

Listening Strategy Instruction: Alleviating Anxiety and Enhancing Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Appropriate top-down, bottom-up balance listening strategies can develop English language learners' listening comprehension and self-efficacy and decrease listening anxiety in EFL contexts. This study aims to apply Yeldham and Grubas' (2016) balance of top-down and bottom-up framework to promote listening skills among 70 participants who were selected from among 120 EFL students from the Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz, Iran. The participants were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group, each comprising 35. The experimental group received training on listening strategies based on the Yeldham and Grubas' framework, while the control group was taught listening strategies based on the PPP (presentation, practice, and production) approach. Pretests and posttests of listening skills were used to assess the effect of the intervention of listening strategies. Data analysis showed that instructing students in listening strategies resulted in a notable enhancement in their listening comprehension, as well as a reduction in anxiety levels related to language learning. Nevertheless, the study found that while students' listening skills improved within the experimental group, their self-efficacy did not. Implications of the study suggest that listening strategies following the above framework can boost learners' listening skills.

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Introduction

The main emphasis of the study is on the importance of top-down, bottom-up balance instruction of listening strategies to improve the learners' listening comprehension skills of Iranian English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. These listening strategies can affect learners' listening anxiety and self-efficacy. PPP approach deals with presentation of the lesson and oral listening comprehension, Yeldham and Grubas' (2016) balance of top-down and bottom-up framework deals with listening skills as a crucial role in understanding language and having genuine conversations with speakers of different languages. It involves utilizing auditory phonetics to overcome challenges in segmenting words, making it a complex task. Furthermore, L2 listening entails both linguistic and world knowledge (Vandergrift & Baker, 2015).

In Iran, in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context, listening skills, compared to speaking, reading, and writing skills, have not received enough attention in research (Rahimirad & Zaree, 2015). The prevailing viewpoint is that L2 listening should not be assumed to develop naturally; rather, it necessitates explicit instruction (Ngo, 2019). This has prompted researchers to investigate the effectiveness of strategic instruction for second language (L2) listening (Ngo, 2019; Yeldham, 2016, 2017).

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Accordingly, listening strategies, which are a category of language learning strategies, are utilized by learners to improve both their linguistic and schematic understanding. These strategies are considered significant components in L2 acquisition as teaching them can enhance the learners' effective application of these strategies to positively link L2 success. Within the Yeldham and Grubas' (2016) framework of top-down, bottom-up balance instruction of listening strategies, listening strategy instruction seeks to enhance learners' capability to identify and implement suitable strategies for effective listening comprehension.

As interest in second language (L2) strategies has grown, researchers (e.g., Cohen, 2011; Yeldham & Grubas, 2016) have begun to explore the application of these strategies in specific L2 tasks and skills. Strategies tailored to particular tasks assist learners in overcoming weaknesses in specific L2-related skills or activities. Among these, strategies for listening have attracted considerable attention. Effective listening comprehension relies on a harmonious combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies with the use of these strategies facilitating the coordination of both approaches. Listening strategies are intentional methods that are used by EFL learners to enhance listening abilities and resolve comprehension challenges. Various instructional programs focused on these strategies have been researched intensively (e.g., Zohrabi & Shokrzadeh, 2017a; 2017b). These programs prepare listeners with the tools needed to navigate real-world listening situations and can improve both understanding of meaning and linguistic processing.

Concerning strategies for instruction, recent research has utilized both explicit teaching methods and more subtle frameworks for metacognitive strategies (Zohrabi & Shokrzadeh, 2017a; 2017b). Explicit strategy instruction entails identifying, demonstrating, teaching, and practicing strategies, which helps students recognize their advantages (Oxford, 2011). On the other hand, implicit models integrate strategy use into various language tasks. The common thread is the acknowledgment that listening skills should not be left to develop naturally through exposure alone.

