

Listening Anxiety and Its Relationship with Listening Strategy Use and Listening Comprehension among Iranian IELTS Learners

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating listening anxiety and its relationship with listening strategy use and listening comprehension among Iranian IELTS learners. Sixty-three IELTS learners from two language institutes in Shiraz were selected for this study. To collect the data, four instruments were used: a Background Questionnaire developed by Lee (1997), a Listening Anxiety Questionnaire developed by Kim (2000), Lee's (1997) Listening Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire and an IELTS listening test. The results revealed that listening anxiety had negative correlation with listening comprehension and listening strategy use. Moreover, the findings showed that low anxious learners used metacognitive strategies more than did high anxious learners. In relation to cognitive and social/affective strategies, the two groups did not differ significantly. Low anxious learners also performed better in the listening comprehension test. Regarding learner characteristics, it was revealed that female learners were more anxious than male learners. Years of studying English also had a significant negative effect on IELTS learners' anxiety.

Keywords: listening anxiety, listening strategy use, listening comprehension, IELTS learner

1. Introduction

For some time, educators have recognized the existence of foreign language anxiety and its potential for significant interference with language learning and production. In 1986, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope defined FL anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128).

In fact, it is widely accepted that anxiety plays a crucial role while learning a foreign language. The impact of such an emotional arousal in language learning has long been considered in language classroom. Much of the past studies have been conducted on the aspect of anxiety associated with oral production in L2; however, recently interest has been extended to cover all language skills (Kimura, 2008). One of these skills is listening.

During listening process, different factors may cause uneasiness and tension for language learners and result in poor listening. Young (1992) stated that poor listening ability results from many factors, such as insufficient emphasis on listening, immature teaching methodologies, ineffective listening strategies, and students' lack of vocabulary, but the increasingly important one is anxiety. It plays a very important role because the anticipation of foreign language use in receiving information can provoke anxiety.

According to Scarcella and Oxford (1992), listening anxiety occurs when students face a task they feel is too difficult or unfamiliar. Young (1992) also stated that listening comprehension is highly anxiety-provoking if the discourse is incomprehensible. Learners may feel anxious while listening in the target language due to some difficulties associated with FL listening. Generally, as defined by Oxford (1993) listening is a complex, problem-solving skill and it is more than just perception of the sounds. Listening includes comprehension of meaning-bearing words, phrases, clauses, sentences and connected discourse. It is usually a hard skill to master in one's own language, let alone in another language.

Besides, such difficulties may be increased during international exams. In relation to listening section of IELTS, Rasti (2009) stated that most IELTS candidates find listening as one of the most difficult sections of IELTS due to the fact that it is both fast and confusing. Moreover, perhaps the biggest problem that candidates have with the

IELTS academic listening test is that the listening recording is only played once. Therefore, they fear from losing some parts while listening.

In this respect, because listening is a challenging skill for foreign language learners in general and causes difficulty, developing effective listening strategies may help to overcome many problems related to target language listening. These strategies are the steps taken by learners to help them acquire, store, retrieve, and use information (O'Malley, Chamot, & Küpper, 1989). Carefully designed listening strategy use can enhance the performance of the learners and help promote learner autonomy (Mendelsohn, 1994).

2. Objectives of the Study

This study intends to investigate whether FL listening anxiety is related to listening strategies used by Iranian IELTS learners, and whether this anxiety affects students' listening comprehension. A major goal is to determine whether listening anxiety and listening strategy use are separate phenomena in the IELTS learners' language classroom. The secondary aim of this study is to examine the relationship between listening anxiety and listening comprehension and to evaluate this anxiety across two learner characteristics: gender and years of studying English.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Listening Anxiety

While learning a foreign language, listening becomes more important as learners need to understand what is said to them for successful communication. Rivers (1981) stated that the necessity of developing listening skill for a FL learner as aural comprehension is the essential element in an act of communication. However, this skill is usually anxiety provoking. Christenberry (2003) underlined the problematic nature of listening and stressed that it is an incredibly difficult area to teach properly; thus, it is likely to cause anxiety. Furthermore, Vogely (1999) clearly emphasized that one of the most ignored but potentially one of the most debilitating type of anxiety is the anxiety accompanying listening comprehension. MacIntyre (1995) believed that listeners in L2 worry about misunderstanding or non-understanding, and they fear embarrassing outcomes. Chastain (1979) also stated that since listening is a complex skill, students have the fear of understanding the message and interpreting it correctly.

