

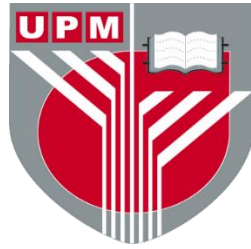


UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY, LISTENING ANXIETY, SELF-EFFICACY, AND LISTENING COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

SAMANEH SERRAJ

FPP 2014 72



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By

SAMANEH SERRAJ

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2014

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DEDICATION

To my parents, whose continuous love, sacrifices and support helped me peruse my dreams...



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

SAMANEH SERRAJ

December 2014

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Anxiety and self- efficacy are affective factors that have influential impact on foreign language learning domains and play crucial role in language learners' performance. In the Iranian EFL context listening comprehension remains as one of the most problematic skills for EFL learners to obtain and for instructors to instruct. The present study is an attempt to investigate the effect of Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension anxiety, foreign language anxiety and listening self-efficacy on their listening comprehension performance. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the factors that cause and reduce listening anxiety. Moreover, the possible relationship between foreign language anxiety, listening anxiety and listening self-efficacy is sought. Lastly, the study seeks to determine the extent to which the level of anxiety varies at different levels of proficiency.

The study adopts a primarily quantitative approach, followed by qualitative data aimed at expanding and elaborating on the quantitative data. Two hundred and ten EFL learners in two levels of intermediate and advanced took part in the study. A packet of questionnaires was employed to measure listening comprehension anxiety, language learning anxiety and language listening self-efficacy. To figure out learners' sources of listening comprehension anxiety and the factors that might reduce listening anxiety, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants in order to arrive at richer findings. Further, all participants took part in listening tests in order to find out if their listening comprehension anxiety, foreign language anxiety and listening self-efficacy are related to their listening comprehension performance.

Results showed that learners in both groups experience listening anxiety and it is the best predictor of learners' listening comprehension performance among other variables. Moreover, it was found that listening anxiety and foreign language anxiety are negatively correlated with learners' listening comprehension while listening self-efficacy is positively correlated with learners' listening comprehension. Furthermore, result showed that the level of FL anxiety, listening anxiety and listening self-efficacy do not differ across two levels of proficiency.

The factors that were identified as having influence on listening anxiety were divided into three categories, i.e. individual factors (nerves and emotionality, using inappropriate strategies and lack of practice), input factors (lack of time to process, lack of visual support, nature of speech and level of difficulty) and environmental factors (instructors, peers and class environment). Moreover, connectedness, instructors and type of listening materials were identified as factors that reduce listening anxiety among Iranian language learners. Based on the findings of the study, a foreign language listening anxiety model of factors influencing Iranian learners' listening comprehension is proposed. The findings of the study draw the attention of EFL instructors to encourage their learners seek approaches to reduce their listening anxiety. Pedagogical implications for language teachers and learners are provided as well.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafa

**HUBUNGAN ANTARA, KERISAUAN FL KERISAUAN MENDENGAR,
EFIKASI KENDIRI DAN PRESTASI KAFAHAMAN MANDANGAR
PALAJER EFL IRAN**

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Kerisauan merupakan faktor yang mempengaruhi domain pembelajaran bahasa asing dan memainkan peranan penting dalam prestasi bahasa pelajar. Kajian ini merupakan satu cubaan untuk mengkaji kesan kerisauan kefahaman mendengar pelajar EFL Iran, kerisauan bahasa asing dan efikasi sendiri mendengar ke atas prestasi kefahaman mendenar mereka. Selain itu kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kerisauan mendengar. Tambahan pula, hubungan yang mungkin di antara kerisauan bahasa asing, kerisauan mendengar dan efikasi sendiri untuk mendengar juga dikaji. Akhir sekali, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti sejauh mana tahap kerisauan berbeza dalam pelbagai peringkat kemahiran.