Due to the findings in the literature of the study on strategy instruction and the scarcity of studies focusing on listening strategy instruction, this study seeks to examine the listening strategies improve EFL learners' listening comprehension and self-efficacy and decrease their listening anxiety. Furthermore, effective use of listening strategies plays a vital role in listening comprehension, boosts self-regulation and autonomy in listening among EFL learners, and relates to listening self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, rooted in socio-cognitive theory, influences individuals' actions and effort allocation in tasks. In L2 research, self-efficacy beliefs impact language achievement and correlate with significant learning attributes, making them pedagogically relevant (Mahdavi et al., (2024).

The study also investigates L2 listening anxiety, a subtype of foreign language anxiety (FLA). FLA encompasses anxiety experienced when using L2 in situations where learners are not highly competent. Listening anxiety is common in L2 listening activities stemming from issues like unclear audio, perceived challenges, unfamiliar tasks, and anxiety over understanding (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Studies suggest that L2 listening anxiety differs from general FLA and has a detrimental impact on L2 listening performance (Russell, 2020; Yu, 2021). EFL learners in Iranian context face listening problems which is affected by anxiety and the lack of self-efficacy. This research gap needs to be explored since these problems are related to the development of listening skills that has been attracted less research attention in recent decades.

Review of the Literature

Although there is a significant amount of research focused on L2 listening comprehension, studies addressing the affective factors and individual differences in listening are still relatively scarce when compared to other language skills (Andringa et al., 2012). According to Mahdavi et al. (2024), considering the complexity many learners associate with L2 listening, there is a pressing need to explore how instructional methods, especially strategy instruction, affect emotional factors linked to listening, such as anxiety and self-efficacy (Kassem, 2015). Successful listening relies not only on cognitive elements and strategy application but also on the individual and emotional traits of L2 listeners making affective variables essential for improving listening skills (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Despite their significance, both listening and its psychological dimensions have not garnered much research focus. Therefore, there is a need for replication studies to further examine the cognitive and affective factors in L2 listening (Vandergrift & Baker, 2015).

It is important to highlight that the application and effectiveness of language learning strategies can differ based on the context (Ngo, 2019; Amani & Mgaïwa, 2023). In Iran, the approach to English language teaching in public schools often emphasizes grammar over communication skills. As a result, many Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) seek out private language centers to enhance their speaking and oral proficiency (Haghighi & Norton, 2016). Nevertheless, these students frequently have limited opportunities to practice spoken English outside of the classroom, which can impede their speaking and listening development. Furthermore, challenges such as inadequate facilities, large class sizes, diverse language backgrounds, lack of materials, and unsuitable evaluation methods have hindered the advancement of communicative skills.

As previously mentioned, there has been some research focused on listening strategy instruction within EFL settings (e.g., Ngo, 2019; Yeldham, 2016, 2018). There appears to be a lack of empirical studies examining how strategy instruction affects affective and personal variables related to L2 listening. The literature includes several studies that provide valuable insights into this subject. For example, Cross (2009) investigated the effects of a metacognitive listening intervention on L2 learners, revealing improvements in their listening knowledge and greater confidence in listening activities. Cross carried out a quasi-experimental study that indicated explicit strategy instruction led to significant enhancements in L2 listening comprehension.

In a separate study, Graham and Santos (2015) discovered that teaching listening strategies significantly improved both listening performance and self-efficacy among French learners in the UK. Additionally, the relationships between the use of listening strategies and personal factors such as anxiety and self-efficacy were analyzed. Moreover, Xu and Huang (2018) examined how listening metacognitive awareness acted as a mediator between listening anxiety and performance, as well as between test anxiety and performance, finding that metacognitive knowledge of listening influenced these connections. Ngo (2019) investigated the impact of a listening strategy instruction program on Vietnamese EFL learners, demonstrating an increased application of listening strategies.

Recent studies in Iran have added valuable insights to this subject. For instance, Movahed (2014) investigated how metacognitive strategy instruction impacted listening performance, metacognitive skills, and listening anxiety in Iranian EFL learners. Findings showed enhancements in listening ability, awareness of metacognitive processes, and a decrease in

anxiety related to listening comprehension. In another study, Rahimirad and Zare-ee (2015) discovered that teaching metacognitive strategies for listening significantly boosted self-efficacy in listening among Iranian EFL learners.

