

## Listening strategy use, test anxiety and test performance of intermediate and advanced Iranian EFL learners

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### *Abstract*

Learning a foreign language has been related with some kind of knowledge of language learning strategies on the one hand, and some level of (test-taking) apprehension or tension on the other although a small amount of anxiety is normally expected as a natural warning symptom. The current study aimed at investigating the relationship between listening strategy use, test anxiety, and listening test performance of Iranian intermediate and advanced EFL learners. To this end, eighty (40 intermediate and 40 advanced) Iranian EFL learners took part in the study by completing Lee's (1997) Listening Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire, Sarason's (1975) Test Anxiety Scale (TAS), and two monologues of Listening test performance selected from Listening part of TOEFL. The results of Pearson product moment correlation analyses revealed a significant negative correlation between test anxiety and listening test performance, but a significant positive association between listening strategy use and listening test performance. Furthermore, the results of multiple regression analyses indicated listening strategy use was a stronger predictor of listening test performance. Additionally, the results of independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between Iranian intermediate and advanced EFL learners regarding both their listening strategy use and level of test anxiety.

**Keywords:** Test anxiety, listening strategy use, listening test performance, intermediate, advanced, EFL learners

### **Introduction**

Social cognitive theories (e.g., Bandura, 1986, 1997) are human functioning theories which contribute to the notion that humans can control and manage their own behavior. According to social cognitive theories "what people think, believe, and feel affect how they behave" (Bandura, 1986, p. 25). Learning a foreign language has thus always been related with some level of "affect" including apprehension or tension especially when taking a test although a small amount of anxiety is normally expected as a natural warning symptom and as a facilitative factor. With the shift of research focus from teachers to

learners in second language acquisition, affective factors such as attitude, motivation and anxiety are believed to account for successful language learning outcomes.

According to Bandura (1997), anxiety is "a state of anticipatory apprehension over possible deleterious happenings" (p. 137). People experiencing anxiety exemplify apprehension as well as evident behavior which often interfere with their everyday life performance as well as in academic situations. Anxiety is often considered to be of various types and degrees. Cubukcu (2007) maintains there are three main

types of foreign language anxiety: a) communication apprehension, b) test anxiety and c) fear of negative evaluation. He argues that people with communication apprehension are shy about communicating with others and have difficulty speaking in public and listening to spoken messages.

Furthermore, communication apprehension in foreign language learning originates from the personal knowledge that one will almost certainly have difficulty understanding others and making oneself understood; that is why many talkative people remain silent in the class. He further states that test anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure and thus associates test anxiety with language anxiety because learners hold unrealistic expectations on language achievement. Since tests and quizzes are frequently used in language classes, students with test anxiety may also develop language anxiety (Wu, 2001).

The third type of anxiety is fear of negative evaluation that deals with apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations and the expectation that others will evaluate one negatively. It may occur in any situation; learners may be sensitive to the evaluations-real or imagined- of their peers (Cubukcu, 2007).

As Worde (1998) puts it, nearly half of EFL learners experience some degree of anxiety. According to Kondo and Ling (2004), anxiety might cause language learners to deal with certain potential problems. Those learners who are anxious may not enjoy their study (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002), something which will have a negative effect on their performance. While in foreign language contexts the anxiety research mostly focuses on oral production (Kimura, 2008), the attention has newly shifted to receptive skills such as listening which is

regarded as one of the most effective skills for foreign language learners (Vogely, 1998).

Listening as the most frequently used skill plays a crucial role in learning a foreign language (Vogely, 1998) simply because it is usually through this skill, accompanied by reading, that students become capable of receiving the information (Serraj & Noordin, 2013). The significance of listening in learning a second/foreign language has been highlighted by scholars in the field (Rivers, 1981; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Ferris, 1998; Field, 2003). Furthermore, listening comprehension, as some scholars state, is at the crux of L2 learning and hence the development of this skill can play a crucial role in developing other language skills (Dunkel, 1991, as cited in Vandergrift, 2007).