Kajian ini mengguna pakai pendekatan kuantitatif, diikuti dengan data kualitatif bertujuan untuk mengembangkan dan menghuraikan data kuantitatif. Dua ratus sepuluh pelajar EFL dalam dua peringkat pertengahan dan lanjutan telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Satu paket soal selidik telah digunakan untuk mengukur kerisauan kefahaman mendengar, kerisauan pembelajaran bahasa dan efikasi sendiri kemahiran mendengar. Untuk mengetahui sumber kerisauan kefahaman pelajar, temu bual separa berstruktur telah dijalankan dengan tujuh peserta untuk mencapai penemuan yang lebih mendalam. Selain itu, kesemua peserta mengambil bahagian dalam ujian mendengar untuk mengetahui jika mereka kerisauan kefahaman mendengar, kerisauan bahasa asing dan efikasi sendiri mendengar mereka mempunyai kaitan dengan prestasi kefahaman mendengar.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pelajar dalam kedua-dua kumpulan mengalami kerisauan mendengar. Dalam kajian ini, kerisauan mendengar merupakan peramal terbaik bagi prestasi kefahaman mendengar di kalangan pembolehubah yang lain. Selain itu, didapati bahawa kerisauan mendengar dan kerisauan bahasa asing mempunyai kaitan negatif dengan kefahaman mendengar pelajar sementara efikasi sendiri mempunyai kaitan positif dengan kefahaman mendengar pelajar.

Tambahan pula, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa tahap kerisauan FL, kerisauan mendengar dan efikasi sendiri mendengar tidak berbeza antara dua tahap kemahiran. Faktor-faktor yang telah dikenal pasti mempunyai pengaruh ke atas kerisauan mendengar telah dibahagikan kepada tiga kategori, iaitu faktor individu (saraf dan emosional, penggunaan strategi yang tidak sesuai dan kurangan latihan), faktor-faktor input (kekurangan masa untuk memproses, kekurangan sokongan visual, sifat pertuturan dan tahap kesukaran) dan faktor-faktor alam sekitar (pengajar, rakan-rakan sebaya dan persekitaran kelas). Berdasarkan dapatan kajian ini, suatu model faktor kerisauan mendengar bahasa asing yang mempengaruhi kefahaman mendengar pelajar Iran di cadangkan. Implikasi pedagogi untuk guru-guru bahasa dan pelajar juga dikemukakan.

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Last but not least, I would like to extend my gratitude to my special one who has lightened up my way with hope and positivity.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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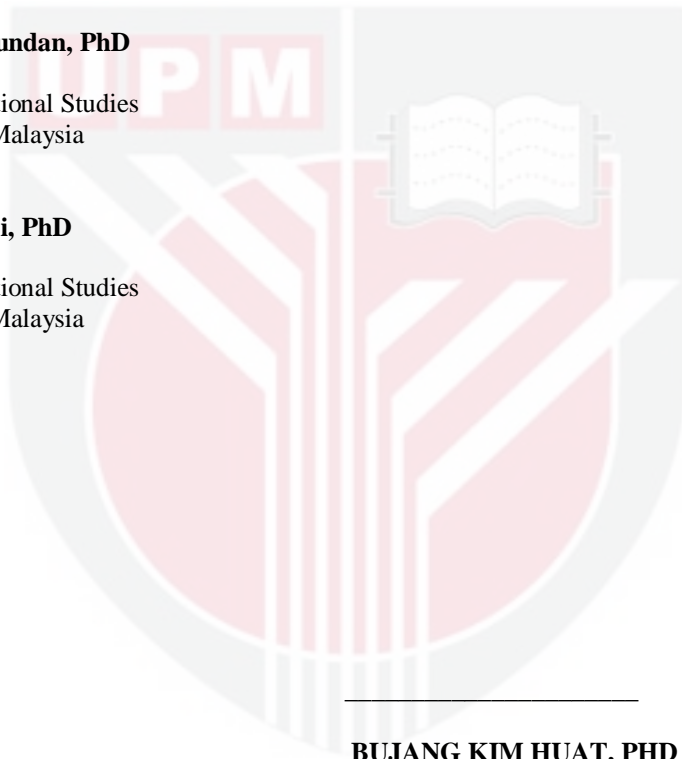
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ABSTRAK	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
APPROVAL	vi
DECLARATION	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xvi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	3
1.3 Objectives	5
1.4 Research questions	6
1.5 Significance of the study	7
1.6 Limitations	8
1.7 Definition of terms	9
1.7.1 EFL learners	9
1.7.2 Listening self-efficacy	9
1.7.3 FL Anxiety	9
1.7.4 FL Listening Anxiety	9
1.7.5 Listening comprehension proficiency	10
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Listening comprehension	11
2.3 Listening Comprehension and Language Learning	15
2.3 Theoretical framework	16
2.3.1 Social cognitive theory	17
2.3.2 Social cognitive theory's components	18
2.4 Self-efficacy	20
2.4.1 Academic studies on self-efficacy	21
2.5 Anxiety	23
2.6 Theoretical model of FLA	25
2.7 The development of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale	27
2.8 FLCA and academic performance	28
2.9 FL listening anxiety	37
2.10 Foreign language listening anxiety studies	38
2.11 Research on self-efficacy and anxiety	41
2.12 Factors Influence Listening Comprehension Performance	42
2.13 Gaps in literature	43