Mohamadpour et al. (2019) examined how effective metacognitive strategy instruction was in alleviating listening anxiety. Golzadeh and Moiiinvaziri (2017) explored the relationship between listening anxiety and awareness of metacognitive strategies in a sample of 105 Iranian EFL learners at upper-intermediate and advanced proficiency levels. They collected data for this correlational study by using the metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire (MALQ) and the foreign language listening anxiety scale (FLLAS). The analysis indicated a negative correlation between learners' listening anxiety and their application of metacognitive strategies. Additionally, listening instruction in Iran generally adopts a product-oriented approach, wherein students are required to listen and respond to questions with minimal guidance (Dahmardeh, 2009). As a result, strategy instruction in second language (L2) listening is frequently lacking in Iranian EFL classrooms, which focus more on listening activities than on teaching and improving listening skills. In light of these research gaps and existing challenges, this study seeks to explore the impact of listening strategy instruction on the listening proficiency, listening anxiety, and listening self-efficacy of Iranian EFL students. Regarding the research gap in the literature of the study, the following research questions (RQs) are formulated as follows:

RQ1. Does top-down, bottom-up balance instruction of listening strategies significantly improve the L2 listening comprehension skills of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners?

RQ 2. How does top-down, bottom-up balance instruction in listening strategies significantly contribute to the enhancement of L2 listening self-efficacy among Iranian EFL learners?

RQ 3. How does top-down, bottom-up balance instruction in listening strategies significantly contribute to decrease of the level of listening anxiety among Iranian EFL learners?

Method

Design

This study employs a stratified random sampling methodology that incorporates pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test evaluations, along with an intervention focused on listening strategy instruction. A quasi-experimental method was utilized with data collection and analysis of the pre and post-test of listening comprehension. In the intervention sessions, strategic teaching was integrated into regular instructional methods by Yeldham and Grubas' (2016) framework of using top-down and bottom-up listening strategies. In this framework, the teachers select integrating suitable top-down and bottom-up listening strategies from the course into listening activities. They also developed in a number of person-related and task-related areas, including their self-efficacy, confidence, motivation and feeling of control over the listening process. The framework uses an instructional cycle as learners receive guidance how to make predictions and check comprehension. They give feedback on their understanding throughout several listening activities like oral comprehension questions, group discussion, peer interactions, etc. The teachers aim to assist students in more effectively managing their use of the above listening strategies.

Participants

The research was carried out at the Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz, Iran. Participants were 70 EFL students who were selected from among 120 students based on their scores on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). All participants were identified as equal to upper-intermediate (B2) level learners, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). They were graduate students enrolled in the TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) master's program at the university. The participants were randomly assigned to two equal groups based on the systematic random sampling method as a control and an experimental group. The learners' demographics are represented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Groups	Educational level	gender	Age
Experimental	B2	Male 11, Female 24	25-28
Control	B2	Male 5, Female 30	21-41
Total			70

Instruments

The study used three instruments including four instruments:

1. Oxford Placement Test (OPT): The English proficiency assessment utilized in this research was created by Allan in 2004. The OPT was implemented to evaluate the general English proficiency of the participants and to verify the uniformity of the two groups. This test features a six-point rating scale that facilitates the identification of learners' proficiency levels in English. The scoring range and their associated proficiency levels are as follows: scores from 0 to 17 denote a basic level (A1), scores between 18 and 29 signify an elementary level (A2), scores from 30 to 39 indicate a lower intermediate level (B1), scores between 40 and 47 categorize learners as upper-intermediate (B2), scores from 48 to 54 represent advanced learners (C1), and scores between 55 and 60 signify highly proficient learners (C2).

In this study, the internal consistency of the OPT, calculated using Cronbach's alpha, was found to be .86, indicating that the test is a reliable measure of English proficiency. The OPT is a validated and commonly used test for English language proficiency, developed by Cambridge English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Oxford University Press.

2. International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Listening Section: To measure the participants' listening comprehension skills, the IELTS listening practice tests (Scovell et al., 2004) were administered as pre-test and post-test. The assessment is divided into four sections, each featuring a different audio recording, where candidates must respond to a

series of questions based on the information presented in each recording including 60 items. The reliability coefficients, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, were .79 for the pre-test and .82 for the post-test measures.

3. Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS): Created by Kim in 2000, the FLLAS was utilized to evaluate listening anxiety both before and following the intervention. It includes 33 items that explore three aspects of L2 listening anxiety: feelings of tension and worry, a lack of confidence, and the challenges faced. This self-report scale is modeled on a Likert-type questionnaire (Horwitz et al., 1986) and showed strong internal consistency in this study, with a Cronbach's alpha of .81.

4. Second Language Listening Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (SLLSQ): The SLLSQ, formulated by Kassem (2015), was used to gauge participants' self-efficacy in L2 listening. This questionnaire comprises 40 items based on a 5-point Likert-type scale, evaluating five subscales: progress, observational comparison, physiological states, strategic awareness, and challenges. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was reported to be .79, as determined by Cronbach's alpha.

Data Collection Procedure

This research employed a mixed-method approach to investigate the effects of listening strategy instruction program on L2 listening cognitive and affective variables. Specifically, this research focused on investigating the effects of a listening strategy instruction program on various L2 listening cognitive and affective variables. However, the study specifically reports on a section of the procedure that examined the impact of strategy instruction on listening anxiety and self-efficacy.

Before initiating the intervention, one session was dedicated to administering the English proficiency test (OPT) to both groups of learners. The purpose of this test was to ensure that the participants were homogenous in terms of language proficiency. Additionally, the listening section of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) was administered as a pretest and post-test following a pilot study to measure the students' listening comprehension ability. Furthermore, aligned with the pretest and posttest, the administration of questionnaires to assess listening anxiety and listening self-efficacy.

During the 12 sessions of intervention, Yeldham and Grubas' (2014) balance of top-down and bottom-up instructional cycle in the experimental group was used. This method believes that it helps learners better coordinate their strategy usage, self-efficacy, and anxiety free listening activities. Students received guidance in making predictions, checking their comprehension, and reflecting on their understanding throughout several listening sessions. In contrast, the control group participated in conventional listening instruction that did not incorporate explicit strategy instruction. Their activities included listening to various texts and responding to comprehension questions without an emphasis on specific strategies. The control group received the PPP approach and dealt with presentation of the lesson and oral listening comprehension. Then in the practice phase, learners practiced what they learned in oral and written activities. Finally, in the production phase, they participated in conversation activities, listening to the CDs and answering the questions. The teacher helped the learners with appropriate feedback and provided them with

class activities that can be seen in any traditional classroom. The materials for both groups were 12 units of Tactics for Listening: Expanding (Richards, 2017).

After completing the strategic instruction intervention, both groups of students were asked to take the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) and the L2 Listening Self-Efficacy Questionnaire as post-tests. The teacher was present during both the pretests and posttests to address any questions or concerns that arose for the students while they completed the questionnaires.

Alongside the quantitative assessments, a semi-structured interview was conducted to collect qualitative data regarding the participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward listening strategy instruction, anxiety reduction, and the enhancement of self-efficacy. The goal of the interview was to draw out detailed responses and insights, with questions crafted based on the research objectives and existing literature. Both the quantitative and qualitative data gathered were examined using relevant statistical methods and thematic analysis, respectively. The results from this analysis were then triangulated to gain a thorough understanding of how listening strategy instruction affects anxiety reduction and improvement in self-efficacy among Iranian EFL learners. During the first week of the intervention for the experimental group, the teacher briefly discussed the significance of teaching listening strategies and provided an overview of the instructional program. The strategy instruction framework utilized in this study was based on Yeldham and Gruba's (2016) model, which combines elements of both embedded and explicit approaches. This approach aims to strike a balance between engaging learners and providing clear guidance. The strategy instruction intervention lasted for 14 weeks and aimed to alleviate listening anxiety and enhance self-efficacy in the participants.

