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A Listening Strategy Instruction and Iranian EFL Learners' Micro and Macro Listening Comprehension

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A B S T R A C T

This study was an attempt to investigate the effect of strategy instruction on micro and macro listening comprehension among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners. The researcher chose 60 male and female EFL learners whose homogeneity was determined through administering an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) at the beginning of the study. The participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group which was taught by strategy instruction, and the control group, which was taught without strategy instruction. The instrument utilized in this study was a listening test, the test was used as both the pretest and posttest. A number of independent samples t tests were conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in developing the macro and micro listening of EFL learners in the two groups and to find the possible significant difference in listening comprehension development of EFL learners regarding macro and micro skills through strategy instruction. The results revealed that strategy instruction significantly enhanced EFL learners' macro and micro listening. Based upon the findings of the study, it can be concluded that strategy can be a tool for EFL learners to develop their listening and their aural production. The outcome of this study can be used by curriculum developers and English language teachers to consider the importance of strategy instruction.

Keywords: Listening comprehension, Listening strategy, Micro-skill, Macro-skill.

INTRODUCTION

One of the basic skill on which EFL classrooms try to focus, is listening. Many theorists and scholars have looked and have commented differently to approach this skill(Rasouli, Mollakhan, & Karbalaei, 2013; L Vandergrift, 2007; Young, 1997). Rasouli et al. (2013), stated that "As most English teachers in Iran believe, although we may know a lot about the nature of listening and the role of listening inside and outside the classroom, L2 listening has been considered to be an overlooked skill in comparison to three other language skills". Besides oral tasks are also considered another kind of activities which are used to evaluate EFL learners' understanding of listening contents and details.

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Rasouli et al. (2013), mentioned that listening is an effective skill which can develop faster in comparison to the speaking skill and often can have an effect in the development of reading and writing abilities in learning a new language. Young (1997), believed that listening is not an easy skill to acquire because it requires listeners to make meaning from the oral input by drawing upon their background knowledge of the world and of the second language. Meanwhile, (Larry Vandergrift, 2003); L Vandergrift (2007), asserts that listening is a complex, active process of interpretation in which listeners try to suit what they hear with their prior knowledge.

Buck (2001), that he asserts listeners' involvement can be different for example as a component of social action (e.g. conversational listening), listening for information academic listening (e.g. lectures), listening for pleasure (e.g. radio or movies), or for other reasons. Micro-skill listening is contrasted with macro-skill listening; Macro-skill listening involves listening to a recording to get a general understanding but micro-skill listening on the other hand involves more detailed analysis of the language used or listening for specific information or even the exact word of a phrase or expression. Listening for specific information involves finding the answers to specific questions(Kim, 2004). The theoretical notions underlying testing practice are not always explicit; however, each test item is based on particular theoretical notions about the nature of the construct being measured(Buck, 2001). Based on the basic principles of the research, present study will assess the micro and macro-skills of listening.

Oxford (2003), describes learning strategies as specific behaviors or thought processes that students use to enhance their own L2 learning. Learning strategies can also enable students to become more autonomous and independent. Therefore, the present study investigated the effect of listening strategy instruction on micro-skill and macro-skill listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

The problem of listening comprehension and what learners face as obstacles have been discussed in general by Jung (2003), he said that comprehension historically has received only minimal treatment in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL), but it is, in fact, one of the most important skills a second language (L2) learner must master to succeed in academic studies. Listening strategy instruction for developing listening comprehension, is a technique on which this study focused. Hayati and Jalilifar (2009), believed that a problem that listeners often address is the rapid disappearance of the content of what they listen to; they also mentioned that "many language learners claim that as they listen, they can follow the speakers with some ease, but when it comes to remembering it sometime later, they find themselves behind eight balls.

Listening comprehension may seem relatively straightforward to native language speakers but it is often a source of frustration for second and foreign language learners(Graham, 2006). Listening comprehension problems of EFL learners, specially in Iranian context have always been the center of attention in many studies but less attention has been paid to the use of listening strategy instruction with which developing listening comprehension can occur. The language practitioners are usually unaware of the impact of listening strategy instruction on macro-skill and micro-skill listening of EFL learners. Besides, the demand for better teaching material to improve listening comprehension of EFL learners and a better context of learning inspired the present researcher to conduct a study in which listening strategy instruction is used to see its effects on EFL learners' listening comprehension. Its effect on micro-skill and macro-skill listening comprehension of the language learners is also another focus in this respect. That is, language teachers are expected to know the different reactions that learners show when they are exposed to listening strategy instruction to promote their micro-skill and macro-skill listening.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted with an experimental and quantitative design. This study enjoyed a pretest and posttest experimental design that was carried out over a period of around 8 weeks. Firstly, homogenous participants were assigned to two groups.

