# EFL Learners' Perceptions towards Meta-Cognitive Strategy Use in English Language Listening

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## ABSTRACT

Most Iranian learners face several difficulties when they need to listen to recordings in English or their lecturers' speech in English because they do not know how to employ the listening skills and listening strategies to understand the texts. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to explore how Iranian female freshman learners, who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at tertiary level, listen to English texts in classrooms and what are their perceptions towards the use of meta-cognitive processes and strategies while listening to English texts. 84 Iranian EFL female freshman university learners who are majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), in the west of Esfahan, Iran participated in this study. They are native speakers of Farsi/Persian aged 18. Based on the scores obtained from Oxford Placement Test (OPT), they are placed in intermediate proficiency level category. The descriptive analysis of the four factors of Meta-cognitive Awareness Listening Strategies (planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge) reveals that the learners employ directed knowledge strategies more frequently, followed by planning and evaluating, problem-solving, and personal knowledge strategies respectively. Furthermore, analysis from the qualitative data also supported the use of these four key factors in the meta-cognitive strategies, which contributed to how EFL learners understand and listen to English texts. The study implies that meta-cognitive strategies should be explicitly infused in the teaching and learning of listening activities in the classrooms.

**Keywords:** qualitative; meta-cognitive strategies; listening; freshman; perceptions

## INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies are specific actions considered by learners to facilitate and "make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). It is obvious that learning strategies in general and listening strategies in particular are contributive to second/foreign language learning. According to Yang (2009), learning strategies enable learners to reply to the learning situation and manage their learning in an appropriate and suitable way and allow learners to take more responsibility for their own learning and become autonomous second/foreign language learners. Thus, learners' perceptions towards learning strategies in general and listening strategies in particular will have effect on the sorts of strategies they employ (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986). By taking into account the learners' awareness and perceptions, a better picture of cognitive complexities that differentiate between successful and unsuccessful learners is achieved (Wenden, 1987; Goh, 1997). In Iran, English is learned as a foreign language, for academic purposes only. Memorization of vocabulary items and grammatical points are given much more attention whereas listening activities are not (Yu-Ling, 2005). Therefore, majority of Iranian EFL learners face several difficulties when they

need to listen to texts recordings of English texts or to their lecturers' speech because they do not know how to employ the listening skills and listening strategies to understand the English texts. Hence, this study focused on meta-cognitive listening skills and strategies because listening is essential for second/foreign language learning acquisition. It is considered as an active process of meaning construction in which listeners pay attention to and process oral and relevant visual input in order to understand what is clearly stated and to make all necessary inferences implied in the input (Buck, 2001; Graham, 2006; Vandergrift, 2011). In view of the importance of listening skills and the difficulties experienced by majority of Iranian learners in listening, the purpose of the current study is to illuminate the Iranian EFL freshmen's perceptions towards the use of meta-cognitive processes while engaging in listening activities. An examination of Iranian EFL learners' perceptions towards the use of meta-cognitive strategies may provide a better theoretical understanding of English language learning and acquisition in listening skills; suggesting how the curriculum should be for the Iranian EFL learners. Thus, this study attempts to find out and explore the Iranian EFL learners' perceptions towards the use of meta-cognitive strategies while listening to second/foreign language and how Iranian EFL female freshman university learners listen to English texts in the classroom.