	2.14 Conceptual framework	44
3	METHODOLOGY	47
	3.1 Introduction	47
	3.2 Research design	47
	3.2.1 Method	48
	3.3 Participants and sampling technique	49
	3.3.1 Population	50
	3.3.2 Samples	50
	3.2.4 Sampling procedure	41
	3.4 Instrumentation	52
	3.4.1 Questionnaires	52
	3.4.1.1 FL Classroom anxiety scale	52
	3.4.1.2 Listening self-efficacy questionnaire	53
	3.4.1.3 FL Listening anxiety scale	53
	3.4.1.4 Interview	54
	3.4.1.5 Tests	55
	3.5 Reliability and validity of the instruments	56
	3.5.1 Questionnaires	56
	3.5.2 Tests	58
	3.6 Procedures for data collection	58
	3.6.1 Pilot study	58
	3.6.2 Actual study	59
	3.7 Procedures for Data Analysis	62
4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	65
	4.1 Introduction	65
	4.2 Demographic information	65
	4.2.1 Demographic information on respondents' Gender	65
	4.2.2 Demographic information on respondents' level of proficiency	66
	4.3 Exploratory data analysis (EDA)	67
	4.3.1 Test of normality	68
	4.3.2 Descriptive data for advanced group	68
	4.3.3 Descriptive data for intermediate group	68
	4.4 Findings	69
	4.4.1 Research question one	69
	4.4.1.1 LC and FLCA (Advanced group)	70
	4.4.1.2 LC and FLCA (Intermediate group)	71
	4.4.1.3 LC and SE (Advanced group)	73
	4.4.1.4 LC and SE (Intermediate group)	73
	4.4.1.5 LC and FLLA (Advanced group)	74
	4.4.1.6 LC and FLLA (Intermediate group)	75
	4.4.2 Research question two	76
	4.4.2.1 Listening self-efficacy and FLCA (advanced group)	77
	4.4.2.2 Listening self-efficacy and FLCA (Intermediate group)	77
	4.4.2.3 Listening self-efficacy and FLLA (Advanced group)	78
	4.4.2.4 Listening self-efficacy and FLLA	79

	(Intermediate group)	
	4.4.2.5 FLCA and FLLA (Advanced group)	80
	4.4.2.6 FLCA and FLLA (Intermediate group)	81
	4.4.3 Research question three	82
	4.4.3.1 Level of proficiency and listening self-efficacy	83
	4.4.3.2 Level of proficiency and FL listening anxiety	84
	4.4.3.3 Level of proficiency and FLCA	85
	4.4.4 Research question four	86
	4.4.4.1 Best predictor of LC (Advanced group)	86
	4.4.4.2 Best predictor of LC (Intermediate group)	87
	4.4.5 Research question five	89
	4.4.5.1 Nerves and emotionality	89
	4.4.5.2 Inappropriate strategies	90
	4.4.5.3 Lack of time to process	92
	4.4.5.4 Nature of speech	93
	4.4.5.5 Lack of visual support	94
	4.4.5.6 Level of difficulty	95
	4.4.5.7 Environment	96
	4.4.5.8 Instructors	96
	4.4.5.9 Peers	97
	4.4.5.10 Lack of practice	98
	4.4.6 Research question six	99
	4.5.6.1 Connectedness	100
	4.5.6.2 Instructors	100
	4.5.6.3 Type of listening materials	101
	4.5 Discussion	101
	4.5.1 Listening anxiety and LC performance	102
	4.5.2 FL Anxiety and LC	103
	4.5.3 Self-efficacy and LC performance	104
	4.5.4 FLCA and listening anxiety	105
	4.5.5 FL Anxiety and self-efficacy	106
	4.5.6 Level of proficiency and FL anxiety	107
	4.5.7 Level of proficiency and listening self-efficacy	108
	4.5.8 Level of proficiency and FL listening anxiety	109
	4.5.9 Best predictor of LC performance	109
	4.5.10 Factors influencing FL listening anxiety	110
	4.6 LC and affective variables	117
5	SUMMARY, IMPLICATION, AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	119
	5.1 Introduction	119
	5.2 Summary of major findings	119
	5.3 Implications	123
	5.3.1 Theoretical implications	123
	5.3.2 Implications for language teachers	124
	5.3.3 Implications for language learners	126
	5.4 Suggestions for future research	127

