

LISTENING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES OF TURKISH EFL LEARNERS AT UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Listening has been defined as a receptive skill so far, but seeing that English language learners in Turkey expend considerable effort to understand listening texts, it may be misleading to view listening as passive on part of learners. By means of using listening strategies, it may become an active skill in which learners orchestrate several cognitive processes. Therefore, this study was carried out to look into Turkish students' use of listening strategies at the preparatory school of a public university in Turkey. With this purpose in mind, The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal & Tafaghodtari, 2006) and retrospective accounts were used to collect data from intermediate-level students. The results indicate that out of four subcategories of listening strategies, learners appeared to prefer two of them, namely directed attention and mental translation more than planning-evaluation and problem solving strategies. In addition, they were found to have more difficulty in answering implicit listening questions and verbalizing how they answered them than explicit listening questions. Possible reasons behind these findings might be lack of systematic strategy training for both teachers and learners and backwash effects of listening tests in Turkey. Therefore, familiarizing teachers and learners with listening strategies and improving listening tasks and tests are suggested.

Keywords: Learning English as a foreign language; listening skill; listening strategies; The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire; retrospective account

İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRENEN TÜRK ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN DİNLEME BECERİSİ STRATEJİLERİ

ÖZET

Dinleme, bugüne değin algılayıcı bir beceri olarak tanımlanagelmiştir. Ancak Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğrenenlerin İngilizce metinleri anlamak için sarf ettikleri büyük çaba göz önüne alınırsa, öğrenciler açısından dinlemenin edilgin bir beceri olduğunu düşünmek yanıltıcı olabilir. Dinleme, kullanılan stratejiler aracılığıyla, öğrencilerin birçok bilişsel süreci harmanladığı etkin bir beceriye dönüşebilir. Bu nedenle çalışmamızın amacı, Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesinin hazırlık eğitimi veren

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yüksekokulundaki Türk öğrencilerinin dinleme stratejilerini kullanımını incelemektir. Bu amaçla Üstbilişsel Farkındalık Dinleme Anketi (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal ve Tafaghodtari, 2006) ve geriye dönük anlatım kullanılarak orta düzey öğrencilerden veri toplanmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre öğrenciler, dinleme stratejilerinin dört alt türünden ikisini, yönelmiş dikkat ve zihinsel çeviri stratejilerini, planlama-değerlendirme ve sorun çözme stratejilerine tercih ediyor görülmektedir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin örtük dinleme sorularını yanıtlamada ve onları nasıl yanıtladığını dile getirmede açık dinleme sorularından daha fazla zorlandıkları bulunmuştur. Bulguların ardındaki olası nedenler olarak, hem öğretmenler hem öğrenciler açısından düzenli strateji eğitiminin eksikliği ve Türkiye’deki dinleme sınavlarının ket vurma etkisinden söz edilebilir. Dolayısıyla, öğretmen ve öğrencilerin dinleme becerilerini tanınması ve dinleme etkinlik ve sınavlarının geliştirilmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenme; dinleme becerisi; dinleme stratejileri; Üstbilişsel Farkındalık Dinleme Anketi; geriye dönük anlatım

1. INTRODUCTION

Within four language skills, listening is compared to Cinderella which has been overlooked by its elder sister, namely speaking (Nunan, 1997). Despite its status secondary to speaking, it necessitates considerable effort on the part of the listener which is described by Vandergrift (1999) as an active process requiring the listener to “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 sociocultural context of the utterance” (p. 168). Therefore, it would be no surprise to foreign language teachers to hear their students’ complaints about the “difficulty” of a listening text or the “fast” pace of speakers (Renandya & Farrell, 2011).

As a language teacher, the author of this paper is also familiar with such complaints and has observed a number of learners with a sense of low achievement particularly in listening tasks. Yet, some students are able to cope with listening tasks given both as classroom activities and in examinations. What makes them better listeners than others might be found in their use of listening strategies (Bao, 2017; Berne, 2004; Go & Hu, 2014; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). Hence, this research was conducted with the aim of investigating Turkish foreign language learners’ use of listening strategies to provide an insight into their listening processes. Although the data were collected in 2012, learners’ problems with this Cinderella skill still exist.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of listening comprehension strategies goes back to 1990s (Vandergrift, 1999) and it is described as active processing of the aural input (Rubin, 1994). Since then, there has been a growing interest in learners’ cognitive and metacognitive strategies to understand a listening text and make inferences (Hinkel, 2006). Rubin (1994) clarifies the distinction as follows: “Cognitive strategies involve solving learning problems by considering how to store and retrieve information. Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension” (p. 211). In Vandergrift (1997b), cognitive strategies encompass making inferences, elaboration on the basis of background knowledge, summarization, translation, transfer from one language to another, repetition, resourcing, grouping, note-taking, deduction/induction

and substitution, while metacognitive strategies include the three aforementioned strategies in addition to problem identification.

The positive effect of systematic and explicit cognitive and metacognitive strategy training on learners' listening comprehension was evidenced in empirical studies (Thompson & Rubin, 1996; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010, Dawenan, 2021). On the other hand, without any explicit instruction, listeners were found to apply some cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Vandergrift, 1997b), and tactics (Goh, 2002). Therefore, language learners' state of mind during listening cannot be compared to *tabula rasa*. On the contrary, it is significant to discover what they already have in their minds to fill gaps with systematic training and to make them feel more prepared for listening. For instance, in Goh's studies (1998, 2002) there was no explicit instruction on strategies provided with the participants for research purposes, the learners' retrospective verbalizations served as photographs of their state. Learners were found to frequently use inferencing, elaboration and predicting as strategies without receiving instruction, but the need for teaching strategies was underlined in those studies.

Field (1998), therefore, questions the effectiveness of teaching such strategies which are already unconscious and stands skeptical about strategy training due to inconclusive research on its guarantee for success in listening comprehension. He suggests adopting an approach more adaptable to teachers' teaching environments rather than an unquestioning acceptance: "All this does not mean that the listening teacher should ignore the true nature of L2 listening and the part played by compensatory strategies. The solution proposed here is that we rethink the structure of our lessons so that activities undertaken in the classroom reflect more closely what happens in a real-life listening encounter" (p. 116).

Taking Field's (1998) suggestion as a point of departure, a study on how Turkish foreign language learners handle their listening comprehension processes was carried out. Whether they feel strategically ready to concentrate on listening texts or create on-the-spot solutions depending on the listening task could be answered in such a study. As Field (1998) observes that there is no indication as to how a learner arrives at a correct answer, this study is a small-scale investigation into learners' ways of arriving at an answer in listening tasks, which is hoped to make a positive contribution to teaching listening.

In order to explore learners' strategies, retrospective verbalization or concurrent verbalization (think-aloud) methodology has been one of the data collection instruments used so far as postulated by Vandergrift (1997b) for the latter that "a think-aloud procedure appears to be a productive methodology for intervening in the listening process and having students report on the strategies they are using" (p. 389). