1 2 3 4 5</div>

10. I like to know the culture and customs of other countries, and often feel excited about getting new knowledge and information in English listening comprehension.

1 2 3 4 5

11. I am often unable to concentrate on the content of the materials when practicing English listening.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I attend English comprehension classes in earnest because I want to develop my listening skills and ability in order that I can use it in future.

1 2 3 4 5

13. I often actively show my ability in English listening and speaking in class, and I know I can perform very well.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I believe that I can learn English listening comprehension very well as long as I make a great effort.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I have a sense of achievement when I perform better than others in English listening comprehension class.

1 2 3 4 5

16. Because my English is poor, I do not like to attend English listening comprehension classes.

1 2 3 4 5

17. My purpose of developing the ability in English listening comprehension is to get good grades in tests and to receive compliments of my teachers and my parents.

1 2 3 4 5

18. If I am the only person that can answer the teacher's question, I feel excited.

1 2 3 4 5

19. I hope I can perform better in English listening comprehension than others.

1 2 3 4 5

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20. When I can easily and smoothly understand English by listening, I feel satisfied and have a great confidence.

<p align="center">1 2 3 4 5</p>

21. I hope the teachers and the classmates can notice that my English listening comprehension is better than other students.

<p align="center">1 2 3 4 5</p>

22. After finishing taking English listening comprehension courses, I will not listen to the relevant materials anymore.

<p align="center">1 2 3 4 5</p>

23. I do not like hard English listening materials because those make me feel anxious.

<p align="center">1 2 3 4 5</p>

24. I would like to learn English listening comprehension well because I want to make friends with English speakers and hope to be able to go abroad for advanced study in the future.

<p align="center">1 2 3 4 5</p>