REFERENCES	129
APPENDICES	148
Appendix A: The Foreign Language Class room Anxiety Scale	148
Appendix B: EFL learners' listening self-efficacy questionnaire	151
Appendix C: Foreign Language Listening questionnaire	154
Appendix D: Interview Guide	157
Appendix E: FCE Listening Test	158
Appendix F: CAE Listening Test	165
Appendix G: Bio data of the Panel of Expert	172
Appendix H: Sample Interview Transcript	173
Appendix I: Sample Interview Coding	176
Appendix J: Normality Tests	177
BIODATA OF STUDENT	185
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	186



LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
2.1: Systematic analysis of correlation between FLA and achievement	35
3.1: Reliability of the instruments	59
3.2: Data collection procedures	62
4.1: Respondents' gender	66
4.2: Demographic information on respondents' level of proficiency	66
4.3: Demographic information of interviewees	67
4.4: Descriptive statistics for advanced students	68
4.5: Descriptive statistics for intermediate students	69
4.6: Descriptive results of FLCAS (Advanced group)	70
4.7: Correlation between advanced learners' LC and FLCA	71
4.8: Descriptive results of FL Classroom anxiety scale (Intermediate group)	72
4.9: Correlation between intermediate learners' LC and FLCA	72
4.10: Correlation between advanced learners' LC and their listening self-efficacy	73
4.11: Correlation between intermediate learners' LC and their listening self-efficacy	74
4.12: Correlation between advanced learners' LC and FL listening anxiety	75
4.13: Correlation between intermediate learners' LC and FL listening anxiety	76
4.14: Correlation between advanced learners' listening self-efficacy and FL class anxiety	76
4.15: Correlation between intermediate learners'	78

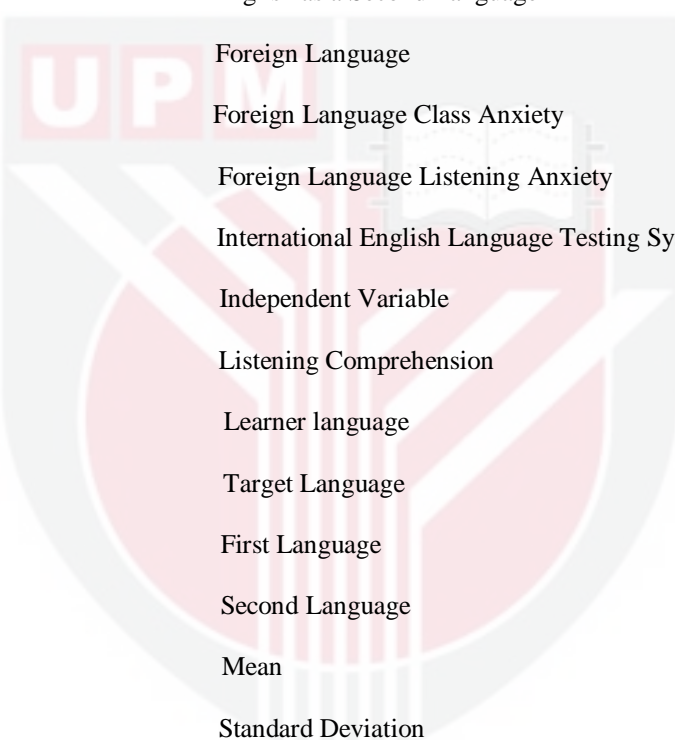
	listening self-efficacy and FL class anxiety	
4.16:	Correlation between intermediate learners' listening self-efficacy and FL listening anxiety	79
4.17:	Correlation between intermediate learners' listening self-efficacy and FL class anxiety	80
4.18:	Correlation between advanced learners' FL class anxiety and FL listening anxiety	81
4.19:	Correlation between intermediate learners' FL listening anxiety and FL class anxiety	82
4.20:	Descriptive statistics for self-efficacy	83
4.21:	Self-efficacy T-test	83
4.22:	Descriptive statistics for FL listening anxiety	84
4.23:	FL listening anxiety T-test	84
4.24:	Descriptive statistics for FL class anxiety	85
4.25:	FL class anxiety T-test	85
4.26:	Regression analysis (Advanced group)	86
4.27:	Regression ANOVA (Advanced group)	87
4.28:	Regression analysis (Intermediate group)	88
4.29:	Regression ANOVA (Intermediate group)	88