## META-COGNITIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES

A strategy refers to a learner's comprehensive approach to a task; it includes how a learner thinks and performs when planning and evaluating his/her study behavior. A strategy consists of guidelines and rules associated with choosing and selecting the best strategies and making decisions about their use (Cubukcu, 2007). One significant theory of language learning is the cognitive theory that observes the processes through which learners acquire, interpret, remember, and utilize information therefore based on the cognitive theory O'Malley and Chamot (1990) developed their three-category learning strategy model (cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies). Their model describes how strategies are learned and affect the learners' behavior. Their three-category learning strategy model can comprehensively describe what learning and listening strategies are used. Listeners use cognitive strategies to help them monitor learning materials and apply specific techniques in listening tasks such as making inferences. Meanwhile, they use meta-cognitive strategies to plan and decide which listening strategies are best served in a particular situation. Learners also take control of their comprehension and the effectiveness of the chosen strategies by evaluating and determining whether they achieve their listening comprehension goals. Meta-cognitive strategies are important because they regulate and direct the language learning process (Macaro 2001; National Capital Language Resource Centre 2003, 2004; O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Peterson 2001; Vandergrift 1997b). Thus, the research studies related to listening strategies have recently expanded to emphasize learners' cognitive appraisal or their metacognitive knowledge. For example, in these studies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Vandergrift, 2002, 2003, 2005; and Kassaian & Ghadiri, 2011) listeners are requested to explicitly report their perceptions towards themselves, their understanding of listening demands, their cognitive aims, their approach to the listening task, and their strategies Furthermore, many other research studies such as Flowerdew and Miller (2005), Goh (2008), Lynch (1998), Macaro, Graham and Vanderplank (2007), Rubin (1994), Selamat and Sidhu (2011), and Vandergrift (2004) took into consideration new approaches to teaching listening which were influenced by developments in linguistics and cognitive psychology. Meta-cognitive approach is considered to be as one of the most important approaches in teaching and learning listening skills (Chamot, 1995; Mendelsohn, 1995, 1998; Vandergrift, 2004). Meta-cognitive strategies refer to an individual's awareness of thinking and learning: what

the learners are thinking, how they are thinking in relation to a learning task or situation and for what reason they are thinking in a particular way. Meta-cognitive strategies also include the ability to regulate these thinking processes (Flavell, 1976, 1979; Goh, 2008). Moreover, Wenden (1998) asserted that learners who employed their meta-cognitive abilities seemed to be more strategic and fast in learning due to their quality and speed of their cognitive engagement. These learners are also confident in their abilities to learn, and they do not hesitate to obtain help from peers, teachers, or family when needed because they are able to regulate their learning. The learners also provide accurate assessments of why they are successful learners and think clearly about inaccuracies when failure takes place in an activity. Their tactics and strategies matched the learning task and adjustments are made to reflect changing situations, and perceive themselves as continual learners and can successfully cope with new circumstances (Wenden, 1998; Selamat & Sidhu, 2011).

According to Vandergrift (2005), meta-cognitive strategies are employed by learners to manage, regulate, and direct their language learning. The four-factor model (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodatari, 2006) underlying meta-cognitive strategies are: planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge (Figure 1). The first factor in the model is planning and evaluation by which learners get prepared to listen, self-control, evaluate and predict strategies to facilitate their listening comprehension. When the learners are involved in preparation and planning in association with a learning goal, they are thinking about what they need or want and how they intend to achieve it. The learners can identify what is to be achieved while selecting and utilizing particular strategies. They also engage actively in metacognition when they try to evaluate whether what they are doing is effective and impressive (Anderson, 2002). In other words, they have a plan in their head for how they intend to listen, think of similar listening texts that they may have listened to, think back how they listened and about what they might do differently next time, and ask themselves whether they are satisfied with their level of comprehension (Vandergrift et al., 2006). To Vandergrift et al., (2006), the items in this factor-model of meta-cognitive strategies are as follows: having a plan for listening, thinking about similar texts as a guide for listening, having a goal in mind while the learners are listening, periodically checking one's satisfaction with the continuous interpretation while listening to the target language, and evaluating the strategic effect of one's listening efforts. As Richards (1990) believes, these strategies reveal the purposeful nature of the listening comprehension process. The second factor in the model is problem-solving by which the learners try to deduce the meaning of the words that are unknown based on an understanding of familiar words. In other words, the items showing this factor in the model consists of strategies such as utilizing known words to deduce the meaning of the unfamiliar words, utilizing the main idea or gist of a text to deduce unfamiliar words, employing one's experience and general knowledge in interpreting the text, adjusting one's interpretation on understanding that it is incorrect, controlling and monitoring the correctness of one's inferences for accordance with the development of the interpretation, and comparing the development of the interpretation with one's knowledge of the topic (Kintsch, 1998, p. 189; Vandergrift et al., 2006). The third factor in the model is personal knowledge by which the learners use their perceptions to influence and have effect on their anxiety and confidence. Learners feel that listening is a challenge. If learners feel nervous during listening to a task in English, this nervousness can hinder confidence, concentration and their memory abilities which can negatively affect and influence their listening comprehension. The fourth factor is directed knowledge by which the learners try to enhance their concentration when they face with listening difficulties (Vandergrift et al., 2006). In other words, the learners concentrate on the listening texts when they have difficulty understanding. They try to sustain careful attention while listening to a text and get back on listening text when they find out that they have lost concentration and attempt to recover