One of the ways in which learners' listening comprehension abilities can be enhanced is through adoption of listening strategies, the identification and classification of which have been the main focus of second language listening research (Thompson & Robin, 1996; Vandergrift, 1999). Additionally, interest in listening strategy use has increased as the research in the field indicates (O'Malley, Chamot & Walker, 1987).

Listening comprehension "takes place within the mind of the listener, and the context of interpretation is the cognitive environment of the listener" (Buck, 2001, p. 29). Listening comprehension is regarded as an essential means of communication and an indispensable part of oral language competence. Thus, on the one hand, development of listening competence is deemed necessary for successful communication. On the other hand, since listening is generally a challenging skill for second/foreign language learners and generates difficulty (Mohammadi Golchi, 2012), it seems necessary to develop effective listening

strategies to cope with this problem. Moreover, (carefully designed) listening strategies can help second/foreign language learners overcome problems associated with their listening test performance and also enhance their listening comprehension (Mendelsohn, 1994).

Therefore, proceeding from what was mentioned above regarding the importance of listening strategy use and test anxiety in relation to listening test performance and bearing in mind that the variables, taken together and especially in terms of language proficiency level of the learners, have been, to our knowledge, little researched in the EFL context of Iran, the present study set out to investigate the issue. That is, a major goal was to determine whether (and how) listening strategy use and test anxiety are related to listening test performance. The secondary aim of this study was to examine the difference between intermediate and advanced EFL learners with regard to their test anxiety and listening strategy use.

### **Review of the related literature**

#### *Test anxiety and test performance*

Test anxiety has appeared as one of the most significant constructs in modern-day psychology and considerably the most widely studied specific form of anxiety in the literature (Zeidner, 1998). Test anxiety construct has matured within a large cocoon of consideration ever since its beginning in the early 1950s, with researchers making important steps toward understanding its nature, origins, components, determinants, and treatments (Tavakoli and Rezazadeh, 2009). It has been defined as cognitive, physiological, and emotional responses created by stress experienced during the assessment and it is a sense that has a negative contribution on the students' attitudes towards courses (Hall Brown, Turner, & Beidel, 2005).

According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), test performance is ascribed to test-takers and test task features. Test-taker characteristics comprise (a) language knowledge, (b) topical knowledge, (c) personal characteristics, (d) strategic competence, and (e) affective schemata of these characteristics. The test-taker characteristics and test task characteristics impact on each other, and as a result, the results of test performance are affected by these interactions. They mention various types of personal characteristics related to test performance (e.g., age, sex, nationality, etc), but one characteristic of great significance is test anxiety, which has been defined as "unpleasant feeling or emotional state that has physiological and behavioral concomitants and that is experienced in formal testing or other evaluative situations" (Dusek, 1980 as cited in Cubukcu, 2007, p.135).

Individual differences, such as one's attitude, belief, motivation, and affective state, are believed to affect the foreign language learning process (Aydin, 2009). As an affective factor, test-taking anxiety has recently been studied in various contexts. Regarding test anxiety, Tavakoli and Amiryousefi (2011), experimenting with Iranian EFL learners, found that test takers usually experienced test anxiety and that some factors like lack of self-confidence and time limitation provoked test anxiety.

Research on the role of test anxiety in the performance of students has repeatedly signified that high levels of cognitive test anxiety enhance the probability of notable declines in exam performance. Cassady (2004) explored the effects of cognitive test anxiety on learners' memory, understanding, and comprehension of expository text passages in situations without externally-imposed evaluative pressure. The results collected through structural equations embodied a significant impact of cognitive test anxiety on

learner's performance in conditions with and without external evaluative pressure. It was also discovered that cognitive test anxiety was stronger in those conditions with external evaluative pressure.

