

## SHADOWING AND EFL LISTENING COMPREHENSION: FOCUS ON METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY USE, SELF-EFFICACY AND ACHIEVEMENT

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**Abstract.** *This study aimed at investigating the effect of shadowing on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners and also how it could influence their listening self-efficacy as well as its relationship with their metacognitive awareness of listening strategies. To this end, 38 EFL learners (20 females and 18 males) in a language institute in Esfahan, Iran, with an average age of 16 years old, at the intermediate level of language proficiency were selected through the convenience sampling method. They were randomly divided into two groups of experimental (n = 19) and control (n = 19). The experimental group was exposed to shadowing in the listening portion of their English classes. Data were obtained via a listening comprehension test and two related questionnaires. Results revealed that shadowing had a significant positive impact on the learners' listening performance. Further, the correlation between shadowing and self-efficacy was found to be moderately positive though statistically non-significant. Finally, shadowing was found to significantly and positively affect the frequency of using metacognitive listening strategies. Findings have implications for language learners and teachers.*

**Key words:** *listening self-efficacy, metacognitive strategies, shadow listening, EFL learners*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Shadow listening, the main instructional strategy used in this study, was adapted from Murphey's (2001) 'conversational shadowing', a pedagogical technique that taps into a common phenomenon in people's discourse: the tendency to repeat silently or aloud what interlocutors or speakers themselves say. Tannen (2007), who has observed frequent use of spontaneous shadowing in conversations, believes that shadowing responds to a basic human drive to imitate and repeat. Shadowing has also been recognized as a useful technique for training simultaneous interpreters (Kurz 1992, Sabatini 2000) and in psycholinguistic research for assessing language processing skills, especially listening and reading (Gray 1975, Marslen-Wilson 1975, Muchisky 1983).

While listening, listeners use a variety of mental processes to give meaning to the information they listen to. These mental processes that listeners use to understand spoken English can be generally described as listening comprehension strategies (Coskun 2010). As Oxford (1990) put it "strategies are especially important for language learning, because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing the

communicative competence. According to Nunan (1999), behind every learning task is at least one strategy. However, learners are not aware of these strategies in which they are engaged.

Anderson (1999) considered metacognitive strategies as the most important strategies to develop learners' skills. O'Malley and Chamot argue that (1990) that learners without these strategies have no ability to monitor and regulate their development, performance, and future learning. On the other hand, learners who use metacognitive strategies are more proficient learners (Hauck, 2005). In the same vein, Yang (2009) maintains that increasing metacognitive awareness assists listeners to accomplish listening tasks more effectively.

On the other hand, learners may make minimum effort because they do not believe that they have the ability to accomplish the learning tasks. The motivational construct that is most related to learners' perception of their own abilities to learn or accomplish given learning tasks is self-efficacy, which is defined by social learning theorists as "a sense of confidence regarding the performance of specific tasks" (Lorsbach and Jinks 1999, 158).

An influential variable in listeners' performance is thus self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986, 391) and as defined in the social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to "people's judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance". Perceived self-efficacy has a bearing on learners' selection of activities as well as their persistence in accomplishing given tasks involved in the activities (Schunk 1989; Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinex-Pons 1992). Put differently, beliefs of personal efficacy can predict one's success in actual abilities, skills, or knowledge (Schunk 1991). That is, "self-perceptions of capability help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have" (Pajares 1997, 3).

One technique which provides learners with affordances for language learning and use is the mere echoing of input material. Shadowing allows learners to not simply repeat but engage in imitation, a process which is crucial to language learning when viewed from a Vygotskian social cognitive theory (SCT): 'In the child's development ... imitation and instruction play a major role' (Vygotsky 1986, 188). Rather than viewing imitation as mere automatic, mechanical copying or repetition of model behavior, SCT conceives of imitation as transformative activity involving a learner's intelligent, intentional, and creative reproduction of someone else's mental operations (Vygotsky 1986). In Vygotskian theory, imitation constitutes the chief mechanism of internalization and a major component of developmental activity in the ZPD.

However, how this idea can be materialized in language classes and how it is related to cognitive and affective variables still needs more investigation. In this study this technique was employed to find about how it could enhance Iranian learners' listening comprehension. More importantly, an attempt was made to determine how it was related to metacognitive strategy use and learners' self-efficacy. Specifically, the following questions were addressed.

1) Does shadowing have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' listening achievement?

2) Is there any statistically significant relationship between shadowing and Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy?