The listening strategy instruction framework employed cognitive and metacognitive strategies to improve their academic language skills. It consisted of five key phases: preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion (see Table 2). The strategy instruction model used in this study encompassed three categories of strategies: top-down, bottom-up, and metacognitive (Bang & Hiver, 2016). Regarding top-down strategies, learners were taught how to predict and infer meaning, utilize contextual clues, and make use of textual markers. Bottom-up strategies focused on cue utilization, recognizing important content words, and understanding discourse and text markers. Metacognitive strategies involve developing awareness of different listening strategies, monitoring comprehension, and problem-solving.

To tackle the research questions, the study utilized appropriate statistical methods for scenarios involving a pretest/posttest design, such as when comparing the effects of two different interventions and measuring results collected before and after the intervention. Independent-sample t-tests were performed to analyze the changes within each group from pretest to posttest of the groups' listening tests. In the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was recruited to elicit the themes that were regarded as participants' perceptions.

The thematic analysis was developed via the two questionnaires via calculating the average scores of the items in each theme. The items that were above the average score were categorized in five qualitative themes.

Results

To assess the impact of the top-down, bottom-up balance instruction of listening strategies intervention on participants' listening comprehension ability, independent samples t-

tests were conducted to compare the listening scores between the pretest and posttest for both the experimental and control groups. The results revealed a significant increase in mean scores for both groups. The results of data analysis aligned with the responses are as follows:

RQ1. Does top-down, bottom-up balance instruction of listening strategies significantly improve the L2 listening comprehension skills of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners?

Table 2

Participants' Pre and Posttest (Paired Samples-t-test)

Groups	Group	M (SD) Pretest	vs. M (SD) Posttest	T	Sig.
Experimental	Exper	28.66 (1.22)	41.66 (2.00)	0.98	0.46
	Contr	30.57 (1.24)	39.57 (1.51)	2.73	0.01

In Table 2, an independent-samples t-test indicates there is no statistically significant difference between the average scores of the two groups in the pretest, $t(0.98) = 0.46, p > .05$. This suggests that both groups had comparable levels of general English ability before the beginning of the intervention. To evaluate the similarity of the two groups regarding their overall English proficiency in the posttest, results compare the average scores of the posttest in two groups as $t(2.73) = 0.01, p < .05$. Results indicate that listening strategies enhanced the experimental group's listening comprehension.

RQ 2. How does top-down, bottom-up balance instruction in listening strategies significantly contribute to the enhancement of L2 listening self-efficacy and alleviate the level of listening anxiety among Iranian EFL learners?

RQ 3. How does top-down, bottom-up balance instruction in listening strategies significantly contribute to decrease of the level of listening anxiety among Iranian EFL learners?

To answer RQ2, the results of Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) and Language Listening Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (SLLSQ) were extracted into five themes qualitatively regarding the average score above three in each item. Thus, the items that are important to elevate listening self-efficacy and alleviate listening anxiety are preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion that are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes of Strategies for Enhancing Listening Self-Efficacy and Alleviating Anxiety

Themes	Exploration of Strategies
Preparation	The teacher encouraged students to think about the strategies they had learned previously (or in the last session).

:	Presentation	<p>Through thinking aloud, the teacher demonstrated the application of a specific strategy using illustrative examples.</p> <p>She provided a brief overview of the listening strategy and gave explicit instructions on when and how to use it effectively.</p> <p>Students discussed the strategy with peers and practiced using it in listening tasks.</p>
:	Practice	<p>Students practiced the learned strategies during listening tasks.</p> <p>Students engaged in peer discussions to determine the selection and effective utilization of strategies.</p> <p>The teacher assisted students who faced difficulties in completing listening tasks or choosing appropriate strategies.</p>
:	Evaluation	<p>Students took time to reflect on how they applied their strategies and their understanding of the listening materials.</p> <p>Students shared feedback and insights on their classmates' use of strategies and their comprehension of the listening texts.</p>
:	Expansion	<p>They were assigned additional listening tasks for homework.</p> <p>Students were motivated to independently apply the strategies they had learned and to cultivate their own personalized set of listening strategies for outside assignments.</p>

Table 3 displays components of teaching via balancing top-down/bottom-up listening strategies include preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion. To manipulate the five themes throughout the class, the following phases are taken:

a) Preparation: This stage involves equipping learners with the necessary background knowledge and strategies before they engage with listening materials. By familiarizing students with the topic, vocabulary, and context, they can approach listening tasks with greater confidence and readiness.