These findings can be interpreted in support of processing models of test anxiety which hold test anxiety interferes with learning through deficiencies in encoding, organizing, and storing in addition to the classic interpretation of retrieval failures. Correspondingly, Cassady and Johnson (2001) found that there was a strong negative correlation between performance and the scores on the cognitive test anxiety scale, with weak or inconsistent correlations between performance and the other measures of test anxiety like procrastination.

The significance of language anxiety has drawn considerable attention in research on the affective domain of second language learning. Some researchers have surveyed significant variables that affect test anxiety. Aydin and Zengin (2008), for instance, stated that learner's beliefs, attitudes, expectations and affective states were significant variables that impacted upon the foreign language learning process. It was revealed that, as an affective state, test anxiety had also substantial effects on the process.

The importance of test anxiety in understanding sources of student anxiety in evaluative situations and poor test performance is now readily ostensible (Bonaccio & Reeve, 2010; Hembree, 1988; Vitasari, Wahab, Othman, & Awang, 2010). For one, Birjandi and Alemi (2010), investigating the impact of test anxiety on the test performance of Iranian EFL learners, found L2 learners' test anxiety was rather low, with most of its components having no significant negative correlation with test performance. However, they found that general test anxiety, because of its functioning at the

higher-order affective level, had a significant negative correlation with test performance. They also discovered that, test preparation anxiety, in view of facilitating test performance, manifested a positive, although non-significant, association with test performance. They also presented various reasons for test anxiety. The first reason was lack of preparation as indicated by (a) cramming the night before the examination, (b) poor time management, (c) failing to organize text information, and (d) poor study habits. They concluded the second source of test anxiety was worrying about (a) past exams performance, (b) how other students are doing, and (c) the negative consequences of failure. It is worth mentioning here that Birjandi and Alemi (2011) explored the relationship between test anxiety and test performance *in general*. However, the present study investigated the possible relationship between test anxiety and a subcategory of test performance, namely *listening* test performance.

#### *Listening strategy use and listening comprehension*

The association of listening comprehension with the use of listening strategies has been widely studied in the past few decades. According to Ho (2006) "Listening strategies refer to skills or methods for listeners to directly or indirectly achieve the purpose of listening comprehension of the spoken input". (p. 25) Listening strategies are divided into three major subcategories of cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, evaluating comprehension. Cognitive strategies are used to manipulate information. Examples of cognitive strategies are rehearsal, organization, summarization, and elaboration. Socio-affective strategies come to play when the listening is two-way and meaning is negotiated between speaker and listener as

in conversation. Examples of socio-affective strategies are cooperative learning, clarification questioning, and managing one's emotions in the learning situation.

According to Vandergrift (1997), learners employ these strategies in order to make comprehension easier and also to have more effective learning.

Several studies have been conducted on listening strategy use (Fujita, 1984; Goh, 2002; Vandergrift, 2003). For one, Hsueh-Jui (2008) conducted a study to identify the interrelationship between learners' listening strategy use across listening ability, and learning style. 101 Taiwanese EFL students took part in the study. They used two structured questionnaires for collecting the required data. Applying ANOVA, the results revealed a statistically significant difference between the listening strategy use and the participants' attainment levels. The results also showed that listening strategy use was significantly correlated with learning styles.

Furthermore, Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011) conducted a study to explore the possible relationship between motivation, metacognitive strategy use and listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners. Their findings indicated that there was a statistically significant association between listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners and their metacognitive strategy use. According to Baleghizadeh and Rahimi, metacognitive listening strategies enhance the EFL learners' listening test performance, leading us to assume that EFL learners' listening ability is related to their (metacognitive) strategic knowledge (i.e. knowledge of listening strategies) in one way or another.

In the same vein, Amin, Amin, and Aly (2011) investigated the relationship

between strategic listening (i.e. listening strategy use) and listening test performance of eighty secondary school EFL students. The required data were collected through 1) Strategic Listening Interview (SLI), 2) Strategic Listening Questionnaire (SLQ) and 3) Strategic Listening Checklist (SLC) with think-aloud protocol. An EFL listening comprehension test was used in order to measure their listening comprehension abilities. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between strategic listening and listening test performance.