3) Does shadowing bring about any significant changes in Iranian EFL learners' pattern of metacognitive strategy use?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Vandergrift (1999, 158), listening comprehension is “a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance”. Thus, listening comprehension involves a great deal of mental activity on the part of the listener and it involves bottom-up and top-down processing of incoming speech.

For Rost (2005, 503), listening comprehension encompasses receptive, constructive, and interpretive aspects of cognition. Therefore, listening comprehension is “a complex cognitive process that allows a person to understand spoken language”. Further, Caldwell (2008, 24) maintains that comprehension is an unobservable process which is extremely complicated and multifaceted entity requiring a “process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction with oral language”.

One way learners can become actively involved in controlling their own learning is by using strategies. Brown (1995, 104) quite appropriately compares strategies to battle plans: “strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information”. Among all the strategies for listening, O’Malley and Chamot (1990) proposed three main types of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies. The metacognitive strategy is a kind of self-regulated learning. It includes the attempt to plan, check, monitor, select, revise, and evaluate, etc. For example, for metacognitive planning strategies, learners would clarify the objectives of an anticipated listening task, and attend to specific aspects of language input or situational details that assisted in understanding the task (Vandergrift 1999). Generally, it can be discussed through pre-listening planning strategies, while-listening monitoring strategies, and post-listening evaluation strategies.

Cognitive strategies are related to comprehending and storing input in working memory or long-term memory for later retrieval. They include bottom-up strategies and top-down strategies. In bottom-up processing the incoming input is used as the basis for understanding the message. On the other hand, top-down processing involves moving from meaning to language (Richards, 2008). Listening comprehension is believed to require both top-down and bottom-up processing (Chiu 2006, Lu 2008).

Social/affective strategies, as defined by Vandergrift (2003), are techniques used to collaborate with others, to verify understanding or to lower anxiety. Habte-Gabr (2006) holds that socio-affective strategies are non-academic in nature and involve stimulating learning through establishing a level of empathy between the instructor and students. They included considering factors such as emotions and attitudes (Oxford 1990).

Goh and Yusnita (2006) and Al-Alwan, Asassfeh, and Al-Shboul (2013) emphasized the positive effect of listening strategies on the learners’ listening performance. Yang (2009) and Al-Alwan, Asassfeh, and Al-Shboul (2013) stressed the significant role of metacognitive strategies in helping learners to undertake the listening activity more effectively and to distinguish successful listeners from unsuccessful ones. Coskun (2010) and Al-Alwan, Asassfeh, and Al-Shboul (2013) in their study of the effect of metacognitive listening strategy training program on listening comprehension reported that the learners who were exposed to metacognitive strategy training showed a much higher listening performance.

There are a few studies reporting non-significant changes in listening performance or strategy use and awareness after strategy instruction and such changes have been attributed to both listeners' characteristics and contextual factors (Chen and Haung 2011, Seo 2002).

Shadowing is a technique which could engage listeners in both top-down and bottom-up processes. Using this technique, learners not only repeat, partially or completely, what other learners say, but also interact dialogically. Technically, shadowing can be defined as a paced, parrot-style auditory tracking task, conducted with headphones (Lambert 1992). Shadowing is not a passive activity, rather it is an active and highly cognitive activity in which learners track the heard speech and vocalize it as clearly as possible at the same time that they hear it (Tamai 1997). While repeating is an off-line task which provides learners with silent pauses so that individuals can reproduce the sounds they hear, shadowing is an on-line immediate process of repeating speech (Shiki et al. 2010). In Murphey's (2001) view, shadowing is a tool of recursion because it allows for "repeated use of the same or similar language items, from simple repetition, to reformulation, to new production and novel use" (p. 132). Murphey (1996, 2001) believes that shadowing may be helpful in showing learners how to make adjustments and negotiations conducive to L2 acquisition.

Granted that shadowing has proved an effective learning technique and also the influential role of using metacognitive strategies in improving one's listening, it must be interesting to find out whether shadowing could contribute to raising learners' awareness of these strategies, hence the present study.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1. Participants

For the purposes of this study, 38 learners (20 females and 18 males) with an average age of 16 years old, at the intermediate level of language proficiency were selected. They were randomly divided into two groups of experimental ( $n = 19$ ) and control ( $n = 19$ ). The participants were selected through the convenience sampling method. For this purpose, the existing classes in a language institute in Isfahan, Iran were selected. Their language proficiency level was determined via the school placement test.

#### 3.2. Instruments

To measure the variables of the study (including listening comprehension, listening self-efficacy and metacognitive listening strategy use), the following instruments were used.