The researcher applied two different methods to teaching to the participants in the study. The experimental group have exposed to strategy teaching for listening skill, while the control group didn't have such exposures.

The participants in this study were non-randomly chosen from among 80 intermediate male and female Iranian EFL learners, aged 17-22, studying English at the intermediate level classes of Pars language Institute in Isfahan.

In order to make sure in objective terms that the learners were truly homogenous with regard to their English proficiency level, an Oxford Placement Test was given to them. After obtaining the proficiency test results, it was decided to choose those participants. This being so, 60 participants who had this homogeneity criterion were selected and assigned to the two groups (one experimental and one control) involved in the study (30 students each).

A number of different instruments including an OPT, a pretest and a posttest were utilized at different phases of this study.

Oxford Placement Test (OPT): An OPT was administered to guarantee the subjects' homogeneity in terms of their English proficiency level. In fact, it was used to exclude from the study those students whose English proficiency level differed significantly from that of the others and to neutralize the subject selection effect. This OPT test contained 50 multiple-choice questions, and the participants' responses were scored on a scale of 100 points.

The rationale behind the application of OPT was two-fold: (1) OPT was deemed to be more appropriate than the other available tests for the intermediate-level subjects of this study. That is to say, the participants in this study were believed to be more familiar with the structure of OPT, and therefore they were expected to take the test with complete peace of mind. (2) OPT appeared to fully serve the purpose of the researcher to include homogenous participants in the experiment.

Pretest

Since this study was designed to focus on listening comprehension development of Iranian EFL learners after certain types of instructional activities were employed by the use of two different types of method in teaching them listening, a pretest was administered prior to the treatment phase of the study to assess the performance of the participants on the listening in general and macro and micro-skill listening in particular. As such, a pretest was constructed to assess the learners' listening prior to any type of treatment. The pretest contained different questions to which the participants had to respond according to the listening files; as the focus of the study was on two subcategories of listening skill, the questions were of two kinds, some on details of them to assess the micro-skill listening and the others on general ideas of them which are expected to assess the macro skill listening.

In order to start each part of the test, the participants were asked different questions regarding the taught contexts and vocabularies of the material.

In fact, this listening test served as the pretest and posttest in the study to collect the relevant data; however, in order to avoid practice effect, the questions designed for each test were different.

Moreover, for the sake of validity the listening items and questions were chosen from the question bank of the taught material (Top Notch, 2013), and then they were presented to some experts in the field and their validity was approved. In addition, to gain reliability of the test, the tests were administered in a pilot study among 9 intermediate EFL learners, then the reliability of this test was calculated by Cronbach Alpha Formula which was 0.91. The test included 20 multiple-choice items. The grades were calculated out of 20.

Posttest

In order to assess the learners' listening comprehension performance development and their macro and micro-skill of listening in focus after the treatment, the posttest was administered. It should be noted that the posttest resembled the pretest in form and was parallel to it in nature. That is, the posttest consisted of a listening test to assess the learners' performance after the strategy instructional activities were undertaken during the treatment. The posttest contained different questions to which the participants had to respond according to the detail or general idea of the listening voices. The validity and reliability of the posttest gained through the same procedure used for the pretest.

Procedure

The study was conducted at the beginning of the semester. After establishing the homogeneity of some EFL learners in terms of their language proficiency through OPT, participants were chosen, and divided into two groups, namely experimental and control groups.

At the beginning of the semester, a pretest was administered and at the end of the semester the posttest was conducted to assess the listening macro and micro-skill of the participants.

As Hariri (2014), cited in her article on strategy instruction, many scholars as Khavazi, Yousefi, and Kharaghani (2018), noted that using effective listening strategies are useful for both understanding spoken communication and language acquisition. According to Laviosa (1991), the efficacy or inefficacy of the employed strategies depends on the individual perceptions of the learners about the problems and their ability to use different strategies and making harmony between them. One of the major goals of the present research study was to achieve a more concrete operationalization of strategy instruction and to investigate their potentially facilitative effects on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension specially their macro and micro-skills. So, listening tests were given tests to the learners as pretest and posttest.

