

## Research Article

# THE IMPACT OF INCORPORATED TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION WITH METACOGNITIVE ACTIVITIES ON LISTENING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

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### ABSTRACT

In L2 listening instruction, a comprehensive metacognitive approach via presenting several tasks leads students to listening improvement in the classroom. The present quasi-experimental study examined the impact of incorporated task-based instruction with metacognitive activities on Iranian intermediate young EFL learners' listening comprehension ability. To this end, 30 Iranian female EFL learners studying in an English language institute in Tehran were selected based on convenience sampling. The Preliminary English Test (PET) and a listening protest were administered to examine the participants' homogeneity before the treatment. The groups were assigned to Metacognitive Listening Tasks Group (MLTG, n=15) and Cognitive Listening Tasks Group (CLTG, n=15). During 12 sessions, MLTG experienced one-way (non-participatory) and two-way (participatory) listening tasks and metacognitive activities. However, CLTG experienced only the one-way and two-way listening tasks. Metacognitive activities included a self-directed listening/viewing guide, listening diaries, process-based discussions, and a self-report checklist. The listening post-test results revealed that the MLTG outperformed the CLTG in listening comprehension. The study has implications for the EFL/ESL students in listening comprehension pedagogy and can offer some hints for investigators to develop a comprehensive model for the L2 listening process. Teachers could employ collaborative techniques and metacognitive activities in their classes, considering the practical implications.

**Keywords:** EFL learner, Listening comprehension, Metacognitive activities, Task-based instruction.

### INTRODUCTION

Listening skills seem to be the most challenging among other skills since it is difficult for teachers to teach and students to learn, although its decisive role in improving L2 competence is undeniable (Field, 2009; Vandergrift, 2004, 2007). Learners consider the skill boring because it does not have specific patterns to learn successfully. As Nadig (2013) mentions, listening comprehension is the practice of understanding and making sense of spoken language. Listening skills help learners enhance their knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and phonology (Goh, 2000). However, as Vandergrift (1999) states, three kinds of strategies are necessary for developing language components via listening: cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. Metacognitive strategies, which comprise activities such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating listening comprehension before, during, and after listening, are the focus of the present study. Such strategies seem to be used by active listeners more than inactive listeners (Bozorgian & Padiav, 2015). The present study's researchers assume that task-based metacognitive instruction, which, as the name implies, integrates task-based learning with metacognitive teaching, is necessary for effective teaching. The method is based on the strong points of communicative task-based learning, which encourages students to listen and respond actively to authentic texts through two kinds of listening tasks: one-way (non-participatory) and two-way (participatory). According to Goh (2008), metacognitive tasks within the listening class may include a self-directed listening guide, listening diaries, process-based discussions, and a self-report checklist. In L2 listening instruction, a comprehensive metacognitive approach presenting many tasks leads to listening improvement, inside and outside the classroom (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The primary purpose of the approach is to make students self-regulated

individuals who are aware of their learning processes, demand extra learning tasks, use some critical listening skills, apply a range of strategies, and adapt to meet the needs of particular contexts. Listening exercises concentrate on listening outcomes in many language classes, doing little more than measuring how well students can listen. Students are usually left to develop their listening skills with little direct support from the instructors. One possible reason is that many educators themselves are unsure about teaching listening constructively (Vandergrift, 2004). Students need to receive support during the listening task and should have the opportunity to step back, learn how to manage the listening feedback, think about the task they are doing, and evaluate their performance during listening task implementation (Goh, 2000; Vandergrift, 2004). The act of thinking about thinking, and metacognition, concerning learners' ability to manage their thoughts and regulate their learning, is ignored in most listening classes. Therefore, the current research investigated whether incorporating task-based instruction with metacognitive activities could enhance the listening comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Primarily, listening was an ignored phase of foreign language learning. It was viewed as a passive practice to be learned by itself (Nazarieh, Razmi, Azizian, & Ghani, 2022). Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has arisen as a salient point of language learning practice universally by using various tasks in the class setting (Skehan, 2003; Ellis, 2005; Robinson & Gilabert, 2007; Robinson, 2011). By using tasks, teachers can enhance students' awareness of the listening comprehension processes, encourage them to employ effective strategies or skills, and regulate their cognitive processes by integrating metacognitive activities with task-based instruction (Goh, 2008; Haghighi, Rashtchi, & Birjandi, 2019b). Concerning this issue, Maghsoudi and Golshan's (2017) study showed that task-based instruction improved participants' listening ability. Similarly,