Several studies have also been conducted in the context of Iran on listening strategy use. For instance, MohammadiGolchi (2012) investigated listening anxiety and its relationship with listening strategy use and listening comprehension among sixty three Iranian IELTS learners. It was found that listening anxiety had reverse association with listening strategy use and listening comprehension.

Several other studies have explored test anxiety and listening strategy use among ESL/EFL learners (Goh, 2002; Gu & Johnson, 1996; In'nami, 2006; Kim, 2000; Legac, 2007; Oxford, 1990; Vandergrift, 1999; Zhang & Liu, 2008). Vandergrift (2003), for instance, investigated the relationship between listening strategy use and listening proficiency of 36 junior high school students in Canada. The findings of his study revealed that the more proficient listeners made use of metacognitive strategies more often than did the less proficient listeners, and the variations in this type of strategy use had a significant relation across the listening ability.

#### *Anxiety, proficiency level and listening test performance*

Recently, a number of researchers have studied the effects of anxiety on the listening skill. For example, Elkhafaifi (2005) investigated the relationship between listening

comprehension and anxiety in the Arabic language classroom. He found that learners' anxiety varied according to their level of ability in foreign language listening. The results of his study indicated that the learners with higher levels of foreign language learning anxiety also tended to have higher levels of anxiety. Regarding two types of anxiety among students of first-, second-, and third-year Arabic, he found that students in third-year Arabic reported significantly lower levels of both types of anxiety than did students in first-year.

Likewise, Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2006) also found that learners' anxiety varied according to their level of ability in foreign language listening. They also concluded that listening self-efficacy was positively associated with listening proficiency only for the female learners, and listening anxiety was positively associated with the listening proficiency of both males and females.

In another study, In'nami (2006) explored to what extent test anxiety influenced listening test performance. His findings revealed that among the three components of test anxiety (i.e., general test worry, test-irrelevant thinking, and emotion), none affected listening test performance. He discovered that the non-relationship between test anxiety and listening test performance might be due to test-takers' personal characteristics (especially, test-takers' English proficiency levels, experience of successful test performance in the past, and self-esteem), strategic competence that controls anxiety, and the low-stake nature of test results.

Similarly, Shomoossi and Kassaian (2009) investigated the effect of test anxiety in relation to two major skills—listening and speaking—associated with test anxiety, as well as the extent of anxiety before and after the listening test. The results of their study indicated that there was no

significant difference between test anxiety before and after the listening comprehension test. However, they reported that anxiety was a more serious factor in taking speaking tests than in listening comprehension tests.

As mentioned earlier, on the one hand, the contribution of listening strategy use to successful listening comprehension and test performance has been documented by the experts in the field (e.g., Fujita, 1984; Vandergrift 2003). On the other hand, test anxiety has been found to negatively affect listening comprehension and test performance (e.g., Elkhafaifi, 2005; In'nami, 2006; Mills, Pajares, and Herron, 2006). However, to the best of our knowledge, little research, if any, has been conducted on the relationship among Iranian EFL learners' test anxiety, listening strategy use and listening test performance moderated by their language proficiency level. The present study thus set out to delve more deeply into the issue and investigate whether (and how) these variables are associated and whether listening strategy use and test anxiety can predict Iranian Intermediate and Advanced EFL learners' listening test performance.

#### *Research questions*

The following questions were thus formulated for the present study:

1. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' test anxiety and listening test performance?
2. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' listening strategy use and listening test performance?
3. Concerning test anxiety and listening strategy use, which one is a significantly stronger predictor of listening test performance?

4. Do intermediate and advanced EFL learners differ with regard to their listening strategy use?
5. Do intermediate and advanced EFL learners differ with regard to their level of test anxiety?