With regard to the cause of listening anxiety, Gonen (2009) stated that learners may feel anxious while listening in the target language due to many factors such as the authenticity of the listening text, incomprehensibility of the listening material and some external environmental factors like noise and inaudibility. According to Dunkel (1991), why many students complain about the difficulties of listening in FL may also depend on feelings of inadequacies or lack of confidence.

Other variables were identified by Vogely (1998), who looked at sources of listening anxiety among learners of Spanish at an American university, as reported by the students themselves. Half of their responses focused on the characteristics of the input (nature of the speech, level of difficulty, lack of clarity, lack of visual support, and lack of repetition) as being a major source of anxiety.

3.2 Studies Conducted on Listening Anxiety

Different studies have been conducted on listening anxiety in foreign language context. For example, in 2000, Kim studied the foreign language listening anxiety. One of the main findings of her study was the two-factor solution of her factor analysis of the foreign language listening anxiety scale: tension and worry over English listening and lack of confidence in listening, respectively. She also found a moderate association between listening anxiety and listening proficiency and demonstrated the somewhat obvious case that listening anxiety interferes with foreign language listening. Chang (2008a) also conducted a study to investigate college students' listening anxiety in learning English in a classroom context. The result indicated that participants showed moderately high intensity of anxiety in listening to spoken English, but were more anxious in testing than in general situations.

In 2007, Legac conducted a study to examine the foreign language anxiety and listening skill in Croatian monolingual and bilingual students of EFL. The result indicated that bilingual students experienced a considerably lower intensity of listening anxiety than monolingual students.

With respect to using some strategies to reduce listening anxiety, Chang (2008b) investigated the effect of four forms of listening support (pre-teaching of content and vocabulary, question preview, and repeated input) on the anxiety levels of college students in Taiwan. The result indicated that prior to the test, the test takers were uniformly anxious but afterwards, there were significant differences in anxiety according to type of support and level of proficiency. Ko (2010) explored the impact of pedagogical agents in computer-based listening

instruction on EFL students' listening anxiety levels and listening comprehension skills. Results showed that there were no statistical differences in listening anxiety levels and listening comprehension skills between students who worked with the agent and students who worked without the agent. Gonen (2009) conducted a study to investigate the listening strategy and listening anxiety of sixty intermediate English proficiency students. The results revealed that when there is an increase in FL listening anxiety of the students, FL listening strategy use decreases.

These studies also support the findings of the recent studies conducted on the relationship between general classroom anxiety and strategy use. For example, Sioson (2011) and Lu and Liu (2011) found a negative correlation between strategy use and anxiety level.

Some other studies also considered the relationship between listening anxiety and gender. For example, Elkhafaihi (2005), Ko (2010) and Campbel (1999) found no significant difference between male and female learners in their listening anxiety.

Moreover, some studies investigated the relationship between listening anxiety and listening proficiency. Aneiro (1989) found that the apprehension of her Puerto Rican college students was most affected by their level of listening proficiency, followed by the amount of exposure to the foreign language and their general language competence. Elkhafaihi (2005), Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006) and Wang (2010) have also obtained evidence that learners' anxiety varies according to their level of ability in foreign language listening.

Chang (2010) examined the second language listening anxiety before and after one year intervention in extensive listening compared to standard foreign language instruction. The result indicated that extensive listening group improved more compared to the formal instruction group in listening competence.

Kimura (2011) also used a self-presentational framework to investigate second language listening anxiety among university students learning English in Japan and demonstrated that L2 listening involved social concerns that were specific to L2 settings. The result showed that L2 listening anxiety was specific to L2 situations and linked to L2 proficiency.

3.3 Listening Comprehension Strategies

In order to understand the meaning of listening strategies, at first, it is better to know the meaning of language learning strategies. Language learning strategies are "the techniques or devices that a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (Rubin, 1975, p. 43). Oxford and Crookall (1989) stated that language learning strategies are steps taken by learner to enhance the acquisition, storage and retention.

