



The Correlation Between Adopted Listening Strategies and Performance of the IELTS Candidates

KEYWORDS

listening strategies; IELTS general and academic candidates

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ABSTRACT *Listening has become an important part of many second or foreign language programmes. Listening involves the simultaneous organization and combination of skills in phonology, syntax, semantics, and knowledge of the text structure. Listening to texts in an English academic setting, the IELTS candidates appeared to use an extensive array of listening strategies, but they did not indicate any significant differences in employing the listening strategies. Neither general nor academic training groups in this investigation revealed any significant differences in using the strategies.*

Introduction

In this empirical investigation, the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) candidates (both in the pilot and main study) listened to a listening comprehension test and then answered a 30-item Likert-type questionnaire on listening strategies. The items are thirty statements which are related to listening comprehension strategies. The items measure the perceived use of the strategies and processes underlying factors related to cognitive, meta-cognitive, compensation, memory-related, affective and social strategies selected and used by the IELTS candidates. A five-point Likert-Scale ranging from (strongly disagree) to (strongly agree) was used to indicate students' preferences. At the end, the strategies employed by the two different IELTS general and academic groups and their performance in the listening tests were analysed to see whether there was a correlation between the test scores and the strategies they adopted. The researcher has made an attempt to investigate the IELTS candidates' listening comprehension tests so as to find out the correlation between their performance in the listening tests and the strategies they have adopted. Accordingly the following research question has been posed: "Was there any correlation between performance in the listening tests (test scores) and the strategies they adopted?"

Listening Comprehension

Listening has become an important part of many second or foreign language programmes. Yet, many language teachers might still be uncertain about how to help their students develop their listening abilities and solve their listening comprehension problems.

Rivers (1981) stated: Students trained to study the language through written texts are sharply challenged when suddenly confronted with listening comprehension material of a similar standard of difficulty to that which they are accustomed to study at their leisure in graphic form. The emotional tension associated with this experience is frequently compounded by the near approach of some examination for which this type of activity is preparing them. It must be clearly borne in mind by teacher and student alike that listening comprehension is not a skill which can suddenly be brought into the picture at an advanced level for students visually trained, nor can it be mastered once and for all and then ignored while other skills are developed. There must be regular practice with increasingly dif-

ficult material. This practice must, however, be regularly spaced over the language learning period and not massed urgently in great blocks at some moment preceding an examination.

According to Rivers (1981), listening is not a passive skill, nor even, as traditionally been believed, a receptive skill. Listening is a creative skill.

Rost (1990, cited in Ellis 2008:251) defined listening comprehension as essentially an inferential process based on the perception of cues rather than straightforward matching of sound to meaning. Ellis (2008) suggests that understanding does not necessitate close attention to linguistic form. Faerch and Kasper (1986a, cited in Ellis 2008:ibid) also recognised the importance of 'top-down processes', in which learners utilise contextual information and existing knowledge to understand what is said, but they also point out that they may sometimes make use of 'bottom-up' processes', where they pay closer attention to the linguistic forms in the message.

Language Learning Strategies

L2 learning strategies are specific behaviours or thought processes that students use to enhance their own L2 learning. The word strategy comes from the ancient Greek word *strategia*, which means steps or actions taken for the purpose of winning a war. The warlike meaning of *strategia* has fortunately fallen away, but the control and goal-directedness remain in the modern version of the word (Oxford, 1990).

According to Oxford's (1990) definition: Language learning strategies are specific actions or techniques that students use, often intentionally, to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. Strategies encompass a wide range of behaviours that can help the development of language competence in many ways.

In particular, listening strategies (LSs) are conscious attention of the learners to their comprehension processes so as to construct meaning. In fact, teachers can help language learners improve their listening competence by equipping them with useful listening strategies and skills. Autonomy entails deliberate control of one's own listening strategies. According to Oxford (2001), LSs assist learners become more autonomous. Au-

onomy entails deliberate control of one's own learning processes. It is argued that LSs improve learners' self-efficacy and their perception that they can effectively complete a task or series of tasks, which in turn can enhance their autonomy. According to Chamot and Kupper (1989), from the research to date, it is clear that all language learners make use of some types of language learning strategies.

Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence.

An emphasis on listening comprehension, as well as the application of listening comprehension strategies, will help students to capitalise on the language input they receive and to achieve greater success in language learning. Language strategies are useful tools for learners because they open up more reliable and less frustrating routes to language learning success. However, knowledge about listening comprehension strategies is still restricted, because most research concentration regarding language learning strategies has been devoted to those involved in reading, writing and speaking (Hadidi&Babazadeh, 2012).