## Methodology

### *Participants*

Eighty (40 intermediate, 40 advanced) EFL learners took part in this study from an English language institute in Kermanshah. The participants were all native Persian speakers and English was their second language. Their age ranged from 15 to 26. They were mainly selected based on convenience sampling.

### *Instruments*

#### *Listening performance test*

Two different listening texts (Texts A and B), each containing six items, were adopted from TOEFL's listening part (Educational Testing Service, 1989, pp.68 and 76). TOEFL was adopted for the present study because first, TOEFL is a highly-accredited advanced-level proficiency test. Second, since TOEFL mainly adopts a multiple-choice format which is usually the most familiar test format to Iranian test-takers in comparison to fill-in-the-blank, matching-type, etc. item-formats of other proficiency tests like IELTS, Cambridge CAE, CPE, etc., it is typically preferred by, and best suits Iranian EFL test-takers and thus the risk of test-takers' language ability being undermined by such construct irrelevance variance (Messick, 1989) as task unfamiliarity is reduced. However, since test methods may impact upon test performance, it is important not to use a single task type if we are to lessen such effects (e.g., Bachman, 1990). Thus, two different task types, namely multiple choice and open-ended tasks, which are both familiar to Iranian test-takers, were used for each level in the present study.

#### *Test anxiety questionnaire*

Participants were asked to complete the Test Anxiety Scale (TAS; Sarason, 1975). The TAS has 37 Likert-scale items. The TAS is based on the theory and evidence that test anxiety is composed of test-relevant and test-irrelevant thinking and has been used widely as a leading instrument in the research of the ilk. Using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, the reliability of the TAS was recalculated in the present study which came to be 0.82.

#### *Listening strategy use questionnaire*

The listening strategy use questionnaire was originally developed by Lee (1997) and modified by Ho (2006). Moreover, the questionnaire has been modified by MohammadiGolchi (2012) for Iranian context and some more strategies have been added. The questionnaire consists of 39likert-scale items divided into 3 categories of metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective. MohammadiGolchi (2012) reported the internal consistency of the questionnaire to be 0.92. Using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, the reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was calculated to be 0.79.

It is worth mentioning here that since both Test Anxiety Questionnaire and Listening Strategy Use Questionnaire have already been validated and used extensively in various studies of the ilk, revalidating them (e.g., through factor analysis, pilot testing, etc.) was not deemed necessary although they were both additionally judged by two experts in the field, both of whom considered them "quite appropriate" for the purposes of the study.

#### *Procedure*

The study spanned a two-week period. In week one, the participants completed the listening strategy use questionnaire and took the two sections of the listening performance test. In week two, they took the other two sections of the listening performance test and the test anxiety

questionnaire. In order to prevent the practice effect on test performance, two parallel multiple choice and open-ended tasks were used. All the participants in each level were randomly assigned to one of the two groups, and the order of each section of the listening performance test was counterbalanced across the groups in order to control the order effect of task on listening performance test. It is noteworthy that the listening texts were played twice, and they were allowed to take notes. Listening performance test administration took about 30 minutes. Answers to the open ended tasks in the listening performance test were scored as either correct or incorrect by their teachers and the researchers. High inter-rater reliability of 0.901 was obtained.

#### *Data analysis*

The statistical analyses were conducted by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The data were analyzed through Pearson product moment correlation, Multiple-regression, and Independent Sample t-test.

#### **Results**

The data were collected through using the three research instruments; namely, Listening Performance Test, Test Anxiety Questionnaire, and Listening Strategy Use Questionnaire as mentioned earlier and they were analyzed using such parametric statistical analyses as Pearson product moment correlation, Multiple-regression, and Independent Samples t-test.

To investigate the first research question of whether there was any statistically significant relationship between test anxiety and listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners, Pearson correlation coefficient was run whose results are summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: The relationship between test anxiety and listening test performance**

	Test Anxiety
Pearson Correlation	-.397**
Listening test performance	Sig. (2-tailed) .000
N	80

As is evident from Table1, there was a statistically significant reverse correlation between test anxiety and listening test performance.