"Listening strategies refer to skills or methods for listeners to directly or indirectly achieve the purpose of listening comprehension of the spoken input" (Ho, 2006, p. 25). According to Gonen(2009), "As for listening, employment of listening strategy use is of crucial importance due to the online processing that takes place during listening. That is, learners have to decode the message, understand and interpret it in the course of listening" (p. 45).

Such strategies are divided into three main groups. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Vandergrift (1997) believed that listeners use metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies to facilitate comprehension and to make their learning more effective. Metacognitive strategies are important because they oversee, regulate or direct the language learning process. Cognitive strategies manipulate the material to be learned or apply a specific technique to a listening task. Socio-affective strategies describe the techniques listeners use to collaborate with others, to verify understanding and to lower anxiety.

In relation to metacognitive strategies, Vandergrift (1999) stated that metacognitive strategy is a kind of self-regulated learning. It includes the attempt to plan, check, monitor, select, revise, and evaluate, etc. It can be discussed through pre-listening planning strategies, while-listening monitoring strategies, and post-listening evaluation strategies.

Cognitive strategies are problem-solving that learners employ to manipulate their learning tasks and facilitate acquisition of knowledge or skills (Derry & Murphy, 1986). Examples of cognitive strategies in the field of listening include predicting, inferencing, elaborating, and visualizing. Moreover, cognitive strategies are related to comprehending and storing input in working memory or long-term memory for later retrieval. They are investigated from the aspects of bottom-up strategies and top-down strategies.

For social/affective strategies, Vandergrift (2003) defined the strategies as the techniques listeners use to collaborate with others, to verify understanding or to lower anxiety. Habte-Gabr (2006) believed that social/affective strategies are those which are non-academic in nature and involve stimulating learning through

establishing a level of empathy between the instructor and student. They consist of factors such as emotions and attitudes. It was essential for listeners to know how to reduce the anxiety, feel confident in doing listening tasks, and promote personal motivation in improving listening competence (Vandergrift, 1997).

3.4 Studies Conducted on Listening Strategy Use

Different studies have been conducted on listening strategies, for example, Fujita (1984) investigated the listening strategies of Japanese beginning college students. He found that the predominant strategies used by participants were translation and note taking. In 2002, Goh conducted a study to examine a group of Chinese ESL learners' listening strategies and the tactics that operationalized these strategies. It was found that although the participants used many similar strategies, the higher ability listeners demonstrated more effective use of both cognitive and metacognitive tactics.

In Vandergrift's (2003) investigation, which aimed to examine the relationship between listening proficiency and listening strategy use, 36 junior high school students of French in Canada were recruited for listening strategy elicitations. It was found that the more proficient listeners employed metacognitive strategies more frequently than did the less proficient listeners, and the variations in this type of strategy use had a statistically significant relation across the listening ability.

Hsueh-Jui (2008) studied the interrelationship between learners' listening strategy use across listening ability, and learning style. He found that there was a statistically significant difference between the strategy use and the attainment levels. The findings also suggested that listening strategy use was significantly associated with learning styles.

Some studies were also conducted in Iran. For example, Ahmadi and Yamini (2003) aimed to explore the relationship between field-dependence/field-independence and the use of listening comprehension strategies. Their findings indicated that metacognitive, memory, cognitive and social strategies were significantly related to the cognitive style, whereas affective and compensatory strategies did not show a significant correlation. They also found that field-independent listeners used metacognitive, memory, and cognitive strategies more frequently than their field-dependent counterparts, but field-dependent students made more use of social strategies than field-independent students.

Recently, Bidabadi and Yamat (2010) conducted a study on the relationship between the listening strategies and learning style preference. The results indicated that the learners employed metacognitive listening strategies such as planning, direct attention and selective attention the most and in terms of learning style preferences they considered themselves as communicative learners. The Pearson Correlation analysis showed that there was a statistically significant association between learning style preferences and listening strategies employed by Iranian EFL freshman university students.

In brief, different studies have been conducted on listening anxiety and listening strategy use (Wang, 2010; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Fujita, 1984; Ahmadi & Yamini, 2003; Bidabadi & Yamat, 2010). However, these two phenomena were considered separately. Actually, the relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategy use was of little interest, especially in Iranian EFL context. Moreover, listening anxiety scales are still new in the field of foreign language education and listening anxiety is believed to be generally high among language learners (Kim & Cha, 2010). Therefore, this study aims at filling the gap in the recent literature on listening anxiety and its relationship with listening strategy use and listening comprehension.