One week prior to the first treatment session, the participants took the pretest. Then, every group participated in different instructional sessions. The experimental group received the strategy instruction as their treatment while the control group had regular class process in teaching listening which consisted of playing the listening twice and do the tasks in their materials. Strategies had been chosen to support the listening activities were prediction, transfer, and visualization adopted from Chamot (2005). Prediction helped learners be prepared for listening by thinking, in advance, about types of information or words they might hear based upon what they already knew about the topic. The uses of transfer and visualization for listening were similar to those for learning vocabulary. That is, transfer encouraged recognizing cognates, and visualization encouraged students to picture what they heard instead of translating the words into English. One day after the last instructional session, the posttest, which was parallel in nature to the pretest was conducted.

Since this study was designed to focus on the listening skill development of Iranian EFL learners after certain types of treatment were employed, a pretest and a posttest were administered to assess the participants' aural performance and listening skill in focus prior to and after the treatment phase of the study. Both tests consisted of different questions to which the students were required to respond by using taught content and focusing on details and

general ideas of listening. Participants' responses to pretest and posttest items were scored.

In order to answer the research questions in focus in this study, and to examine the relevant hypotheses, after collecting data, quantitative analysis were performed on the data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20.0).

In order to answer the research questions, a number of independent sample *t* tests were run to examine whether there was significant difference between Iranian intermediate EFL learners who were taught listening strategy and those without such instruction in enhancing listening macro and micro-skill. A number of other independent sample *t* tests were run to compare the means of two groups in posttest. In fact, first of all descriptive statistics were computed, and to see whether the mean differences were significant or not the researcher ran inferential statistics on pretest and posttest of the two groups.

RESULTS

As was pointed out above, to select the participants of the study, a placement test was administered to assign the learners to the two groups of control and experimental. What follows is the results of the pretest and posttest before and after the treatment.

The results of the pretest regarding learners' micro listening skill are shown in the following table and the accompanying figure.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Micro Listening Skill in Pretest

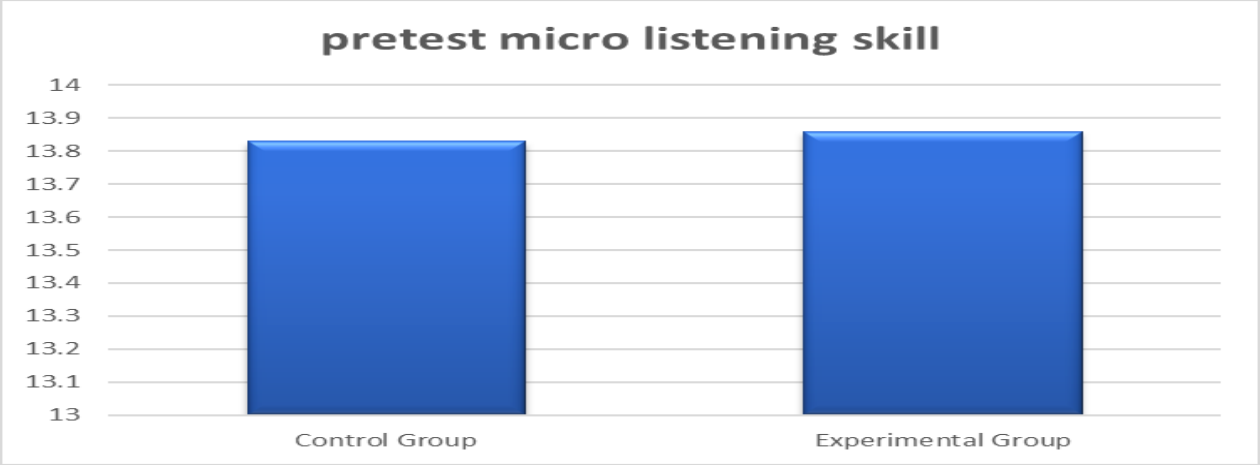
	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest micro	Control Group	30	13.8333	1.31525	.24013
	Experimental Group	30	13.8667	1.22428	.22352