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	page
2.1: Conceptual framework	45
4.1: An affective factor model on LC performance	117



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS



DV	Dependent Variable
EDA	Exploratory Data Analysis
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	First Certificate in English
FCE	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
FLCA	Foreign Language Class Anxiety
FLLA	Foreign Language Listening Anxiety
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IV	Independent Variable
LC	Listening Comprehension
LL	Learner language
TL	Target Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
M	Mean
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Self- efficacy
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to find out the relationship between foreign language anxiety, listening anxiety, self-efficacy, and listening comprehension among Iranian EFL learners.

This chapter contains several major sections. It starts with introducing the topic under discussion and presents a study background. Next section addresses the research problem. Then, the objectives of the study and the research questions are stated. Next part presents the significance of the study. Then, limitations of the study are mentioned. Finally, the constitutive and operational definition of some of the key terms will be presented.

1.1 Background

Listening is considered as the highest frequently used form of language skill and has a fundamental role in normal communication and educational performance. Students need to spend most of their time listening to what their teachers says, such as, presenting lectures, telling directions or asking questions. When students first start learning a new language, they generally have to hear the words of that language very frequently before they are able to recognize and then verbalize those words. Not only is listening skill the basis for improving other skills, it is also the main route through which learners make initial exposure to the target language (Curtain, Pesola, & Savignon, 1988).

The importance of linguistic input for successful language acquisition is stressed in language learning and it has been emphasised even more in contemporary second language acquisition theory. Oral input is an essential component of the communication goal for learning a foreign language. Learners' ability to control what they hear has an impact on their development of comprehension. Rivers (1981) suggested that language instructors' goal from the very early stages of language instruction must be to build confidence in learners' ability for comprehending different kinds of input.

In spite of the importance of listening in foreign/second language learning, the necessity to examine learners' affective variables as factors explaining differences in individual's ability for learning a new language have received only slight emphasis in language instruction (Rost, 2002).

In this respect Savignon (2002), argued that affective variables contribute more to the success in foreign or second language learning than do intelligence, teaching method, or the amount of time spent in learning (see Rahimi & Abedini, 2009). Although paying attention to the affective issues in educational setting is not new, it has received recognition in the 1960s with the evolution of humanistic psychology when the learning cognitive theories were discredited and the combination of cognition and affective variables was highlighted (Arnold & Brown, 1999). Affective variables have been emphasized by many researchers (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Clement, Drnyei, & Noels, 1994; Hayati & Ostadian, 2008; Rahimi & Abedini, 2009) as one of the major determining factors of success in language learning. Bandura (1986, 1997) in his social cognitive theory asserts the ability of humans in controlling their behaviour. Individuals possess a system of self-beliefs that make them capable of having control over their action, emotions and thoughts. Based on this theory "what people think, believe, and feel affect how they behave" (Bandura, 1986, p. 25).

According to Bandura (1997, p. 3), self-efficacy, or "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required producing given attainments" is the most significant mediator of self-reflection. Therefore, assumptions about personal efficacy are not only related to one's abilities but also on what an individual believes might be accomplished with one's personal set of skill. Some scholars consider self-efficacy beliefs as more reliable predictors of success than knowledge, previous achievements, or personal skills (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Schunk, 1991).

In addition, Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy has a crucial role in the provocation of students' anxiety (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Learners' efficacy beliefs positively relate to their academic performance, while anxiety toward the subject possess minimal or no relationship to students' academic success (Bandura, 1986, 1997). In the social cognitive theory, state anxiety views as a function of the confidence with which ones encounter with activities and tasks. While learners have weakened senses of efficacy in a specific academic subject, they become anxious about the corresponding academic tasks. As a result, a poor sense of efficacy increases anxiety as well as reduces achievement.

Furthermore many scholars believed that language anxiety might be related to the feelings of tension, nervousness, worry and apprehension (Gardener & MacIntyre, 1993; Arnold & Brown, 1999; Oxford, 1999), while other researchers argued anxiety might actually increase foreign language performance (Chastain,1975; Scott, 1986) or reported no significant relationship between language performance and anxiety (Young, 1990). Through studying the previous research, it has emerged that the link between anxiety and foreign language learning is not utterly clear and provided some conflicting result.