##### 3.2.1. PET

PET is an English language test provided by Cambridge English Language Assessment. PET is an intermediate level qualification which demonstrates the ability to communicate using English for everyday purposes. It is designed to show that learners can use their English language skills in everyday situations when working, studying and travelling. It incorporates all four language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking). The Listening paper has four parts comprising 25 questions and it lasts approximately 35 minutes. Candidates are expected to understand a range of spoken materials, in both informal and neutral settings, on a range of everyday topics. Recorded materials may include announcements, interviews and discussions about everyday life.

Part 1 has seven short recordings and three pictures for each. Candidates listen for key pieces of information in order to complete seven multiple choice questions.

Part 2 has a longer recording either in monologue or interview format. Candidates identify simple factual information in the recording to answer six multiple choice questions.

Part 3 has a longer monologue, which may be a radio announcement or a recorded message with information about places and events. Candidates are given a page of notes summarizing the recording and must fill in six pieces of information which are missing from the notes.

Part 4 has an informal conversation between two people who are discussing everyday topics. Candidates decide whether six statements are true or false, based on the information, attitudes and opinions of the people in the recording.

The listening section of PET as a standard test was used to determine students' listening proficiency. A different version of the test was used as the posttest. Students' scores on both versions appeared to have similar means and variances.

### 3.2.2. *Metacognitive Listening Strategy Questionnaire (MALQ)*

For the purposes of this study, the Metacognition Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), which was developed by Vandergrift and others (2006), was given to the experimental group both at the beginning and at the end of the treatment so that possible changes in their use of those strategies could be determined through comparison.

In order to ensure full understanding, a Persian version was used in this study. In a pilot study, this version was examined to make sure there would not be any intelligibility problems. The scores the students got were viewed as their metacognitive awareness of the processes and strategies required for successful second language listening comprehension.

The questionnaire contains 21 items, each item is rated on a six point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) without a neutral point so that respondents could not hedge.

The MALQ consists of five categories including problem solving (6 items), planning and evaluation (5 items), mental translation (4 items), person knowledge (3 items) and directed attention (4 items).

The validity of the questionnaire has been explored by the developers using both exploratory and confirmatory analysis by a large sample of different foreign language learners including Iranians (Vandergrift, et al. 2006).

### 3.2.3. *Listening Self-Efficacy Questionnaire*

Participants' listening self-efficacy beliefs were investigated through the Persian version of the English listening self-efficacy questionnaire (ELSEQ) developed by Renzhi (2012). The ELSEQ assesses how confident learners are when performing a listening task. The ELSEQ has 16 items and each item is rated on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all sure) to 5 (moderately sure) and 10 (completely sure). Again, the questionnaire was pilot-studies in order to avoid any potential intelligibility problems during the main study. The reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .81. The reliability coefficients of the subsections were found to be .78, .83, .79, and .86 respectively.

### 3.3. Procedure

The purpose of this study was to identify the role of imitation from a perspective called listening-shadowing activity in an EFL context. For this purpose, the experimental group (CG) was exposed to shadowing in the listening portion of their English classes; that is, whenever they listened to a listening text, they were asked to repeat and imitate chunk by chunk what they had listened to. The instruction period took 12 sessions in a span of four weeks. However, the control group (CG) was taught listening void of any shadowing. The listening achievement test as well as the self-efficacy questionnaire were given to the participants after the intervention while the MALQ was administered both prior to the treatment and afterwards so that potential changes in participants' pattern of strategy use could be discerned.

## 4. RESULTS

In order to answer the first research question, independent-samples *t* test was used to compare the listening comprehension skills of the CG and EG learners both prior to and after instruction. For the sake of answering the second research question, Pearson correlation was employed to find the relationship between the posttest scores of the EG learners and their post-experiment self-efficacy. Finally, independent-samples *t* test was used again to compare the strategy use scores of the CG and EG learners before and after instruction, and thus to answer the third research question of the study.

### 4.1. Comparing the achievement scores of EG and CG learners

The first research question of the study was concerned with whether shadowing had any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' achievement. The achievement scores of the learners in both groups, obtained through administering the listening section of the PET, before and after the intervention are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of achievement scores of EG and CG

	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest	EG	19	12.46	1.57	36	.63	.41
	CG	19	13.02	1.94			
Posttest	EG	19	18.38	2.19	36	6.75	.00
	CG	19	15.85	1.89			

As demonstrated in Table 1, the results obtained from running an independent samples *t*-test indicated that the difference between the performance of the learners in the experimental group ( $M = 12.46$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ) as compared with that of the control group ( $M = 13.02$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ) before the treatment was not significant,  $t = .63$ ,  $p = .41$ . However, results obtained from the test after the intervention depicted a different picture. The experimental group ( $M = 18.38$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ) outperformed the control group ( $M = 15.85$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ) and the difference turned out to be significant,  $t = 6.75$ ,  $p = 0.00$ .