The learners' mean scores on the pretest regarding their micro listening skill were 13.83 in control group and 13.86 in experimental group. As it is shown there is a slight difference between the mean of two groups. To see whether this difference is statistically significant an independent *t* test run and the result are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Results of the Independent-Samples t Test for Comparing Experimental and Control Groups' Micro Listening Skill in Pretest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		F.	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest micro	Equal Variances Assumed	0.087	0.769	-0.102	58	0.919	-0.03333	0.32806	-0.690	0.623
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-0.102	57.705	0.919	-0.03333	0.32806	-0.690	0.623

Inasmuch as the *p* value was greater than the specified level of significance (.91 > .05), it could be argued that the difference between the pretest mean scores of the two groups regarding their micro listening skill did not reach statistical significance. This also is shown in the bar graph below.



Graph 1. Pretest Mean Scores for Micro Skill Listening

Considering the pretest and learners' performance on it regarding macro listening skill the following tables and figure are shown in this part.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Macro Listening Skill in Pretest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest macro	Control Group	30	14.0000	1.14470	.20899
	Experimental Group	30	14.0667	1.36289	.24883

On the pretest, the mean score of the experimental group (M = 14.06) was slightly greater than that of the control group (M = 14). Next table shows that this difference between the two mean scores was not statistically significant.

Table 4. Results of the Independent-Samples t Test for Comparing Experimental and Control Groups' Micro Listening Skill in Pretest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		F.	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest macro	Equal Variances Assumed	1.153	0.287	-0.20	58	0.838	-0.06667	0.32495	-0.717	0.583
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-0.20	56.32	0.838	-0.06667	0.32495	-0.717	0.584

The difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the pretest regarding their macro listening skill failed to reach statistical significance since the Sig. (2-tailed) value was found to be greater than the significance level (0.838 > .05). This lack of statistical significance for the difference between the groups pretest scores is also graphically shown in the figure below.

Graph 2. Pretest Mean Scores for Micro Skill Listening

Next two tables summarize the results of the learners' micro listening performance on the posttest. While the mean score of the experimental group on the posttest was 16.50, that of the control group turned out to be 14.80.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the Micro Listening Skill in Posttest

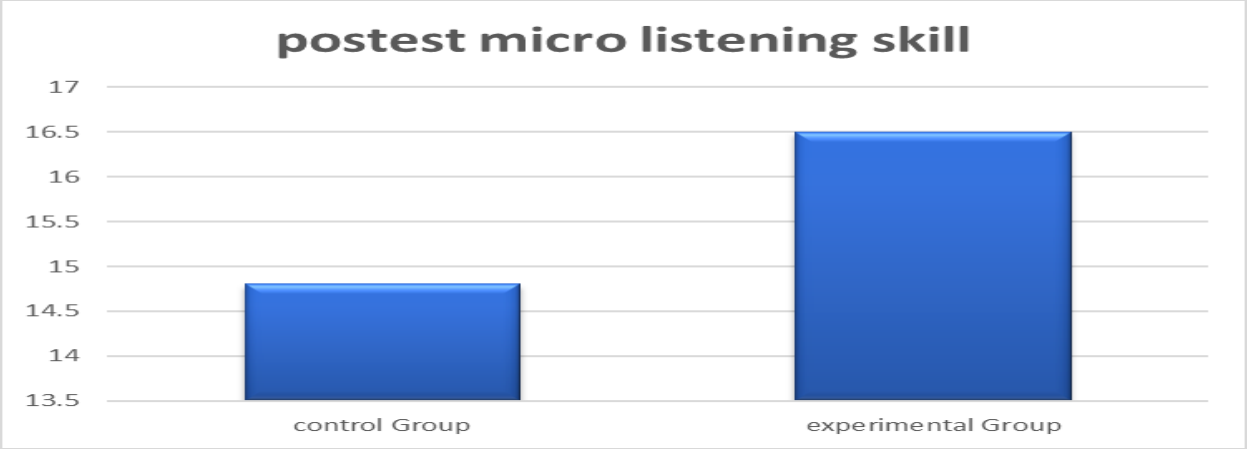
	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest micro	Control Group	30	14.80	1.21485	0.22180
	Experimental Group	30	16.50	1.25258	0.22869

The *p* value under the *Sig.* (2-tailed column) in statistics determines whether the difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on the posttest was statistically significant or not.