concentration when attention has drifted (Vandergrift et al., 2006). Therefore, experts believe that one of the ways to develop students' listening skills and strategies is through extensive English listening training (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1996; Swan, 2011). For instance, in the study conducted by Vandergrift (2004), he suggested that a meta-cognitive cycle contributes learners to integrate the use of strategies while listening. Vandergrift used meta-cognitive sequence to facilitate the learners' use of meta-cognitive strategies while listening. The findings of his study revealed that these processes help the learners raise their awareness of the use of strategies and provide a type of scaffolding to the learners as they are involved in listening tasks.
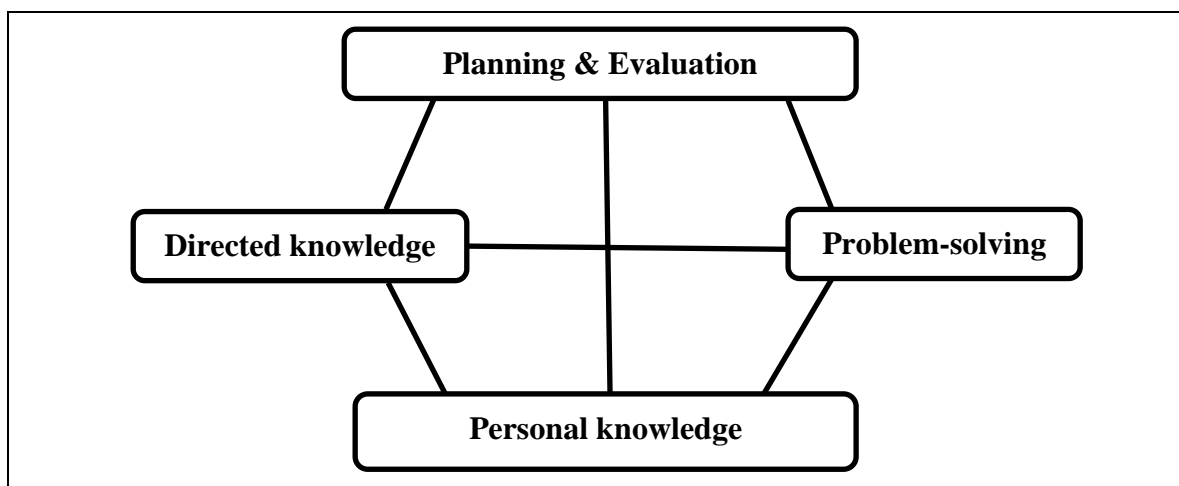


FIGURE 1. The Four-Factor Model (Vandergrift et al., 2006) Underlying Meta-Cognitive Strategies

## THE STUDY

This study used a mixed methodology single-case study research design (quantitative and qualitative). According to Berg (2001), a single-case study research design allows information about particular persons in a group at the micro level as well as the whole population at a macro level be collected. The participants were 84 Iranian EFL female freshman learners studying Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at a university in the west of Esfahan, Iran. A total of six female freshmen (L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, and L6) out of these 84 learners were purposively selected. The participants of the study were all native speakers of Farsi/Persian aged 18 and majoring in English Language Teaching. They were all in intermediate level based on their scores obtained from Oxford Placement Test (OPT) developed by Oxford University Press (Allan, 1992). By using the criteria adapted from the OPT, their scores were between sixty and seventy five (L1=68, L2=66, L3=68, L4=62, L5=73, and L6=70). These freshmen were selected because they were at the beginning level of tertiary/higher education in which they needed to be competent in English language listening skills to make sure that they would be able to overcome the difficulties they face in listening. The data were gathered through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The Meta-cognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) was adapted from Vandergrift et al., (2006). It included five factors (planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, directed knowledge and mental translation) with twenty-one items. However, for this study only four factors (planning and evaluation (five items), problem-solving (six items), personal knowledge (three items), and directed knowledge (four items)) with eighteen items were employed. A five-point Likert-Scale that ranges from one (Strongly Disagree) to five (Strongly Agree) was employed to reveal learners preferences. A semi-