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Mohamadpour, Talebinejad, and Tabatabaei (2018) compared the efficacy of task-based metacognitive training approach to self-regulation in listening comprehension classes and reported that applying task-based activities through metacognitive training attracted students' attention, engaged them in foreseeing and assessing their learning progression, and instructed them to reflect on their presentation at the stage of post-listening. Listening comprehension creates favorable conditions for active learning, develops language skills, and ameliorates the process of receiving comprehensible input (Kurita, 2012). Metacognitive instruction in listening classes concentrates primarily on explicit strategy training via task implementation and enhances students' listening achievement (Macaro *et al.*, 2007). Several research findings have highlighted the dominant role of metacognitive knowledge awareness in developing learners' listening ability in academic contexts (e.g., Haghghi, Rashtchi, & Birjandi, 2019a; Moradian & Baharvand, 2017). In this regard, Maftoon and Fakhri Alamdari (2020) investigated the effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on the listening comprehension performance and metacognitive awareness of 60 Iranian EFL intermediate students. Findings showed that improving students' strategic knowledge led to a considerable difference in the overall listening ability and metacognitive awareness of the active listeners. Equally, Zarrabi's (2020) study on 135 female intermediate Iranian EFL learners' styles (auditory, kinaesthetic, tactile/haptic, visual) and metacognitive strategy awareness. The findings revealed a significant relationship between learners' styles and metacognitive listening strategy awareness. It is worth noting that auditory learners gained higher mean scores on the metacognitive listening questionnaire than other styles. The latest study in this realm is associated with Alamdari and Bozorgian (2022), who examined the mutual effect of gender, metacognitive intervention, and dialogic communication on 1080 advanced students' multimedia listening ability. In the study, two groups of students in the experimental cluster practiced metacognitive procedures through dialogic communication; the other two groups of the experimental cluster experienced merely metacognitive treatment. However, the two control groups experienced regular classroom listening instruction. The findings revealed that female EFL students in experimental groups outperformed their male partners. Likewise, students in the first experimental cluster outperformed their peers in the second cluster equally in multimedia listening and metacognitive knowledge. Several research outcomes also have emphasized the central role of strategy knowledge in developing learners' listening ability in the EFL/ESL context (e.g., Al-Nafisah, 2019; Cao & Lin, 2020; Savitri, 2018; Unin & Johari, 2017). In this domain, Latip, Swanto, and Din (2020) studied the relationship between metacognitive awareness of listening strategies and the listening achievement of 169 Malaysian science students. The results indicated a positive relationship between students' listening ability and strategic knowledge. Similarly, Bourdeaudhui, Aesaert, and van Braak (2021) intended to provide a more inclusive interpretation of the relationship between metacognitive awareness and motivation of 649 native Dutch-speaking students' critical listening skills. The outcome showed that high-level listeners were more aware of metacognitive knowledge, such as person knowledge and problem-solving. Besides, students were more intrinsically motivated to listen in comparison with the average or low-level listeners. The outcomes also proposed that metacognitive knowledge awareness facilitated the relationship between motivation and critical listening skills. Recently, Chou (2022) examined the effects of group difference and affective factors among learners studying five foreign languages on students' metacognitive strategies for communicative listening. Findings showed that Spanish language students used metacognitive strategies more frequently than the other students. Moreover, learners with higher communicative confidence used inference-making and nonverbal