The second question sought to investigate whether there was any statistically significant relationship between listening strategy use and listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners. A Pearson correlation coefficient was conducted whose results are summarized in Table 2 as follows:

**Table 2: The relationship between listening strategy use and listening test performance**

	Listening Strategy Use
Pearson Correlation	.725**
Listening test performance	Sig. (2-tailed) .000
N	80

As Table 2 indicates, there is a significant positive relationship between listening strategy use and listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners.

Multiple regression analysis was run to determine the best linear combination of test anxiety and listening strategy use for predicting listening test performance. The descriptive statistics (i.e. the means and standard deviations) can be found in Table3, summary of one-way ANOVA in Table 4 and coefficients in Table 5.



**Table 3: Descriptive statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Listening test performance	26.8125	4.83681	80
Test anxiety	128.0000	10.91277	80
Listening strategy use	13.9250	2.27688	80

**Table 4: Summary of one-way ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	217.047	2	108.524	43.409	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	192.503	77	2.500		
Total	409.550	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Listening performance test  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Listening Strategy Use, Test Anxiety

**Table 5: Summary of coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	7.15	3.05		2.34	.02
Test Anxiety	-.01	.01	-.07	-.82	.41
Listening Strategy Use	.32	.04	.69	7.80	.00

a. Dependent Variable: Listening performance test

As Tables 4 and 5 indicate, listening strategy use significantly predicted listening test performance,  $F(2, 77) = 43.40, P < .05$ .

The fourth research question set out to investigate whether there was any significant difference between intermediate and advanced EFL learners with regard to their listening strategy use. An Independent Samples t-test was run to compare the two groups on listening strategy use whose results are summarized in Table 7. However, the descriptive statistics are first summarized in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: Mean and Std. deviation of intermediate and advanced EFL learners' listening strategy use**

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Intermediate	25.25	4.25	40
Advanced	28.37	4.92	40

**Table 7: Independent Samples t-test for intermediate and advanced EFL learners' listening strategy use**

	Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differ.
Equal variances assumed	4.24	.04	-3.03	78	.003	-3.12
Equal variances not assumed			-3.03	76.36	.003	-3.12

As Table 7 displays,  $t_{78} = 3.03 (p < .05)$ , the two groups (intermediate and advanced) significantly differed with regard to their listening strategy use; that is, advanced EFL learners ( $M = 28.37, SD = 4.92$ ) used more listening strategies than their intermediate level counterparts ( $M = 25.25, SD = 4.25$ ). In other words, proficiency level of studying English had significant positive effect on EFL learners' listening strategy use.

The last research question sought to investigate whether intermediate and advanced EFL learners significantly differed with regard to listening test anxiety. To this end, the descriptive statistics were computed and an Independent Samples t-test was run whose results are summarized in Tables 8 and 9 respectively.

**Table 8: Mean and Std. deviation of intermediate and advanced EFL learners' listening strategy use**

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Intermediate	132.72	9.90	40
Advanced	123.27	9.86	40

**Table 9: Independent Samples t-test for intermediate and advanced EFL learners' test anxiety**

	Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differ.
Equal variances assumed	.007	.93	4.27	78	.000	9.45
Equal variances not assumed			4.27	76.36	.000	9.45

As indicated in Table 9 above,  $t_{78}=4.27$  ( $p < .05$ ), the two groups (intermediate and advanced) significantly differed with regard to their test anxiety; that is, advanced EFL learners ( $M=123.27$ ,  $SD=9.86$ ) had less test anxiety than intermediate EFL learners ( $M=132.72$ ,  $SD=9.99$ ). In other words, proficiency level of studying English had significant positive effects on reduction of EFL learners' level of test anxiety.

## Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the possible relationship between EFL learners' test anxiety, listening strategy use and listening test performance. Since the relationship between test anxiety and listening test performance is deemed to be intuitive, only few empirical studies have investigated their dynamic relationships to date.