Moreover, considering the proficiency level and comparing low and high proficient students, Young (1991) claims that anxiety influences FL learners with lower levels of proficiency more than students with higher levels of proficiency. In contrast, Toth (2011) believes that FLA is not restricted only to the beginning stages of language learning. As Onwuegbuzie et al.'s (1999) study showed learners experienced a linear rise in FL anxiety as duration of the study increased.

On the other hand, experiencing difficulties in comprehending the input in English appears to be one of the major problems that Iranian learners encounter in their course of English learning. The reason might be rooted in their weaknesses in general English that might have a severe influence on their listening performance.

Nevertheless, in English language classes in Iran listening skill has been a source of difficulty for both EFL learners and instructors due to the lack of resources and limited exposure to the target language out of classrooms compared to other EFL students in other settings (Sadeghi, 2005). Many FL learners never experience even a single occasion to communicate with an English native speaker throughout the entire process of English language learning. These shortcomings might affect the level of self-efficacy, FL anxiety and listening anxiety among Iranian EFL learners.

Hence, the researcher aims to investigate the role of EFL learners' self-efficacy and anxiety which are the components of motivational dimension based on Yang's model (1999) and their relationship to student's listening comprehension which is the meta-cognitive dimension.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem that exists in the current study can be addressed from different major point of views: the researcher's experiences in teaching, the current status of language teaching in Iran, and the insufficient number of studies in the area under investigation.

The researcher's teaching experience reflects the fact that in the Iranian EFL context listening comprehension remains one of the most problematic skills for EFL learners to obtain and for instructors to instruct. Iranian EFL learners find it difficult to comprehend recorded conversations. They feel anxious and worried in listening comprehension classrooms. Listening comprehension activities might create anxiety in Iranian EFL learners since they need to process the input very quickly while they do not have any opportunity to listen to English language out of their English classrooms. Moreover, in

EFL classes in Iran, most of the language activities are instructor-oriented and students are more passive in classrooms.

On the other hand, many English instructors assume that the low performance of language learners in listening comprehension is associated with their low general knowledge. In this regard, Chastain (1988) postulates that apart from linguistic aptitude, there should be other equally influential variables clarifying whether language learners learn a foreign language skills. He posits “The affective domain plays a larger role in developing second-language skills than does the cognitive because the emotions control the will to activate or shut down the cognitive function.” (p. 122).

In the Iranian EFL context, a lot of attention is paid to teach grammatical points and vocabulary while listening practice is not given enough emphasis (Rahimi & Abedini, 2009). In spite of the necessity of listening practice in language teaching process, the main focus in English language classes in Iran is still on the reading and writing skills. In Iran, English language is instructed as a subject at secondary schools and EFL learners are learning English in a context where they have no other exposure to English language outside of classrooms. Therefore, they have very limited opportunities to listen to the real language; these learners are not accustomed to listening to English language as it is spoken by native speakers. These factors effect on their low performance in listening comprehension performance which may not merely be due to their low aptitude.

Research in the Iranian EFL context has also proved that a serious problem most language learners face is their inability to communicate and comprehend, which is the result of lack of practice and exposure to the target language (Maleki & Zangani, 2007; Vaezi, 2008). Rahimi & Abedini (2009), too, contend that students do not learn much English due to some problems in the textbooks, teachers’ methodology or the evaluation system.

In Iran, the educational system is defined as three cycles including six years of primary school, three years of middle school or secondary school, three years of high school. English language is a FL in Iran and it is officially taught from the first year of the middle school. Hence, Iranian students study English language for almost six years. However, unlike what Brown (1980) stated that “listening ability lies at the very heart of all growth, from birth through the years of formal education” (p. 10) a very limited time is dedicated to listening skill. Lack of knowledge of using listening strategies, lack of exposure to English language outside the classrooms, the absence of motivation towards doing textbook English language exercises, lack of appropriate textbook materials and unawareness of language learners of their learning styles are some factors that influence English language listening proficiency of Iranian language learners (Shirani Bidabadi & Yamat, 2012).