strategies more frequently than low-confidence learners. Overall outcomes highlighted fast speech rate, vocabulary span, and lexical division as main listening challenges. Despite the results obtained from the studies on task-based instruction, the researchers of the current study believe that there is still a great need for further investigation on the impact of task-based instruction aligned with metacognitive activities on EFL learners' listening comprehension ability partly because listening ability requires strategy training. Therefore, the following research question was formulated to explore the issue in the present quasi-experimental study with a non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design. The main two variables of the study consisted of an independent variable, task-based instruction with metacognitive activities, and a dependent variable, listening comprehension ability in listening pedagogy.

**RQ:** To what extent does the incorporated task-based instruction with metacognitive activities affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension ability?

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

Thirty Iranian female, young EFL students at the intermediate level, were selected from a language institute in Tehran via convenience sampling. The participants, who came from different socio-economic backgrounds, were within the age range of 15 to 17 years old. Their first language (L1) was Persian, but few also spoke Turkish and Armenian. They already had approximately five to seven years of interaction with English as a foreign language, with an average of two hours of English classes per week. The participants had registered in the two classes according to their time schedules. The researchers randomly assigned the two classes to the Metacognitive Listening Tasks Group (MLTG), taught through listening tasks with metacognitive activities, and the Cognitive Listening Tasks Group (CLTG), instructed through listening tasks. The number of participants was equal in the groups ( $n_1=n_2=15$ ).

### Instruments

The researchers used the following instruments to fulfill the objectives of the study. The Preliminary English Test (PET), designed by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate and equal to B1 based on the classifications of language proficiency by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), was used to homogenize the learners regarding general English proficiency. The test assessed learners on four language skills in three parts. The first part covered reading and writing questions (42 test items answered in 90 minutes). The second part included listening comprehension questions (25 test items answered in 36 minutes). The third part was speaking questions (speaking between two students and an examiner in 10 to 12 minutes). The test took 140 minutes. The reliability of the test considered via Cronbach's alpha formula was 0.87. Listening comprehension pretest and post-test were utilized to measure the students' listening ability at the beginning and end of the study. It was adopted from listening sections of lesson one of the IELTS third book (Jakeman & McDowell, 2002). The pretest and post-test reliability indices were 0.82 and 0.83, respectively. A self-directed listening guide was employed as a metacognitive activity to practice individual listening comprehension in MLTG (Appendix A). Also, listening dairies were employed as a metacognitive activity to reflect on relevant listening comprehension experiences using guiding questions in MLTG (Appendix B). Process-based discussions were employed as a metacognitive activity to address listening problems and improve listening strategy use in MLTG (Appendix C). Besides, a self-report

checklist was used as a metacognitive activity to assess learners' knowledge, corroboration, assessment, and reflection in MLTG (Appendix D).

**Materials**

The participants studied units one and two and their parts (parts A and B) of the book American English file 3 (Latham-Koenig, Oxenden, & Seligson, 2014) along with two supplementary teaching materials: Grammar in Use, Intermediate (Murphy, 2004) and Oxford Word Skill, Intermediate Level (Gairns & Redman, 2008). They learned about rhythm, stress, intonation, and connected speech. Students experienced metacognitive tasks (e.g., self-directed listening/viewing guide, listening diaries, process-based discussions, and a self-report checklist) and cognitive tasks such as brainstorming. The book also contained grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation exercises.

**Procedure**

The two classes met three sessions a week with a 120-minute duration. The participants studied units one and two of American English file 3 (Latham-Koenig et al., 2014). The book also contained grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation exercises. It is worth mentioning that both groups studied the same course book and implemented the same activities such as listen and sort, listen and compare, listen and match, listen and combine, listen and compose, dictate and complete, simulate and discuss, and take note and clarify. About 40 minutes of each session was devoted to the listening tasks of the book in both classes. Lesson one of the IELTS (Jakeman & McDowell, 2002) was utilized as the pretest and post-test to measure the students' listening comprehension ability at the beginning and last phase of the study.