As the results indicated, a significant reverse relationship was observed between test anxiety and listening test performance. That is, as the results showed, the higher

the level of test anxiety was, the lower the listening test performance scores were. The findings here align with the results of Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006), and Elkhafaifi (2005), which revealed when learners' anxiety decreased, their comprehension of listening tasks increased. However, the findings of the study stand in contrast with those of In'nami (2006). He explored the extent test anxiety influenced listening test performance of 79 Japanese first-year university students. His findings revealed that among the three components of test anxiety (i.e. general test worry, emotion, and test-irrelevant thinking), none affected listening test performance of Japanese university students. The results of In'nami (2006), which are not in line with our findings in the present study, might indicate that the relationship between test anxiety and listening test performance is seemingly culture- and context-specific and thus still needs further investigation.

The findings of the current study as examined by the first research question provide empirical support for the prediction that test anxiety and listening test performance are negatively related. However, since, to our knowledge, no empirical studies, at least in the context of Iran, have investigated this relationship, the results in this regard seem to bring a new correlate and construct of test anxiety into focus in the field of EFL learning which can ignite further research in the field.

Since the results of the present study (and those of the others already mentioned) revealed a negative association between test anxiety and listening test performance, it is plausible to state that test anxiety might be considered as a barrier for (listening) test performance in a second/foreign language. The findings of the study in this regard are strongly supported by the results of a study by El-Banna (1989) which indicated that high-

proficiency level ESL learners tended to have poor performance in their language tests, whereas ESL learners with low levels of anxiety appeared to outperform their counterparts on the language tests used.

The current study also explored the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' listening strategy use and listening test performance. The results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between listening strategy use and listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners.

The findings of the study in this respect are in line with those of Hsueh-Jui (2008) who, as mentioned earlier, attempted to identify the interrelationship between learners' listening strategy use across listening ability, and learning style. A statistically significant difference was found between the listening strategy use and the participants' attainment levels.

In a similar vein, Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011), exploring the relationship between listening strategy use and listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners, showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' listening test performance and their metacognitive strategy use.

The present study also aimed at investigating whether intermediate and advanced EFL learners differed in their listening strategy use. The results indicated that advanced EFL learners used significantly more listening strategies than their intermediate level counterparts. That is, proficiency level in English had significant positive relationship with EFL learners' listening strategy use.

The findings of the current study support those of Vandergrift (2003). Vandergrift investigating the relationship between

listening strategy use and listening proficiency of 36 junior high school students in Canada, found that the more proficient listeners made use of metacognitive strategies more often than did the less proficient listeners, and the dissimilarities in this type of strategy use had a significant relation across the listening ability.

The findings are also in accordance with those of Ghoneim (2013), who investigating the listening comprehension strategies used by college students to cope with the aural problems in EFL classes, concluded the advanced EFL learners used more listening strategies than their intermediate level counterparts.

Such findings indicate that the adoption of a combination of numerous listening strategies is vital in improving EFL listeners' test performance (Carissa, 1997). According to Carissa, those students who achieved higher scores in listening test performance tended to make use of a combination of such listening strategies as summarization, self-evaluation, inference, feedback, elaboration, and reprise. Furthermore, as Vandergrift (2004) maintains, in order to accomplish the listening process more efficiently, listeners regularly use such strategies as compensation strategies, and other existing pertinent information to deduce what was not understood.

According to Brindley (1997), in order to comprehend a listening input properly, both linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge are required. This might be the plausible reason why the participants of the present study in the intermediate group could not perform as well as their counterparts in the advanced group did, most probably due to the fact that low-proficiency level listeners had limited language knowledge (including knowledge of vocabulary) in comparison to their counterparts in advanced group, an issue

which might have consequently led to problems in comprehending the message.