structured interview was also used to achieve an in-depth understanding that is best communicated through detailed examples and rich narratives employed by learners (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The semi-structured interview protocol included questions constructed based on the four basic processes in the meta-cognitive strategy questionnaire suggested by Vandergrift et al., (2006). For example, the interview questions were structured around prepared questions such as: *How would you describe your understanding while listening to someone speaking in English on tapes, radio or in the classroom? When you are in a classroom and listening to tapes in English or to your lecturer speaking in English, what strategies influence your understanding?* In other words, the semi-structured interview was conducted to achieve insights into how Iranian EFL freshman university learners listen to English texts in the classroom and their perceptions towards the use of meta-cognitive strategy. According to Creswell (2002), for the qualitative data, a small size of participants (n) is chosen because the purpose is to learn or comprehend the central phenomenon. The number of people chosen for a qualitative data differs from one study to another because the overall ability of the researcher is to provide an in-depth picture that diminishes with the addition of each new individual and that a total of twenty samples for interview in maximum can be representative of an idea. Similarly, Nielson (1994) cited in Johnstone, Bottsford-Miller and Thompson (2006) suggests that sample sizes as small as five participants will yield enough information about problem-solving behavior.

The semi-structured interviews took about thirty to forty-five minutes on average for each interviewee. The students were also allowed to speak in their first language (Farsi) to enable them to clearly explain their perceptions towards the listening strategies used. The learners were also asked for their opinions on the use of meta-cognitive strategies to enhance their English listening skills in the classroom. All the interviews were tape-recorded so that the researchers do not lose the learners' words. After gathering the data from the semi-structured interviews, the data was transcribed by the researchers. Then the semi-structured interview data was analyzed through an open-coding process to identify the themes. The relevant themes were planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge. After that the axial-coding in which the subthemes were refined, developed and related was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to organize and categorize them as themes and make them more abstract. This was performed by looking again at the interviewees' transcripts' answers personally based on the interview questions and answers. The subthemes connected to one another based on the similarity in implications, they were put together under one category and coded. For example when the learners talked about *getting ready, before listening*, *listening evaluation, background knowledge,* and *listening classroom* which had already been identified in the open-coding as subthemes coded as factors that may have been planned and evaluated. This was termed or coded as "*planning and evaluation*". All the verbatim transcriptions were read and re-read line by line separately so that the researchers can identify the perceptions of the learners towards meta-cognitive strategies employed by each learner. The four factors of the meta-cognitive strategies namely, planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge were employed to gauge the use of each of the category of the strategies. Through the findings, the aim of this study was to identify thematic categories revealing the meta-cognitive strategies that can be employed by the freshman learners and help them become successful listeners. To maintain rigor in the methodology, the researchers utilized the inter-rater degree of agreement to investigate the reliability of the data. Three experts in English Language Teaching field independently compared the coding schemes developed by the researchers (planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge). The experts were given the definition of themes used in this study. Regarding the units of analysis from the

data, the Cohen's Kappa formula (Cohen, 1960) was utilized to calculate the reliability (K) value by averaging the three values. The process produced a high K-value (0.84).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE META-COGNITIVE AWARENESS LISTENING QUESTIONNAIRE (MALQ)

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the four factors of meta-cognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire. As can be seen in Table 1, the mean value for directed knowledge by which the learners try to increase their concentration when encountering listening difficulties (Vandergrift et al., 2006) is 3.68 and a standard deviation of 0.53 among female freshman learners. This implies that the Iranian EFL female freshman university learners employ directed knowledge more frequently than planning and evaluation, problem-solving, and personal knowledge. It also implies that the learners try to focus on the listening texts when they have difficulty understanding. They try to get back on the listening text when they find out that they have lost their concentration. This reveals that the learners' ability to direct their attention to a listening text is an important strategy to make learners understand the listening texts. This can be supported by Kaplan and Berman (2010) who reported that both learners' "executive functioning" and self-regulation are essential factors that enable learners to control their attention consciously (Selamat & Sidhu, 2011, p. 191).