**Metacognitive Listening Task Group (MLTG)**

Metacognitive tasks such as self-directed listening guide, listening diaries, process-based discussion, and self-report checklist were implemented every session in this group. First, the students answered a set of leading questions to plan their listening comprehension tasks implementation at the pre-listening stage. Second, at the while-listening stage, the participants experienced process-based discussions. They were given some prompts akin to listening strategies and experienced collaborative discussion via small groups. They talked about how to do a listening task and which strategy was more effective for task implementation. Besides, at the stage of post-listening, students completed listening diaries. At this stage, they answered some guiding who-questions about the listening event they had experienced in the class. Likewise, to check students' reflection concerning listening tasks, they completed a self-report checklist that included questions pertaining to overall metacognitive knowledge. Students completed reflection sheets on their listening performance and strategies they used for listening task implementation. The teacher examined the completed prompts and wrote her comments concerning strategy use at the end of each listening practice.

**Cognitive Listening Task Group (CLTG)**

In this group, only cognitive procedure via brainstorming techniques (Rashtchi & Beiki, 2015), such as group discussion and clustering, was implemented every session. The teacher devoted eight to ten minutes to brainstorming. The activity helped the teacher activate students' background knowledge. It also allowed the learners to express ideas. The teacher tried to facilitate students' learning by asking some leading questions and teaching some new words or

expressions via pronouncing, repeating, translating, and showing pictures before a listening exercise. On the other hand, the students worked in small groups to help each other learn more and review the new listening task through peer correction, peer review, or peer feedback. They listened to the text twice during class, looked up the meaning of new words or idioms in the dictionary, and answered the tasks within the exercise one by one within 20 minutes. At the end of each session, the teacher read the listening text slowly and defined the new words and concepts. Students took some brief notes and asked a few questions about the new lesson.

**Post-test**

After completing the treatment phase, the groups were retested on the listening sections of lesson one of the IELTS third book to examine whether the treatment had any impact on the participant's listening comprehension ability.

**RESULTS**

The data collected via PET, pretest, and post-test of listening comprehension were analyzed through independent-samples t-tests with two assumptions; normality of data and homogeneity of variances of the groups. Table 1 shows the skewness and kurtosis indices and their ratios over the standard errors analogous to standardized scores (Z-scores) and can be compared against the critical value of  $\pm 1.96$  at .05 levels.

As Table 1 shows, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their standard errors were lower than 1.96 for the PET and listening comprehension pretest and post-test. Thus, it was legitimate to use the parametric independent-samples t-test.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality of Data

Group	N	Skewness			Kurtosis			
		Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	
MLTG	PET	15	-.294	.580	-	-.915	1.12	-
	Pretest	15	-.030	.580	-	-.819	1.12	-
	Posttest	15	.040	.580	0.07	-.074	1.12	-
CLTG	PET	15	-.132	.580	-	-.676	1.12	-
	Pretest	15	-.455	.580	-	-.533	1.12	-
	Posttest	15	-.667	.580	-	-.387	1.12	-

An independent-samples t-test was run to compare MLTG's and CLTG's means on the PET. Table 2 shows the results of the descriptive statistics. The results indicated that MLTG(M = 69.60, SD = 5.20) and CLTG (M = 69.00, SD = 5.12) had almost the same means on the PET.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics; PET by Groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PET Experimental	15	69.60	5.207	1.344
Control	15	69.00	5.127	1.324

Table 3 shows the outcomes of the independent-samples t-test. As Table 3 indicates, the non-significant results of Levene's test (F = .025, p > .05) showed that the two groups were homogenous in terms of their variances on the PET.

The independent samples t-test; ( $t(28) = .318, p > .05$ ), indicated no significant difference between the two groups' means on the PET. Consequently, the two groups were homogeneous concerning their general language proficiency before the treatments.