4. Research Questions

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. Is there a correlation between Iranian IELTS learners' listening anxiety and listening strategy use?
2. Is there a correlation between Iranian IELTS learners' listening anxiety and listening comprehension?
3. Do students with high and low levels of listening anxiety differ in their listening strategy use?
4. Do students with high and low levels of listening anxiety differ in their listening comprehension?
5. Do IELTS learners' levels of listening anxiety differ across categories of gender and years of studying English?

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 63 IELTS learners. They were all native speakers of Persian. They consisted of 29 males and 34 females. They attended IELTS listening and speaking preparation course in two language institutes in Shiraz. The sampling strategy for selection was convenient sampling.

5.2 Instruments

The first data collection instrument used in this study was a Background Questionnaire developed by Lee (1997) and cited in Ho (2006). It asked about students' name, gender, age and years of studying English. The second instrument was the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) developed by Kim (2000) and cited in Kilic (2007). The questionnaire consisted of 33 Likert-scale items. The response continuum was 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. Kim (2000) used factor analysis, internal consistency and test-retest reliability for this instrument. The result of internal consistency estimated for reliability was 0.93 and test-retest reliability was 0.84 (Kilic, 2007; Kimura, 2008). In this study, the internal consistency estimated for reliability of these 33 items was $\alpha = 0.84$.

The third instrument was a sample of IELTS listening test. It consisted of 40 items divided into 4 parts. This sample was administered to obtain IELTS learners' level of listening comprehension. The last instrument was the Listening Strategy Use Questionnaire developed by Lee (1997) and modified by Ho (2006). The questionnaire was also modified by the researcher and some more strategies were added to it based on Vandergrift's (1997, 2003) cognitive and metacognitive listening strategy classification and O'malley and Chamot's (1990) language learning strategy. The scale consisted of 39 items divided into 3 categories of metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective. The internal consistency estimated for reliability of these 39 items was 0.92. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix.

Classification of 39 Strategies in the English Listening Comprehension Strategy Scale:

✓	Metacognitive strategies	
	Pre-listening planning strategies	Statements No. 1-3
	While-listening monitoring strategies	Statements No. 4-6
	Post-listening evaluation strategies	Statements No 7-10
✓	Cognitive strategies	
	Cognitive formal practicing strategies	Statements No. 11, 12, 17, 18
	Cognitive translation	Statements No. 13
	Cognitive bottom-up strategies	Statements No. 14-16 & 33
	Cognitive top-down strategies	Statements No. 19-32
✓	Social/affective strategies	
	Social strategies	Statements No. 34-35
	Affective strategies	Statements No. 36-39

5.3 Data Collection Procedure

In this study, after obtaining the IELTS teachers' permission for conducting the research, the background questionnaire and anxiety questionnaire were distributed. The next session, listening comprehension test was administered. The time for administration was about 30 minutes. Finally, listening strategy use questionnaire was distributed. Since giving all questionnaires in one session might make the students tired and bored and affect their answers, the questionnaires were distributed in two different sessions.

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Relationship between Listening Anxiety and Listening Strategy Use

Table 1 shows the relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategy use. Pearson r indicates a negative correlation between listening anxiety and listening strategy use with $r = -.32$ and $p < .05$. The negative correlation between the two variables indicates that the increase in learners' anxiety level is associated with the decrease in the strategies.

Table 1. Relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategy use

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig(2-tailed)</i>
Anxiety	87.36	15.86	63	-.32**	.009
Strategy	116.84	24.85	63		

6.2 Relationship between Listening Anxiety and Listening Comprehension

As Table 2 shows, a significant negative correlation was found between listening anxiety and listening comprehension with $r = -.63$ and $p < .05$. Based on the result obtained, when IELTS learners' level of listening anxiety increased, their listening comprehension decreased.

Table 2. Relationship between listening anxiety and listening comprehension

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig (2-tailed)</i>
Anxiety	87.36	15.86	63	-.63**	.000
Listening	4.93	1.18	63		

6.3 Difference between High and Low Anxious Learners' Listening Strategies

To determine the high and low anxious learners, the median score was calculated which was found to be 88. Those who scored above the median were considered as highly anxious, and students whose scores fell below the median were put in the low group. The scores of the two groups of high and low anxious learners were compared using independent samples t-test.