Another source of the problem that leads to the present study is the dearth of research in the context where the study is to be carried out. Although listening skill is currently well realised as a critical facet in learning a foreign language, its learning and teaching process still remain the least understood. Listening comprehension is now recognised as an important aspect of language learning; nonetheless, “much work remains to be done in both theory and practice” Morley (2001). In the context of this study, very little time is devoted to listening skill which is unlike what Brown (1981) asserted that “listening ability lies at the very heart of all growth, from birth through the years of formal education” (p. 10).

Additionally, although there are plenty of reasons to consider affective issues such as the level of self-efficacy and anxiety as influential variables, which might highly predict EFL learners’ listening comprehension performance, little attempts have been made to investigate these variables as related to listening comprehension achievement of Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, the issue still remains unknown in the Iranian EFL setting. Small scale studies on the relationship of affective variables and listening comprehension in EFL contexts have been done in Asian countries such as China, Turkey, Japan, and Korea. Nevertheless, this issue is still unexplored in the Iranian EFL context, where a large number of learners are learning English as a foreign language, and the demand for learning this language is growing considerably.

Moreover, little evidence is available to help reach a conclusion about the nature of the relationship between FL anxiety and FL performance across different level of proficiencies. As Horwitz (2001) noted many advanced and successful FL learners experience high levels of anxiety during learning and using a foreign language. On the other hand, the related literature on affective variables evidences the scarcity of studies on the impact of listening self-efficacy on EFL learners’ listening performance as well as the relationship between listening anxiety and listening self-efficacy across different levels of proficiency. Therefore, the present study aims at exploring the role of EFL learners’ self-efficacy and anxiety regarding listening comprehension in their listening comprehension performance.

1.3 Objectives

The present study aims at investigating the role of EFL learners’ self-efficacy, EFL learning anxiety and listening anxiety on students’ listening comprehension performance and comparing the degree of self-efficacy and two types of anxiety on English learners at different levels of proficiency. The study also attempts to find out what factors affect Iranian EFL learners’ degree of anxiety regarding listening comprehension and pinpoint the pedagogical aspects of these findings with regard to the improvement of theoretical and practical research in course designing and L2 teaching. Specifically, the study’s objectives include:

1) To investigate if there is any significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' FL class anxiety, self- efficacy, FL listening anxiety and their listening test performance.

2) To examine if there is any significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' foreign language class anxiety, listening anxiety and their self-efficacy regarding listening comprehension.

3) To investigate how students' level of proficiency influences their foreign language class anxiety, foreign language listening anxiety and their self-efficacy regarding listening comprehension.

4) To examine which variable best predicts the learners' listening comprehension performance.

5) To explore what possible factors learners think can affect their listening anxiety.

6) To find out which factors learners believe may help to decrease their listening anxiety?

1.5 Research questions

The present study is looking at the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy and anxiety regarding listening comprehension and variables that effect on their listening anxiety. Specifically, the study seeks answers to the following questions:

1) Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' FL class anxiety, self- efficacy, FL listening anxiety and their listening test performance?

2) Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' foreign language class anxiety, listening anxiety and their self-efficacy regarding listening comprehension?

3) Do Iranian EFL students' levels of foreign language class anxiety, listening anxiety and self-efficacy differ in their level of proficiency?

4) Which variable best predicts the learners' LC performance?

5) What are the sources of listening anxiety among Iranian foreign language learners?

6) Which factors do learners believe may help to decrease their listening anxiety?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The ultimate goal of second/ foreign language instruction, according to comprehension approach methodology, is to develop communicative competence and oral fluency. However according to Dunkel & Davis (1994) this goal can be achieved by "putting the horse (listening comprehension) before the cart (oral production)" (p. 100). The majority of Iranian students are willing to acquire English competence to be accepted in universities, find better careers, get admission to overseas universities or reach higher social status. Research has also shown that learning English has become progressively popular and prestigious among Iranian students (Vaezi, 2008; Chalak and Kassaian, 2010). However, in spite of their eagerness, Iranian students appear not to be completely successful in accomplishing their goal (Vaezi, 2008; Rahimi et al, 2008). Therefore, it is important to realize what factors arbitrate individuals' differences for being successful in the acquirement of English proficiency. Vandergrift (2007) states study into L2 listening is essential because a better understanding in this area will improve pedagogy and consequently it will affect the development of other skills and overall progress for language learners.