Table 6. Results of the Independent-Samples t Test for Comparing Experimental and Control Groups' Micro Listening Skill in Posttest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		F.	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest micro	Equal Variances Assumed	0.225	0.637	-5.33	58	0.0000	-1.700	0.31858	-2.33	-1.06
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-5.33	57.9	0.000	-1.700	0.31858	-2.33	-1.06

Since *p* was less than the alpha level (.000 < .05) in the table, it could be reasonably argued that the difference between the two groups' mean scores on the posttest was statistically meaningful. This would mean that strategy instruction had a significant effect on the micro listening skill of the learners. The next bar graph also illustrates this difference between the two groups on posttest.



Graph 3. Posttest Mean Scores for Micro Skill Listening

According to this bar graph, there is no escaping the fact that on the posttest, the experimental group, which experienced strategy instruction, substantially outperformed the control group, which was exposed to conventional classroom based instruction considering their micro listening skill.

The second research question stated whether there was significant difference between experimental group and control group regarding their macro listening skill. In order to embark on testing the second null hypothesis and find the answer of the second research question another independent samples *t* test was used to see if strategy instruction had a significant effect on the macro listening performance of learners in the experimental group comparing with that of control group. The following two tables summarize the results of the experimental and control group learners' macro listening performance on the posttest. As it is shown, the mean score of the experimental group for macro listening skill on the posttest was 16.66, while the control group mean score turned out to be 14.86.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for the Macro Listening Skill in Posttest

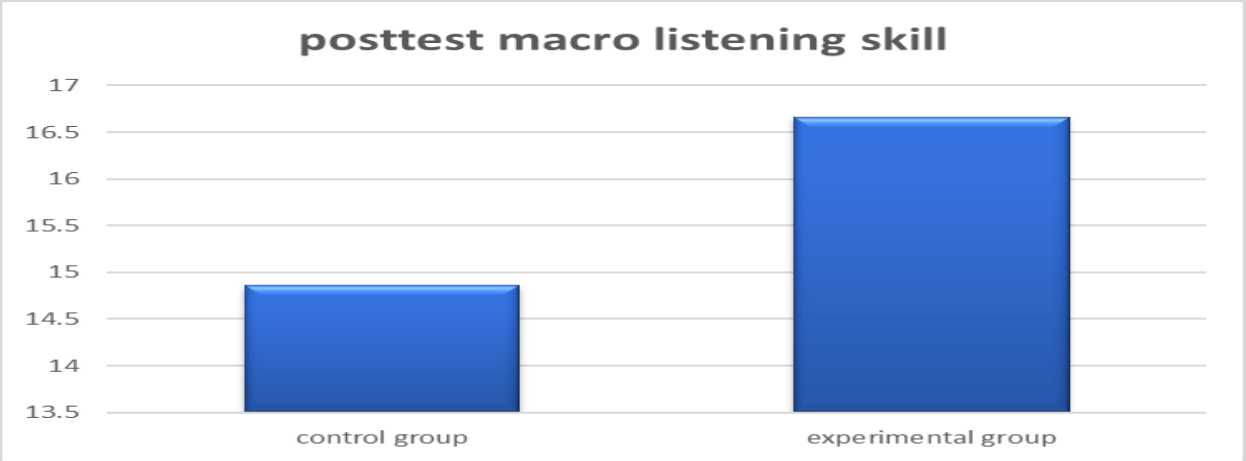
	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest macro	Control Group	30	14.8667	1.19578	0.21832
	Experimental Group	30	16.6667	1.26854	0.23160

The *p* value under the *Sig*. (2-tailed column) in the next table determines whether the difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups for macro listening skill on the posttest was statistically significant or not.

Table 8. Results of the Independent-Samples t Test for Comparing Experimental and Control Groups' Macro Listening Skill in Posttest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		F.	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest macro	Equal Variances Assumed	0.387	0.536	-5.65	58	0.000	-1.80000	0.31828	-2.437	-1.16
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-5.65	57.7	0.000	-1.80000	0.31828	-2.43	-1.16

Since *p* is not more than the alpha level (.00 > .050) in the statistics, it can be claimed that the difference between the two group mean scores for macro listening skill on the posttest was statistically significant. This would mean that strategy instruction also had a significant effect on the learners' listening comprehension with respect to macro. The bar graph below also illustrates this significant difference between two groups.