Considering metacognitive strategies (Tables 3 & 4), the mean of low anxious learners is 34.67 and the mean of high anxious learners is 29.15. The data below, $t_{61} = 3.22$ ($p < .05$), show that the two groups differ significantly. However, they do not differ in the use of cognitive and social/affective strategies.

Tables 5 and 6 show the subcategories of strategy categories. Based on the data, $t_{61} = 1.88$ ($p > .05$), there is no significant difference between high and low groups in the use of pre-listening planning strategies. However, these two groups differ in the use of while-listening monitoring strategies with $t_{61} = 2.12$ ($p < .05$) and post-listening evaluation strategies with $t_{55.60} = 2.17$ ($p < .05$). Considering cognitive strategies, two groups differ in the use of formal practicing strategies with $t_{55.60} = 2.17$ ($p < .05$). However, they do not differ in the use of translation, top-down and bottom-up strategies. Moreover, in the use of social and affective strategies, high and low anxious learners do not differ significantly.

Table 3. Mean and Std. deviation of high and low anxious learners' listening strategy use

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Metacognitive	low	31	34.67	6.61	1.18
	high	32	29.15	6.96	1.23
Cognitive	low	31	69.90	15.12	2.71
	high	32	64.28	19.63	3.47
Social/affective	low	31	18.54	4.75	.85
	high	32	17.18	5.28	.93

Table 4. Independent sample t-test for high and low anxious learners' listening strategies use

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	<i>Mean</i> <i>Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error</i> <i>Difference</i>
Metacognitive	.011	.91	3.22	61	.002	5.52	1.71
Cognitive	3.134	.082	1.27	61	.209	5.62	4.42
Social/Affective	.740	.393	1.07	61	.288	1.36	1.26

Table 5. Mean and Std. deviation of high and low anxious learners in the use of subcategories of strategy categories

	Code	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.</i> <i>Deviation</i>	<i>Std.</i> <i>Error Mean</i>
Planning	low	31	10.77	2.47	.44
	high	32	9.46	2.98	.52
Monitoring	low	31	10.35	2.36	.42
	high	32	9.06	2.47	.43
Evaluation	low	31	13.54	3.74	.67
	high	32	10.62	3.68	.65
Formal	low	31	11.48	3.40	.61
Practicing	high	32	9.18	4.86	.85
Translation	low	31	2.67	1.32	.23
	high	32	2.37	1.31	.23
Bottom up	low	31	11.51	2.42	.43
	high	32	10.28	3.23	.57
Top down	low	31	44.22	9.77	1.75
	high	32	42.43	12.13	2.14
Social	low	31	5.35	1.90	.34
	high	32	4.71	2.21	.39
Affective	low	31	13.19	3.40	.61
	high	32	12.46	3.65	.64

Table 6. Independent sample t-test for high and low anxious learners' use of subcategories of strategy categories

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>
Planning	1.971	.165	1.88	61	.06	1.30	.69
Monitoring	.053	.819	2.12	61	.03	1.29	.60
Evaluation	.100	.752	3.12	61	.00	2.92	.93
Formal Practicing	18.46	.000	2.17	55.60	.03	2.29	1.05
Translation	.081	.77	.90	61	.36	.30	.33
Bottom Up	7.67	.007	1.71	57.37	.09	1.23	.71
Top Down	1.027	.315	.64	61	.52	1.78	2.78
Social	.80	.37	1.21	61	.22	.63	.52
Affective	.34	.56	.81	61	.41	.72	.88

6.4 Difference between High and Low Anxious Learners' Listening Comprehension

Based on the data obtained (Table 7 & 8), the mean of low anxious learners is 5.48 and the mean of high anxious learners is 4.40. Moreover, the data, $t_{53,92} = 3.98$ ($p < .05$), show that the two groups differ significantly.

Table 7. Mean and Std. deviation of high and low anxious learners' listening comprehension

	code	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
listening	low	31	5.48	1.23	.22
	high	32	4.40	.87	.15

Table 8. Independent sample t-test for high and low anxious learners' listening comprehension

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>
Listening	5.059	.028	3.98	53.92	.000	1.07	.27

6.5 Listening Anxiety across Gender and Years of Studying English

For obtaining the IELTS learners' listening anxiety across gender and years of studying English, Two-Way ANOVA was calculated. As Table 9 shows, ($p < .05$), there is a significant difference between male and female learners in their listening anxiety. In fact, female learners were more anxious than male learners.