An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the groups' means on the listening comprehension pretest. Table 4 displays the outcomes of the descriptive statistics. The MLTG ( $M = 20.33, SD = 3.10$ ) and CLTG ( $M = 19.60, SD = 2.97$ ) had almost the same means on the pretest of listening comprehension.

**Table 3.** Independent-Samples t-test; PET by Groups

	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
Equal variances assumed	.025	.875	.318	28	.753	.600	1.887	-3.265	4.465

An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the groups' means on the listening comprehension pretest. Table 4 displays the outcomes of the descriptive statistics. The MLTG ( $M = 20.33, SD = 3.10$ ) and CLTG ( $M = 19.60, SD = 2.97$ ) had almost the same means on the pretest of listening comprehension.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics; Pretest of Listening Comprehension by Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	15	20.33	3.109	.803
	Control	15	19.60	2.971	.767

Table 5 illustrates the results of the independent-samples t-test. The non-significant results of the Levene's test ( $F = .051, p > .05$ ) indicated that the two groups were homogenous in terms of their variances on the pretest. The results of independent samples t-test; ( $t(28) = .660, p > .05$ ), indicated no significant difference between the two groups' means. Thus, the two groups were homogeneous regarding their listening comprehension ability before the treatment.

**Table 5.** Independent-Samples t-test; Pretest of Listening Comprehension by Groups

	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
Equal variances assumed	.051	.823	.660	28	.514	.733	1.110	-1.541	3.008

An independent-samples t-test was run to compare the groups' means on listening comprehension post-test to examine whether the type of the instructions could cause any statistically significant differences between the means of the groups. Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics. The results indicated that MLTG ( $M = 24.47, SD = 2.78$ ) had a higher mean than CLTG ( $M = 21.73, SD = 2.71$ ) on the listening posttest.

**Table 6.** Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Listening Comprehension by Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Experimental	15	24.47	2.875	.742
	Control	15	21.73	2.712	.700

Table 7 shows the outcomes of the independent-samples t-test. The non-significant results of the Levene's test ( $F = .009, p > .05$ ) indicated that the clusters were homogenous in terms of their variances on the post-test. The outcomes of the independent samples t-test; ( $t(28) = 2.679, p < .05, r = .452$  representing a moderate to large effect size) indicated that MLTG significantly outperformed CLTG on the post-test of listening comprehension.

**Table 7.** Independent-Samples t-test; Posttest of Listening Comprehension by Groups

	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
Equal variances assumed	.009	.925	2.679	28	.012	2.733	1.020	.643	4.824

## DISCUSSION

The positive answer to the research question verified the effect of incorporating metacognitive tasks in listening comprehension classes. The study revealed that combining task-based instruction with metacognitive activities improves students' listening ability. As Vandergrift (2003) argues, in learner-oriented listening instruction, the metacognitive approach leads to self-regulated listeners who can control and assess their listening task and product. As a pedagogical method in listening classes, it enhances learners' awareness, promotes their knowledge about themselves as learners, and enhances their self-reflection, encouraging learners' strategies employment for listening task enactment. (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