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics for MALQ

| MALQ | N | Mean | SD | RO |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Planning and Evaluation | 84 | 3.55 | 0.49 | 2 |
| Problem-solving | 84 | 3.44 | 0.46 | 3 |
| Personal knowledge | 84 | 3.33 | 0.59 | 4 |
| Directed knowledge | 84 | 3.68 | 0.53 | 1 |

*MALQ= Meta-cognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire, N= Number of participants; SD= Standard Deviation; RO= Rank Order*
*The Percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenth.*

Meanwhile, for planning and evaluation by which learners get prepared to listen, self-control, evaluate and predict strategies to facilitate their listening comprehension, the findings in Table 1 shows that the mean was nearly high (M= 3.55 and SD= 0.49) among the freshman learners. This reveals that the freshman learners can identify what is to be achieved while selecting and using particular strategies. Thus, Richards (1990) believes that these strategies reveal the purposeful nature of the listening comprehension process.

For problem-solving strategies by which the learners try to deduce the meaning of the words that are unfamiliar based on an understanding of known words, the mean was 3.44 and a standard deviation of 0.46). This indicates that Iranian EFL female freshman university learners utilize problem-solving strategies along with other strategies to improve their listening. According to Selamat and Sidhu (2011), problem-solving is considered as a method of enquiry. It is an essential approach to find solutions to a problem.

For personal knowledge by which the learners use their perceptions to affect their anxiety and confidence, the mean was 3.33 and a standard deviation of 0.59. This indicates that the Iranian EFL female freshman learners feel that listening is a challenge. They feel worried and nervous while listening to a task in English. Hence, this nervousness hinders them to have enough confidence and concentration. These findings are certified by the findings of previous research studies that language learners do not see strategies as important

in listening skills and majority of English language learners lack awareness that these strategies could positively influence their listening processes (Cohen & Allison, 2000; Coşkun, 2010; Oxford, 1990; Vandergrift et al., 2006; Selamat & Sidhu, 2011).

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The findings of the semi-structured interview protocol indicated several similarities and differences that emerged in the ways participants reported what and how they employed meta-cognitive strategies. The analysis of the participants' data generated four themes (planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge) which are discussed in the following:

### PLANNING AND EVALUATION

It was found that many learners asserted that reading listening transcriptions, pre-reading false and true statements and multiple-choice questions before entering classrooms are helpful in understanding the listening tasks. This indicates that the learners' perceptions towards the objectives and goals of the English listening texts should be set to make learners succeed. This implies that according to Vandergrift et al., (2006), concentration, determination, having self-confidence, assessing the requirements of the listening task, bringing to consciousness prior knowledge of the topic, the purpose of the listening task can facilitate the EFL English listening comprehension learners. They can also manage their own motivation for the listening texts. For instance, all learners said that *it is good when* [they] *get prepared because* [they know] *what type of text it is and if there is a written text available at the end of the book* [they read] *it before entering the classrooms*. This shows that the learners know that getting prepared before listening can help in their understanding and has a positive effect on their learning and understanding. Thus it implies that pre-listening activities can help learners brainstorm knowledge related to the topic of the listening text and can also brainstorm the strategies conducive to the coping with the upcoming task (Yang, 2009). It was also indicated that all interviewees' prior and background knowledge can contribute them to understand the listening texts more effectively. As they asserted that this factor is important in helping them make decisions to accomplish the objectives and concentrate on the process of listening. For example, four learners (L1, L2, L4, and L6) out of six interviewees said that *listening evaluation should be based on learners background knowledge, listening materials should be clear regarding their quality of voice, environment noise, and the listening texts should be played while the students are in the mood for listening in the classroom.* These demonstrate that the learners' background knowledge and the learning/listening environment where the learners are listening to the English texts such as classrooms and English language laboratory classrooms, the learners' learning styles and motivation can be taken into account to help them understand the listening texts more successfully. Likewise, studies by Rost (1994), Dunkel and Davis (1994), Selamat and Sidhu (2011) reported that a good background knowledge of the students can contribute positively to the understanding of the listening texts.