Years of studying English were divided into four parts: one to three, four to six, seven to nine and ten to twelve years. As Table 9 displays, ($p < .05$), significant differences were found between these groups in relation to anxiety. That is, years of studying English had significant positive effects on IELTS learners' listening anxiety.

Table 10 displays the Scheffe test for difference between the years of studying English. As can be seen, there are significant differences between the students with one to three years and students with seven to nine years and ten

to twelve years of studying English. The students with one to three years of studying English had more anxiety in comparison to the other groups. However, the other groups did not differ significantly.

Table 9. Two way ANOVA for gender difference and years of studying English

<i>Source</i>	<i>Type III Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Corrected Model	5964.67	7	852.09	4.86	.000
Intercept	347703.24	1	347703.24	1984.62	.000
gender	2220.82	1	2220.82	12.67	.001
Years	2348.75	3	782.92	4.46	.007
gender * years	496.83	3	165.61	.94	.425
Error	9635.92	55	175.19		
Total	496458.00	63			
Corrected Total	15600.60	62			

Table 10. Scheffe test for difference between the years of studying English

<i>Years of Study</i>	<i>Years of Study</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1-3	3-6	10.55	4.16	.105
	7-9	16.06*	4.99	.022
	10-12	18.34*	5.45	.016
4-6	1-3	-10.55	4.16	.105
	7-9	5.51	4.64	.705
	10-12	7.79	5.14	.519
7-9	1-3	-16.06*	4.99	.022
	4-6	-5.51	4.64	.705
	10-12	2.27	5.83	.985
10-12	1-3	-18.3464*	5.45	.016
	4-6	-7.79	5.14	.519
	7-9	-2.27	5.83	.985

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between IELTS learners' listening anxiety, their listening strategy use and listening comprehension. It also aimed at finding the listening anxiety of IELTS learners across learner characteristics. Based on the findings, the relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategy use showed a negative correlation. The findings are in line with the findings of the studies conducted by Chang (2008b) and Gonen (2009). Gonen (2009) found that when there is an increase in FL listening anxiety, FL listening strategy use decreases. With respect to the relationship between classroom anxiety and general strategy use, it also supports the findings of Sioson (2011) and Lu and Liu (2011). Sioson (2011) stated that "because LLSs are specific techniques that enable learners to cope and manage their learning, there might have been an increase in their self-confidence, thus lowering their anxiety" (p. 20).

Based on the results obtained, there is a negative correlation between IELTS learners' listening anxiety and listening comprehension. When students' anxiety increases, their comprehension of listening tasks decreases. This finding is in line with the findings of Aneiro (1989), Elkhafaifi (2005), Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006), Chang (2010), Wang (2010) and Kimura (2011). These studies also revealed that learners' anxiety varies according to their level of ability in foreign language listening.

In this study, high and low anxious learners differed in the use of metacognitive strategies. Low anxious learners used more metacognitive strategies than did high anxious learners. However, these two groups did not differ in the use of cognitive and social/affective strategies. In terms of the relationship between anxiety and metacognitive strategies, Sioson (2011) stated that when students use more metacognitive strategies, they have less feelings of communication apprehension, fear, and general feelings of anxiety. This is probably because metacognitive strategies deal with goal setting, planning and monitoring of learning, which somehow lessen anxiety, thus, possibly making them more confident. However, in terms of two other groups of strategies, cognitive and social/affective, the two groups did not differ significantly. In relation to subcategories of metacognitive strategies, low anxious learners used while-listening monitoring and post-listening evaluation strategies more than did high anxious learners. Low anxious learners also used cognitive formal practicing strategies more than other cognitive strategies. However, these two groups did not differ in the use of social and affective strategies.

High and low anxious learners also differed in their listening comprehension. In fact, low anxious learners performed better in their listening comprehension tasks. Regarding the effect of gender on listening anxiety, the findings showed that female learners were more anxious than male learners. This finding is in contrast to the results reported by Ko (2010), Elkhafaifi (2005) and Campbell (1999) who found that gender had no effect on students listening anxiety. The findings also revealed that the students with one to three years of studying English were more anxious than the students with seven to nine and ten to twelve years of studying English. In fact, years of studying English had significant positive effect on listening anxiety.