The current study highlighted that incorporating a listening guide, listening diaries, process-based discussion, and a self-reported checklist enhanced learners' person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategic knowledge. The researchers of the current research assume that using such instruments could enhance the participants' focus of attention and boost their concentration on the tasks. The participants learned to be aware of the mental processes necessary for performing the tasks. Thus, listening became an organized mental activity that, if followed, could help learners become good listeners. Besides, using a listening guide, listening diaries, process-based discussion, and a self-reported checklist could improve the students' beliefs about their ability to achieve listening goals. The learners gained better insight into the purpose, nature, and demands of listening tasks. They could better realize which strategies were useful, and why they were beneficial. They also learned when and how to apply them. It is worth noting that the self-reported checklist enhanced students' reflection. The act of reflection helped students review their present progress and assess their learning and facilitated the process of recovering knowledge to apply it to a new task. The findings support Osterbaan et al.'s (2010) perspective that students' reflection in a class setting increases their aptitude to attain higher-order thinking skills, such as comparing, evaluating, and drawing conclusions on the contents they concentrate. The findings revealed that incorporating task-based instruction with a metacognitive perspective helped students apply strategies to regulate their listening and attain higher comprehension. The outcome supported Brookfield's (2012) view concerning the notion of reflection, which fosters critical thinking skills, ameliorates the process of pursuing assumptions, notices the thinking process, and checks conventions for accuracy and practicality. Therefore, connecting the viewpoints mentioned above to learners' background knowledge in listening class results in meaningful products in an academic context. The results were consistent with Jeon and Hahn (2006), implying that task-based learning enhanced language skills. The study also highlighted that integrated models, such as content and task-based instruction, positively affected students' learning and attention to what they heard. Besides, the findings supported Unin and Johari's (2017) research finding concerning the positive effect of metacognitive strategy awareness on Malaysian students' academic performance. The outcome aligned with Latip, Swanto, and Din (2020) that metacognitive task implementation facilitated students' learning process in an educational context. Furthermore, some studies (e.g., Altuwaresh, 2016; Bozorgian, 2012) supported metacognitive instruction using a strategy-based approach of directed attention, selective attention, and self-management to help less-skilled listeners develop listening ability. This study also confirmed some research findings (e.g., Ahmed & Lechuk, 2020; Vandergrift, 2007) in this regard. Similarly, the results were congruent with several researchers' findings (e.g., Bahrami, 2010; Ebedy, 2017; Zhang, 2017). Accordingly, the findings highlighted the effectiveness of task-based instruction in improving the listening comprehension ability of EFL students. Regarding the effectiveness of strategy-based and

metacognitive instruction, the majority of the techniques were perceived by teachers as effective. This finding confirmed and was partially in line with the present research. The process-oriented techniques' potential was considered a vital tool for listening improvement (e.g., Cross, 2009; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). However, some research findings (e.g., Chou, 2015; Namaziandost, Ahmadi, & Keshmirshakan, 2019) were not compatible with the current study's findings. They found that metacognitive listening strategies were not valued as being equally practical as cognitive strategies in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. In addition, Iranian EFL learners' listening problems demonstrated that the association between listening challenges and their strategy use was significantly negative and meager.

## CONCLUSIONS

The goal of the current study was to determine the effect of incorporated task-based instruction with metacognitive activities on the listening comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. The overall outcome of the study implied that the MLTG taught through different listening tasks with metacognitive activities significantly outperformed the CLTG group. The current research outcomes could be effective in enhancing EFL learners' ability to self-direct and self-reflect during the listening comprehension process. The present research had some practical and theoretical implications for the EFL/ESL students in listening pedagogy. Concerning the theoretical phase, this study can offer some suggestions for investigators attentive in developing a comprehensive model for the L2 listening process. Teachers can employ collaborative techniques and metacognitive awareness activities in their classes. The knowledge of the metacognitive strategies has a prominent role in listening comprehension ability. Similarly, language teachers can draw on the results of this study to let learners get a deeper insight into the listening activity. Based on the current study, developing listening ability through applying metacognitive strategies plus task-based activities may be a different way of teaching listening to the students. This method can support learners in being motivated and interested enough to increase their general language proficiency. Hopefully, this study can also call the material designers' attention to coordinate special task-based activities with a metacognitive perspective in listening sections of the textbooks. There might be more acceleration in listening comprehension with extra opportunities to do different task-based activities in the books. This study was limited on the grounds that variables such as the participants' age, motivation, and IQ, could not be controlled by the researchers, although they might affect the results. Secondly, all of the participants in the research were females; thus, gender effects could not be controlled. Finally, individual differences arising from personality factors could have affected the results.

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