On the other hand, the view of considering learners' affect as a major factor in listening comprehension performance can provide significant implications for curriculum designers. By developing a learner centered language curriculum that considers affects in different angles, curriculum designer might assist language learners to foster positive beliefs about their abilities. Instructors also will be able to nurture healthy academic atmosphere for their students, which can be led to better performance in language learners. In addition, policy makers and course book developers will be able to design a syllabus and textbooks with individual differences in mind. Furthermore, drawing on the finding obtained in this study course evaluators may concentrate on anxiety issue and individual differences at the time of assessment.

More specifically it is necessary for language instructors to be familiar with factors contributing to low or high degree of self-efficacy and anxiety among their students in order to determine why some language learners with high language proficiency show low listening comprehension performance than those who are less competent. Evaluating self-efficacy beliefs in a foreign language listening can provide beneficial insight into the understanding of learners' self-perceptions of their abilities in processing and

controlling the oral input. On the other hand when language instructors are aware of the factors that contribute to the learners' listening anxiety, they will be able take steps to provide an atmosphere that increases the positive effect or decreases the negative effect on their students' listening comprehension performance.

Lastly, each of the studies conducted to date related to listening skill has examined the influence of one of the variables on the students' performance. In other words, no piece of research has been conducted that takes into account several variables affecting one's listening comprehension performance. Although studies on foreign language anxiety are abundant, there is no research that directly focused on both listening anxiety and foreign language anxiety and their relationship to listening comprehension performance. The originality of the present study lies in the fact that it attempts to add to the existing body of knowledge by trying to come up with a holistic and comprehensive model of factors influencing listening anxiety and listening comprehension skills to Iranian EFL learners, hence providing a better insight into the already-known facts in the area under investigation. Thus, it is significant to pay attention to the role of EFL learners' self-efficacy and anxiety regarding listening comprehension skill which is considered as the "Cinderella skill in second language learning" (Nunan, 1999).

1.7 Limitations

Several limitations of the current research are worth noting. First, although both quantitative and qualitative data were used to meet the objectives of the study, the findings might not be generalized beyond the specific learners and the setting where the data were collected. However, as Cameron and Larsen Freeman (2007) recommend, it is more rational to consider particular generalizations instead of universal generalizations. Thus, as with any study, the particularity of the research needs to be taken into account and the results should be interpreted accordingly. Therefore, any further generalization requires to be done with caution.

Second, although there might be two-way links between personal characteristics and test performance, the present study is to investigate only the one-way relationship between self-efficacy, FL anxiety and listening anxiety to listening comprehension performance.

Furthermore, although the current study seeks to provide an explanation of foreign language learning outcome, which is students' listening comprehension, the explanatory power may be limited due to the number of independent variables included in the study. This limitation seems to be unavoidable due to the numerous factors associated with language learning. Therefore, the present study limits its scope by looking at the most immediate and direct influences on the students' listening comprehension performance.

1.7 Definition of terms

Prior to reviewing the related literature in the next chapter, the keywords related to the study are defined both conceptually and operationally.

1.7.1 EFL learners

English as a foreign language learners refer to learners who are in countries where they learn English as a subject in schools and English language is not used as a language of communication in the country nor as a medium of instruction in education (Chastain, 1988). In the present study, the term refers to Iranian advanced and intermediate students who are learning English in language schools in Iran.

1.7.2 Listening Self-efficacy

Listening self-efficacy is defined as the students' perceived abilities to perform different English listening tasks assigned in their English listening classes and assessments (Bandura 1986, 1997). In the current study, self-efficacy refers to the Iranian EFL students' beliefs toward their listening comprehension abilities and it is measured by Listening Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Rahimi & Abedini (2009).

1.7.3 FL Anxiety

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1991) define foreign language 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. 31). In the current study, FL anxiety refers to Iranian language student's feeling of nervousness, tension, and apprehension and it is measured by the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz et al. (1986).

1.7.4 FL Listening Anxiety

Listening anxiety is the apprehension experienced or anticipated while pertaining to the use of listening skills (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). In the present study, FL listening anxiety refers to Iranian English language learners' anxiety while they are

listening to English materials and it is measured by Foreign Language Listening Scale (FLLAS) developed by Kim (2000).

1.7.5 Listening comprehension proficiency

Listening comprehension proficiency is the ability to extract information from language material presented in an auditory manner (Chastain, 1988). In this study, the term refers to the Iranian English language students' performance of the listening comprehension test. It has been measured by listening comprehension part of Cambridge ESOL examination in two level of FCE for intermediate and CAE for advanced students.



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