Graph 4. Posttest Mean Scores for Macro Skill Listening

As it can be seen in the bar graph, although the mean score of experimental group is a higher than that of control group, the difference between males and females' mean scores is much high to be significant.

CONCLUSION

This section provides a specific discussion for each research question and makes attempt to link each finding to the existing literature.

The findings of this study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in micro and macro listening skills. Lots of other studies have confirmed this result of our study in general that strategy instruction can help learners develop their language learning. As mentioned in literature O'Malley, Chamot, and Küpper (1989), and Thompson and Rubin (1996), obtained the same result as they instructed their learners listening strategies in experiments and came up significant improvement in listening comprehension.

Opposed to what the present study results Tütüniş (2001), found that after 1 year strategy instruction the difference of experimental group was not significant comparing with that of control group. This study revealed that strategy instruction also needs to be considered according to some factors like learners' level of proficiency, abilities, and learning style. Bai (2011), also in a correlational study investigated the relationship between strategy instruction and listening comprehension; it has been found that there is a meaningful relationship between strategy instruction and learners' listening comprehension.

Similarly in Iranian context the findings of the present study are in line with Hosseini (2013), who found that instruction in listening strategy can influence listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. Tabeei, Tabrizi, and Ahmadi (2013), also investigated the effect of strategy instruction on learners' listening instruction. Their study found that strategy instruction could positively influence learners' listening comprehension.

The researcher has not found any studies considering the exact effect of strategy instruction on the Iranian micro and macro listening comprehension. The final result of our study showed that strategy instruction significantly has a positive effect on EFL learners' Micro and macro listening skills and according to the observations of the groups the learners had more motivation in experimental group to use the taught skills while being exposed to the listening text.

According to many researchers Bai (2011), O'Malley et al. (1989), Rost (2013), and Larry Vandergrift (1999), listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listeners actively receive and process the aural input, compound the information and then interpret it. It has also been confirmed by many of them that strategy instruction plays an important role in development of listening comprehension.

Based on the findings of this study, strategy instruction has wonderful and significant effect on Iranian EFL leaners' listening comprehension in general and micro and macro listening skills in particular.

As it has been mentioned in Chapter Two, teachers should be more at the core of language teaching, allowing for the exploration of teaching from the inside(Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Considering the importance of strategy instruction for learners, the present study revealed that teachers also should be aware of this fact and be familiar with the instruction of strategy in EFL classes.

The study also led to some other conclusions. The observed and investigated facts of the present study are coming to the conclusion as that of Oxford's (1990) statement that the leaning strategies by learners makes learning easier faster and more enjoyable. The learners in experimental group who received strategy instruction had more motivation to apply the taught strategies and enjoy the class in comparing with control group learners.

Generally speaking, although there were a few exceptions, almost all listening comprehension problems of the EFL leaners in experimental group were solved in their posttest.

The main implication of this study is that strategy instruction can be used as a helpful way to draw learners' attention to the correct way of comprehending the listening to English text by Iranian EFL learners. This study is probably to draw language teachers' and researchers' attention to the effect of strategy instruction while the learners are involved in learning a foreign language and listening tasks. In fact, this kind of instruction plays a very critical role in learning and teaching a foreign or second language and more specifically in micro and macro listening comprehension.

It seems that learning a foreign language learning strategies can influence EFL learners' overall language abilities especially macro and micro listening skills. Also as O'malley, O'Malley, Chamot, and O'Malley (1990), focused the cognitive stage and associative stage are both important while using strategies of language learning and they can be automatic when they are used by learners subconsciously.

Strategy instruction is good way of omitting learners problems in listening comprehension and can facilitate learning through the nature they have which they are basically problem oriented(Ellis & Ellis, 1994). Such results can also come to mind in developing language learning materials and the learners who are the user of such materials; this fact has been also mention by Ellis and Ellis (1994), that "Strategy use varies considerably as a result of both the kind of task the learner is engaged in and individual learner preferences". Therefore, practitioners who work on developing language materials are also welcome to include explicit

exercises and tasks on strategy use. In this way, learners can make way not only in better comprehension of the general idea of listening they encounter but also in comprehension of more accurate details of it.

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