#### 4.2. The relationship between EG learners' listening and self-efficacy

The second research question of the study was formulated to uncover whether there was any statistically significant relationship between shadowing and Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy. For this purpose, Pearson correlation was applied to the posttest listening scores of the EG learners and their self-efficacy scores obtained through the self-efficacy questionnaire. The results of the analysis are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation between EG learners' listening and self-efficacy

			Listening	Self-efficacy
Listening	Pearson	correlation	1	.42
	Sig.	(2-tailed)		.14
	N		19	19
Self-efficacy	Pearson	correlation	.42	1
	Sig.	(2-tailed)	.14	
	N		19	19

The correlation between shadowing, operationalized through the posttest listening scores of the EG learners, and self-efficacy was found to be moderately positive ( $r = .42$ ). However, this moderate positive relationship did not appear to be statistically significant ( $p = .14$ ). This is also graphically shown in Figure 1.

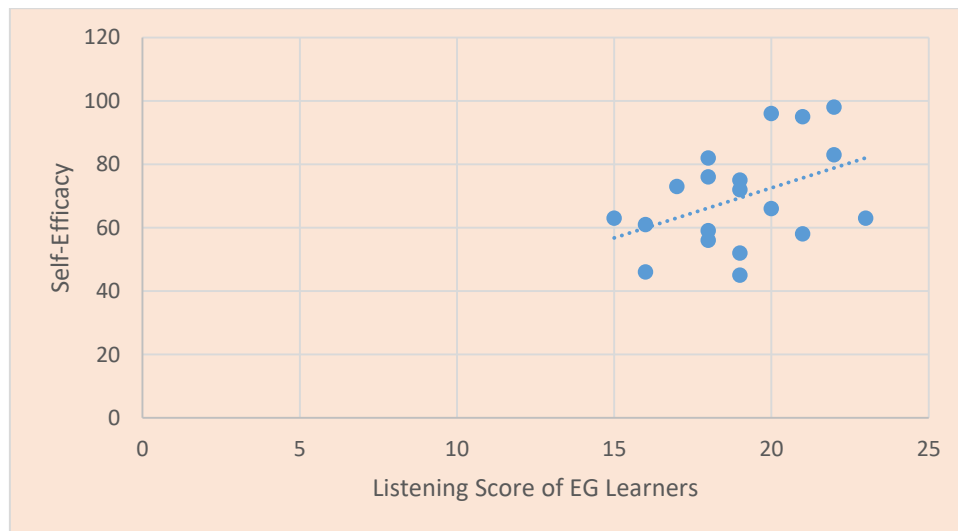


Fig. 1 Relationship between shadowing and self-efficacy

As can be seen in the scatterplot in Figure 1, the hypothetical trend line formed by connecting the dots shows a slight rise, which represents a moderate positive relationship between shadowing and their self-efficacy.

### 4.3. Comparing the strategy use scores of EG and CG learners before and after the experiment

The third research question of the study was intended to find out whether shadowing could bring about any significant changes in Iranian EFL learners' pattern of metacognitive strategy use. To answer this research question, the strategy use scores of the two groups were compared via an independent-samples *t*-test before the experiment commenced. Likewise, after the completion of the experiment, the independent-samples *t* test was conducted again to find out any possible differences between the two groups. The results of the *t* test analyses are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3 Strategy use of EG and CG learners before and after the experiment

	Groups	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)
Pre-Experiment	EG	19	64.92	4.21	36	.71	.44
	CG	19	66.03	4.76			
Post-Experiment	EG	19	76.19	4.15	36	4.46	.00
	CG	19	69.58	3.82			

Table 3 depicts that before the experiment began, there was no significant difference between the mean strategy use score of the EG learners ( $M = 64.92$ ,  $S = 4.21$ ) and that of the CG learners ( $M = 66.03$ ,  $SD = 4.76$ ),  $t = .71$ ,  $p = .44$ . However, after the completion of the experiment, the EG learners' strategy use mean score ( $M = 76.19$ ,  $4.15$ ) turned out to be greater and significantly different from that of the CG learners ( $M = 69.58$ ,  $SD = 3.82$ ),  $t = 4.46$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . In sum it was revealed that shadowing had a statistically significant impact on the listening achievement of Iranian EFL learners and the Pearson correlation analysis indicated that there was a moderate positive relationship between shadowing and Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy though this relationship failed to reach statistical significance. Finally, it was concluded that shadowing was found to significantly affect the frequency of use of metacognitive strategies by Iranian EFL learners.