b) Presentation: During this phase, the listening material is introduced in a way that is engaging and accessible. This could involve using varied audio resources, such as dialogues, podcasts, or videos, that cater to different learning styles. Effective presentation techniques can help capture learners' attention and stimulate their interest in the content.

c) Practice: This component emphasizes the importance of repeated exposure to listening tasks. Through diverse practice activities, such as listening for specific information, summarizing spoken texts, or engaging in interactive listening exercises, learners can reinforce their skills and build their confidence over time.

d) Evaluation: Assessing learners' progress and understanding is vital in fostering self-efficacy. Providing constructive feedback on listening tasks allows learners to recognize their

strengths and areas for improvement. This evaluation process can help reduce anxiety by clarifying expectations and highlighting progress.

e) Expansion: Finally, this stage encourages learners to extend their listening experiences beyond the classroom. By engaging with authentic materials, such as films, music, or conversations with native speakers, learners can apply their skills in real-world contexts. This not only enhances their listening abilities but also boosts their self-efficacy and reduces anxiety by providing opportunities for practical application.

In sum, integrating top-down and bottom-up balance instruction through these five elements—preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion—can significantly contribute to improving L2 listening self-efficacy and alleviating listening anxiety among Iranian EFL learners. By fostering a supportive learning environment that addresses both cognitive and emotional aspects of listening, educators can help students become more confident and effective listeners.

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the effects of integrating listening of top-down and bottom-up strategies into the instruction of Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and its effects on learners' attitude elevating listening self-efficacy and alleviating listening anxiety. Utilizing an intervention based on Yeldham and Gruba's (2016) strategy of top-down and bottom-up instruction in the experimental group, the research showed top-down and bottom-up processing is a crucial in enhancing second language (L2) listening self-efficacy and reducing listening anxiety among Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This balance allows learners to effectively integrate their existing knowledge and experiences with new auditory information, thereby improving their overall listening skills. To elevate listening self-efficacy, which refers to a learner's belief in their ability to successfully understand and engage with spoken language, several key instructional components come into play.

The results indicated that the experimental group, which underwent explicit training in listening strategies, outperformed the control group on the listening comprehension test. This outcome supports prior research that has shown the effectiveness of strategy instruction in improving listening comprehension skills. The study highlighted the importance of combining both bottom-up and top-down strategies in teaching listening comprehension, as relying solely on bottom-up approaches led to less favorable results. This result is in line with Zohrabi & Shokrzadeh, 2017a; 2017b) who note that based on the complexity and hidden nature of the listening process further empirical research on L2 listening and its psychological factors, such as anxiety, self-efficacy, and motivation, is suggested across diverse contexts using different interventions. Using stimulated recalls and think-aloud protocols can provide a deeper insight into the effects of strategy instruction on affective variables like anxiety and self-efficacy, which may not be fully captured by self-report scales and semi-structured interviews.

Additionally, the research found that teaching listening strategies notably reduced listening anxiety among Iranian EFL learners. This supports previous studies that emphasized the beneficial impact of strategy instruction on minimizing listening anxiety. These effects are matched with Movahed's (2014) study that the instruction of listening strategies enabled learners to employ strategies such as word guessing and facilitated the processing of unfamiliar vocabulary, consequently reducing anxiety. The interaction between students and the teacher, coupled with regular feedback, fostered a comfortable and supportive learning environment,

contributing to anxiety reduction. The use of strategies also empowered learners, enhancing their self-confidence, which further mitigated anxiety levels.

Nonetheless, the research did not find a marked enhancement in listening self-efficacy among students who were taught strategies, in comparison to those in the control group. Both cohorts showed a rise in listening self-efficacy, which may have been influenced by their engagement with a range of listening tasks and activities throughout the instructional period. It was proposed that the short length of the intervention and the lack of clear verbal articulation of the strategies by the participants could account for the negligible difference in self-efficacy between the two groups.