As recommended by Carrier (2003) and Coskun (2010), teaching and training learners to use listening strategies would be of great help; however, merely strategy training might not have potential impact on the real improvement in one's listening comprehension. Teachers also have to enhance students' linguistic knowledge (e.g. structures, phonology, vocabulary, etc.) since as Brindley (1997) maintains, in order to understand a listening input properly, both linguistic and non-linguistic information are required.

Finally, the present study explored whether intermediate and advanced EFL learners differed with regard to their test anxiety. The results showed that advanced EFL learners had lower level of test anxiety than their intermediate level counterparts. That is, proficiency level in English was found to have significant reverse relationship with EFL learners' level of test anxiety. The findings of the study are in line with the results of Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006), and Elkhafaifi (2005) which, as mentioned earlier, revealed when learners' anxiety decreased, their comprehension of listening tasks increased. These studies also showed learners' level of anxiety varied based on their foreign language listening ability level. For instance, Elkhafaifi (2005), investigating the relationship between test anxiety and listening comprehension in an Arabic language classroom, revealed that learners' anxiety varied according to their level of ability in foreign language listening. Elkhafaifi's results also indicated that the learners with higher levels of anxiety also tended to have higher levels of listening anxiety.

### **Conclusion and implications**

The present study set out to investigate whether there existed a statistically significant relationship between Iranian

EFL learners' test anxiety, listening strategy use and listening test performance. The study also aimed at identifying whether intermediate and advanced EFL learners differed with regard to their listening strategy use, and level of test anxiety. The findings revealed there was a significant negative relationship between test anxiety and listening test performance, suggesting that in order to improve students' listening test performance, the level of test anxiety must be reduced to certain extent of course; since a small amount of anxiety is normally expected as natural. The results also revealed a significant positive relationship between listening strategy use and listening test performance of Iranian EFL learners. It was also found that advanced EFL learners employed more listening strategies and had lower level of test anxiety than their intermediate counterparts.

From the evidence of the present study, some implications may be drawn. Since it has been found that amount of listening strategy use has significant positive relationship with listening test performance, it can be concluded that the utilization of listening strategies would help learners improve their listening test performance. Therefore, it is deemed essential for ESL /EFL teachers to encourage learners to use listening strategies and nourish them with challenging opportunities to use them whenever the need arises when taking listening comprehension tests in general and in taking high-stakes exams such as IELTS and TOEFL in particular.

They must also know and be taught how to use listening strategies appropriately, since several studies (e.g. Brindley, 1997; Vandergrift, 2003) reveal that the proficient and the non-proficient learners use listening strategies quite differently. That is, as stated by Vandergrift (2003), training less proficient listeners to

efficiently employ such (metacognitive) strategies as investigating the listening task supplies, triggering suitable listening processes, predicting the task, and observing and assessing one's understanding would improve their listening comprehension and plausibly their listening test performance.

The prime suggestion would be directed for materials developers and syllabus designers. It seems that learners are very much in need of course books and materials that enrich students' listening strategies and explicitly highlight their use. Furthermore, the construct of listening strategy has not been given due attention in education including L2 education. Thus, syllabus designers, and materials developers need to do their best to design lessons that promote listening strategies and encourage learners to use listening strategies consciously.

Moreover, since the results revealed test anxiety had a negative relationship with the learners' listening test performance, it seems reasonable to suggest that reducing test anxiety may positively affect their listening test performance. In order to help students improve their listening test performance, teachers must be able to understand the nature of their students' test anxieties which might vary from one individual to another. It is thus important that teachers be made aware of what language anxieties their students may be suffering from. Consequently, EFL/ESL teachers should try to provide educational practices and strategies that tackle this problem, reduce test anxiety, and enable learners to deal with new stressful situations. Thus, foreign language teachers, instructors and examiners ought to be trained during their pre-service and in-service educational programs in the methods and techniques of reducing the level of test anxiety. Moreover, EFL learners with poor listening strategy use and high level of test anxiety must be

identified and treated in order to enhance their listening test performance.

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