## 5. DISCUSSION

As set at the beginning of the study, the aim of the current study was to examine the relationship between shadowing as a teaching technique and EFL learners' listening comprehension as well as their self-efficacy and their use of metacognitive listening strategies. The statistical analysis of the results revealed that the participants in the experimental group managed to obtain significantly higher scores on the listening achievement test than their counterparts in the control group implying that shadowing was effective. The reason behind the effectiveness of shadowing on listening ability of the EFL learners could be attributed to the unique characteristics of this technique for teaching listening. According to Tannen (2007), shadowing responds to a basic human drive to imitate and repeat. Murphey (2001, 132) also maintains that shadowing is "a tool of recursion" because it allows for "repeated use of the same or similar language items, from simple repetition, to reformulation, to new production and novel use". The results of this study were in line with those of the previous ones reported in literature. In a recent study, Commander and M. de Guerrero (2016) used shadow-reading as a pedagogical technique aimed at



fostering reading comprehension and retention in second (L2) or foreign language (FL) classrooms. The technique is an adaptation of “conversational shadowing,” a procedure which requires listeners to repeat what their interlocutors say in an attempt to remember the content of the interaction while also practicing and learning a target language.

As related to the second objective of the study, the statistical analysis of the results pointed to a moderate insignificant positive correlation between shadowing and self-efficacy. Thus, the second null hypothesis was partially rejected, however the correlation was not significant. This could be justified on the ground that variation in the length of shadowing opportunities may marginalize the role of shadowing in listening programs where it is thought that the lack of guidance and criteria seem proportionate to its importance. This could be addressed by standardization of length. However, if this variation is to be addressed adequately there does need to be some specification of the duration, for instance, a minimum number of hours for shadow-listening at least. Another reason could be related to the proper way of shadowing presented and modeled by the teacher. The accurate application of such techniques requires teachers who are well trained and also aware of the correct use of techniques.

A similar study was also conducted by Montebon (2016). This study aimed to investigate the effect of shadow education on students’ self-efficacy. Shadow education or tutoring mimics the mainstream form of education while self-efficacy is a personal judgment of one’s capability to plan and execute a course of action to achieve a certain goal (Bandura 1977). Results of this study described the tutorial background of the respondents and their self-efficacy levels. It has been found out that students’ self-efficacy due to exposure to shadow education is high. Reviewing research on listening self-efficacy and shadowing, Hamada (2016) concludes that shadowing boosts learners’ self-efficacy.

Finally, the statistical analysis of the results uncovered that the application of shadowing led to a significant change in EFL learners’ pattern of metacognitive strategy use. In other words, those exposed to shadowing used metacognitive strategies more frequently. It is evident that metacognitive awareness of listening strategies is related to achievement in English (Kummin and Rahman 2010), English listening proficiency (Shirani Bidabadi and Yamat 2010), and language learning motivation (Baleghizadeh and Rahimi 2011). Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari (2006) pointed out that learners with high degrees of metacognitive awareness are better at processing and storing new information, finding the best ways to practice and reinforce what they have learned. Following this line of reasoning, Coskun (2010) conducted an experimental study on a sample of 40 (male and female) Turkish EFL learning beginners to examine the impact of a five-week metacognitive listening strategy training program on listening comprehension. The results showed a significantly higher performance by the experimental group, implying that metacognitive strategy training be integrated within regular listening classes to foster EFL listening performance. Hamada (2012) also incorporated shadowing and metacognitive awareness into a listening course for Japanese EFL learners and reported that the results were in favor of using shadowing to raise learners’ awareness of those strategies.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It has always been the desire of researchers and teachers to develop more effective teaching techniques to help improve students’ listening skills. The results of this study indicated that shadowing is suitable for regular EFL classrooms, where the emphasis is on listening comprehension development. This study also demonstrated how a theoretically-

effective teaching technique, shadowing, can be used more practically, building a bridge between theory and practice. Another important finding of the research was the positive impact shadowing had on self-efficacy, and metacognitive strategy use of EFL learners. It appears that shadowing has not been very much popular in Iran and it is hoped that similar kinds of shadowing research will be conducted to develop similar learning procedures assisting greater numbers of students to increase their foreign-language skills. The findings of this research can offer beneficial implications for EFL teachers and learners. Additionally, instructors can use various types of listening strategies and then apply shadowing. Another implication could be for teacher trainers. The teachers should be well-trained concerning the proper presentation of shadowing.

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