A balanced approach that combines top-down and bottom-up strategies aids learners in building confidence in their abilities and alleviating anxiety. Top-down processing utilizes prior knowledge and contextual cues to interpret spoken language, enabling students to make informed guesses about the meaning of what they hear. This result is aligned with Yeldham (2016; 2017) whose studies emphasize the role of joining the two listening strategies to encourage learners to concentrate on the overall message rather than becoming overwhelmed by individual words or phrases, which is particularly advantageous in rapid conversations or when encountering unfamiliar accents. Conversely, bottom-up processing highlights the significance of decoding the actual sounds and words in spoken language. By participating in activities that improve phonemic awareness and vocabulary recognition, students can enhance their capacity to comprehend speech in real-time. Techniques such as listening to recordings, working with transcripts, and engaging in interactive listening exercises can assist learners in developing their foundational skills.

By integrating top-down and bottom-up strategies while cultivating a supportive learning atmosphere, educators can enable students to manage their listening anxiety. As students gain confidence in their listening skills, they are more inclined to engage actively in discussions, thereby improving their communication abilities and facilitating their language acquisition process. This is consistent with Rahimirad and Zaree (2015) who believe that practice can help learners convert their anxiety into a catalyst for development, leading to more effective and meaningful interactions during their language learning journey. Consequently, the combined top-down and bottom-up approach not only creates a more encouraging educational environment but also provides students with essential skills to handle real-world listening scenarios more adeptly. Ultimately, enhancing L2 listening self-efficacy and reducing listening anxiety are crucial elements in advancing overall language proficiency, contributing to a more enjoyable and successful learning experience for Iranian EFL students.

Conclusion

Checking the comprehension of EFL learners' comprehension regarding language skills and significantly impacts their language learning progress (Rabani et al., 2024). The application of both top-down and bottom-up instructional methods in listening strategies is essential for enhancing the listening abilities of second language (L2) learners, especially among Iranian students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Top-down strategies leverage prior knowledge, contextual cues, and predictions to interpret spoken language, whereas bottom-up strategies concentrate on analyzing the actual sounds, words, and phrases to grasp the intended message. By combining these two methodologies, learners can achieve a more thorough comprehension of the listening process. This balanced approach not only boosts their listening

self-efficacy—referring to their confidence in their capacity to comprehend spoken English effectively—but also alleviates the listening anxiety that many learners face. Listening anxiety can significantly obstruct effective communication and language learning. When students experience anxiety regarding their listening skills, it can impede their performance and willingness to participate in discussions. Nevertheless, by employing focused strategies that highlight both top-down and bottom-up processing, learners can build confidence in their abilities.

Listening anxiety poses a considerable challenge to effective communication and language acquisition, affecting not just individual learners but also the overall dynamics of classroom interactions. When students are anxious about their listening capabilities, it can hinder their performance and willingness to engage in conversations, resulting in a cycle of frustration and disengagement. This anxiety often arises from various factors, including the fear of making errors, past negative experiences, or the pressure to comprehend every word spoken during a conversation. Furthermore, establishing a nurturing and low-stress atmosphere is essential for reducing listening anxiety. Educators can cultivate a sense of community by promoting collaboration and peer assistance, enabling students to hone their listening abilities in a secure environment. Integrating activities that encourage active listening, such as group discussions, role-playing, and listening games, can also enhance students' comfort and engagement.

The study underscored the need for EFL educators to incorporate explicit listening strategy instruction into their classrooms to enhance learners' listening proficiency, reduce anxiety, and foster motivation and self-efficacy. It emphasized the importance of equipping teachers with the necessary training and competencies to effectively implement strategy instruction. This is consistent with Russell (2020) who notes listening strategies like online and classroom collaboration highlight the significance of cultivating a positive attitude towards strategy use among learners to maximize the benefits of strategic instruction.

Ultimately, future studies might investigate how various approaches to teaching listening strategies impact listening skills, anxiety, and self-confidence among a broader range of learners with different language proficiency levels (Zhang, 2013). This could involve implementing various listening tasks across multiple genres to gain a more thorough insight into the advantages and effectiveness of strategy instruction. Additionally, the relationship between L2 skill-specific anxiety and the use of strategies has not been widely examined.

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