### PROBLEM-SOLVING

The learners make decisions what problems still exist that avoid them from understanding the listening texts. They deduce the meaning of the words that are unknown to them based on an understanding of the familiar words. They also check the plausibility of their interpretations based on knowledge of the topic and try to guess the meaning of unknown words based on the contextual information within an oral text. In other words, the learners try to find out how

they can solve their problems while listening to oral texts in English. L1, L3, and L6 said that [they try] to *re-listen, concentrate, ask about the subject if it is told by the lecturer, and sit in front of the classroom so that the speakers' voice can be heard more easily*. Also L4 asserted that *by taking notes* [she can] *keep on listening, asking questions if* [she is listening] *to an English speaking lect*urer, *making the learning environment silent and quiet (no noise) particularly while she is listening to English texts on tapes for academic purposes*. These indicate that the learners attempt to avoid problems that they may hinder them from understanding the listening texts. It implies that identification of the existence of the problem such as knowing the definition of the new words can help learners employ particular strategies to understand the listening texts. However, L5 expressed her perception like this [she tries] *to guess the meaning of the new words and sentences from the words and sentences* [she understands]. This indicates that using prior and background knowledge can be essential in finding solutions to problems while listening to an English text. It implies that when learners face with difficulties such as unknown words or phrases in listening to a spoken text, they attempt to find solution for their problems. This means that the learners are able to identify which parts of the spoken text (listening) are difficult to understand. They try to guess the meaning of the unknown words and phrases by linking and connecting them to known words and phrases. Therefore, the use of these strategies can be utilized to perform mental processes and identify the applicable concept and strategy to understand the listening texts.

**PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE**

It refers to knowledge of the cognitive and affective factors that help learners learn and understand more effectively (Wenden, 1991; Selamat & Sidhu, 2011). It also refers to a collection of processes that learners utilize to collect, classify, keep, search, retrieve, and share knowledge in their daily activities (Grundspenkis, 2007).In this study, the findings revealed that listening is one of the most difficult skills among EFL learners. As L2 said *the speech rate is high. If there is no listening transcription at the end of the book*, [she cannot follow] *the words read on tapes or radio*. This implies that the learners would like to read listening transcript while listening. Similarly, L4 asserted that *listening is difficult because of different accents, and lack of audio materials in the textbooks*. However, L6 asserted that *learning listening skills need practice even though they are difficult*. These show that the learners seem not to be aware of most strategies (meta-cognitive strategies) employed while listening to spoken texts in English. Therefore, this lack of awareness can have effect on the learners' listening comprehension. They also indicate that learning listening skills can be a challenge for them. Thus, the learners need to enhance their self-confidence to succeed and try to deal with the difficulties facing in the English listening texts and comprehension. In addition, all interviewees reported that [they try] *to speak with their peers in English although they cannot speak well*. However, L3 said that [she is] *afraid of being laughed at by* [her] *peers and teachers*. This implies that enhancing the EFL learners' self-confidence in learning a second/foreign language is required. Thus, the learners should interact with each other. The fact that most learners attempt to speak to their peers indicates that they try to interact with each other in English in order to hear each other's voice. Thus, in this case the learners try to feel relaxed and think positively while listening to their lecturers or listening texts on tapes in the classroom .This implies that the learners should try not to create English learning anxiety particularly while speaking in their target language (English) or listening to texts in English. To this end, all interviewees' except L5 asserted that *some texts are very difficult, have difficult words, and complex structures*. This shows that if the learners do not have enough background knowledge about the learning materials, they would seem difficult

to them. Thus, it implies that the lecturers and instructors need to provide some prior knowledge about the materials they intend to teach in classrooms and start teaching from simple English listening texts to more difficult ones.