The findings obtained from the present study may offer the following implications. As was already mentioned, listening anxiety may increase during international exams such as IELTS and TOEFL, because the listening section of these exams is only played once. Therefore, IELTS instructors can acquaint IELTS learners with the importance of listening strategies and possible methods to apply these strategies in order to reduce their listening anxiety and enhance their listening comprehension. Specifically, training students in using metacognitive strategies can be helpful in reducing IELTS learners' listening anxiety. Moreover, syllabus designers and IELTS materials developers can provide techniques, strategies and helpful hints in order to help learners reduce their anxiety and become more proficient listeners. Since these strategies are general in the area of listening skill, all advanced EFL learners can use them to reduce their listening anxiety and increase their comprehension.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Listening Comprehension Strategy Scale

Advanced organization	1. Before listening, I clarify the objective of an anticipated listening task and/or propose strategies for handling it.
Direct attention	2. Before listening, I concentrate my mind on the listening task and don't pay attention to things that distract my attention.
Selective attention	3. Before listening, I scan the questions first, and then decide to listen for specific aspects of scripts.
Self management	4. While listening, I try to keep up with the speed.
Self monitoring	5. While listening, I ask myself what I am listening to, or how much I have understood.
refocusing	6. I am answer of my inattention and will make myself refocus on the material.
Self evaluation	7. After listening, I self check my listening comprehension and try to correct my errors.
Comprehension monitoring	8. After listening, I look up dictionary to check my comprehension.
Problem identification	9. After listening, I reflect on my problems or difficulties, such as, the speech rate was too fast, or the linkage was hard to identify.
Evaluation	10. After listening, I use a checklist to evaluate my listening progress.
Previewing	11. Before listening, I preview the lesson.
Resourcing	12. I use tools to understand the scripts, such as dictionary, grammar book, or encyclopedia.
Translation	13. I try to translate words or sentences into my own language.
Deduction	14. I use linguistic clues to comprehend the scripts, such as prefixes and suffixes.
Repetition	15. While listening, I repeat words or phrases softly or mentally.
Segmentation	16. I use pronunciation, intonation and pausing to part sentences.
Note taking	17. While listening, I write down some ideas and keywords.
Remarking the key idea	18. I remark the key points of the scripts by underlining or capitalizing.
Listening for main Idea	19. I listen for main ideas first, then details.
Inferencing	20. I predict or make hypotheses on texts by titles and then verify my anticipation.
Linguistic inferencing	21. I guess the meaning of unfamiliar words using known words in the surrounding context.
Extra linguistic inferencing	22. I try to use background sounds and noise and relationship between speakers to guess the meaning of unknown words.
Between parts inferencing	23. I try to use information beyond the sentence level to guess the meaning of unknown words.
Voice inferencing	24. I try to use the speakers' tone of voice, pause and intonation to guess the meaning of unknown words
Think in English	25. I try to think in English.
Imagery	26. I use mental or actual pictures to help me comprehend scripts.

Personal elaboration	27. I relate new information to my personal experience or knowledge.
World elaboration	28. I try to relate new knowledge to the knowledge or experience I gain from the world
Academic elaboration	29. I try to relate the new knowledge to the knowledge or information I gain in academic context (textbook from university or school)
Questioning Elaboration	30. I try to use the combination of questions and world knowledge to understand the meaning.
Creative elaboration	31. I try to use my creativity such as making a story to help me comprehend the script.
Summarization	32. I try to make a written or mental short summary of what I have listened to comprehend the meaning.
Transfer	33. I try to use knowledge of my own language to facilitate listening in another (example: cognates)
Question for clarification	34. I ask speakers for repetition or paraphrasing to clarify comprehension.
Cooperation	35. When I encounter unclear items in class, I will discuss with my classmates to clarify comprehension.
Empathy	36. I try to care for the speaker's thought and feeling.
Lowering anxiety	37. I am not anxious and keep calm while listening.
Self reinforcement	38. I encourage myself through positive self-talk.
Sharing	39. I discuss my experiences or feeling of listening with classmates.