Pilot Study

A small-scale pilot study was conducted to test and confirm the procedures to be used in the main study. The purpose of the pilot study was basically to make sure that the level of the texts difficulty is not too far beyond or below the comprehension level of the listeners and to address the reliability of the listening questionnaire accordingly. The pilot study was conducted in British Council, Sector 17, Chandigarh, India.

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organization for educational opportunities and cultural relations. In order to clear any opacity which candidates might encounter in replying the questionnaire, the 30-item questionnaire was piloted to a group of twenty of the IELTS candidates, 10 of whom were General Candidates and the other ten were Academic Candidates who were randomly selected. This group of IELTS candidates was asked to participate in the pilot study. To test the internal consistency for the questionnaire.Cronbach'salpha was computed based on the IELTS Candidates' responses. The reliability of the questionnaire came out to be .798, which is an acceptable reliability value. This reliability is shown in Table1

Table 1:ReliabilityStatistics

Cronbach'sAlpha	Nof Items
.798	30

The Mean Difference of the Two Groups in Pilot Study

The mean performance (test scores) of the two groups of the candidates in the pilot study in comparison to the main study was very similar. Table 2 shows this similarity.

Table 2:The Mean Difference in PilotStudy

Type ofCandidate	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. ErrorMean
General	10	32.10	2.807	.888
Score Aca-demic	10	18.70	2.263	.71

The two groups' performance in the listening tests in the pilot study was analysed to see whether there was a significant difference between test scores of the two groups of the IELTS candidates. The result indicated that there was a significant difference in their performance. That is to say that general candidates outperformed and achieved better scores.

The same procedures to be followed in the main study were observed in the pilot study. The participants were allotted approximately 30 minutes to answer the listening questions. They listened to the first section and answered the questions. The same procedure was followed with the second section. After having listened to the remaining sections and taken the tests, the participants completed the Listening Comprehension Strategies Questionnaire. On receiving the participants' feedback and the pilot study data, it was confirmed it was safe to proceed with the main study.

Main Study

The data collected from the listening test and the listening comprehension strategies questionnaire was analyzed using four statistical instruments: One sample t-test, an independent-samples t-test, and correlation coefficient and one-way anova of SPSS.

Correlation coefficient was conducted to see whether there was a correlation between the test scores i.e. the performances of the two groups of candidates and the strategies they adopted. The results of these correlations are shown in Table 3 Furthermore, p-values (Sig) in Table 3 reveal that the null hypothesis is confirmed because the p-values for the cognitive, metacognitive , compensation, memory, affective and social strategies were 0.127, 0.134, 0.788, 0.841, 0.726 and 0.167 respectively. As all these p-values are above 0.05, it is revealed that there were no significant correlations between listening test scores and the strategies namely cognitive, metacognitive , compensation, memory, affective and social strategies the IELTS candidates adopted.

Table 3: Correlations between Scores & Strategies

	Score	mean of cognitive	mean of meta-cognitive	mean of compensation	mean of memory	mean of Affective	mean of social
Score	1	.154	.151	.027	.020	.036	.140
	Pearson Correlation						
	Sig. (2tailed)	.127	.134	.788	.841	.726	.167
	N	100	100	100	100	100	99
mean of cognitive		1	.256*	.133	.242*	.225*	.234*
	Pearson Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.127	.010	.189	.015	.025	.020
	N	100	100	100	100	100	99

mean of meta-cognitive	Pearson Correlation	.151	.256*	1	.092	.240*	.250*	.226*
	Sig. (2tailed)	.134	.010		.362	.016	.012	.025
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	99
mean of compensation	Pearson Correlation	.027	.133	.092	1	.230*	.232*	.010
	Sig. (2tailed)	.788	.189	.362		.022	.020	.921
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	99

mean of memory	Pearson Correlation	.020	.242*	.240*	.230*	1	.993**	.381**
	Sig. (2tailed)	.841	.015	.016	.022		.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	99
mean of Affective	Pearson Correlation	.036	.225*	.250*	.232*	.993**	1	.370**
	Sig. (2tailed)	.726	.025	.012	.020	.000		.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	99
mean of social	Pearson Correlation	.140	.234*	.226*	.010	.381**	.370**	1
	Sig. (tailed)	.167	.020	.025	.921	.000	.000	
	N	99	99	99	99	99	99	99

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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