## DIRECTED KNOWLEDGE

The findings also revealed that the learners' perception towards directed knowledge and attention is an essential strategy to make them learn more successfully. This is supported by the viewpoint of Kaplan and Berman (2010) who believe that self-regulation is an important factor to help learners control their attention consciously. For example, the findings of this study demonstrated that most learners tried to have enough concentration and attention while listening. L4 and L6 asserted that [they keep on] *listening in spite of its difficulties*. L2 said [she takes] *notes and concentrate*. Also, they (L1, L2, L4, and L6) pointed out that when some distractions escape their notice, [they] try to *recover immediately their attention and focus*. L5 reported that [she tries] *to make questions and find the answers through listening texts while listening*. This indicates that the learners employ such strategies to keep their concentration and stay focused to overcome the difficulties they face while listening to English texts. It implies that by taking notes and raising questions to ask the person whom the learners are listening to or checking in the textbook through listening transcription at the end of the textbook, learners can focus on the spoken texts more effectively.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the Iranian EFL female freshman university learner's perceptions towards the use of meta-cognitive processes while listening to a spoken text in English and how these learners listen to English texts in the classroom. It is concluded that the learners employed directed knowledge strategies more frequently followed by planning and evaluating, problem-solving, and personal knowledge strategies respectively. Therefore, the use of these meta-cognitive strategies is needed to be infused in the teaching and learning listening skills in the classroom. The learners believe that these strategies play an important role to help them become good foreign language listeners. Thus, there is a need to implement meta-cognitive strategies in teaching and learning textbooks particularly listening textbooks. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview findings supported the use of these four key factors in the meta-cognitive strategies (planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge) to contribute to how EFL learners understand English listening texts. Generally, based on the findings of this study, the use of meta-cognitive strategy awareness is recommended to assist EFL learners to enhance their listening skills and comprehensions. Thus, further research should concentrate on the application of these four strategies and its impact on the learners' listening skills and comprehension. In addition, future studies should also explore the meta-cognitive strategies employed by the learners which can facilitate them to become better foreign language listeners in higher levels of education such as sophomores, juniors and seniors.

It is implied that listening skills are important in EFL contexts such as in Iran. Hence, the explicit meta-cognitive strategy training such as planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge and directed knowledge would contribute to the improvement of the EFL learners in their listening skills and comprehension. Learners need to listen to the spoken texts several times to understand the spoken texts more effectively because their schemata (English language background knowledge) are limited and it is difficult to retrieve the text when it is in their long-term memory. Thus, the high frequency of meta-cognitive strategies among Iranian EFL female university learners in this study seems to prove that

meta-cognitive strategies are essential for improving their English language learning in general and their English listening skills in particular. Similarly, Goh (2000) has stated that by enhancing the learners' knowledge of meta-cognitive strategies, listeners become more active in dealing with listening difficulties instead of simply accepting their problems. According to Liu (2008), the meta-cognitive process involves a listener in a sequence of conscious actions such as analysis of the listening task requirements, activation of appropriate listening processes, making predictions of the task, monitoring and evaluating (Shirani Bidabadi & Yamat, 2011). Therefore, learners should be able to use these four factors of meta-cognitive strategies (planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge) to match their own learning process through planning their learning, monitoring, organizing, setting goals and objectives, considering the purpose, evaluating and help to seek practice opportunities (Oxford 1990, p.136). Moreover, the learning environment should provide effective tools and information resources such as films and video programs for learning activities in classes to help students listen to texts in English. As Cook (2001) asserted that it can be advantageous for learners to listen to authentic language including carefully selected samples of authentic native speech. Thus, textbook designers, curriculum developers and material producers should provide meta-cognitive strategy instructions in the context of this study. For example, they can provide as many different topics in the textbooks, on tapes, CDs, and videos to attract the EFL learners to listen to them. It is worthy to state that more research studies need to be conducted on the EFL learners' perceptions towards meta-cognitive strategies on the learners' listening comprehension. It is hoped that by enhancing the learners' meta-cognitive strategy awareness, the learners can overcome the problems they encounter while listening to spoken texts.

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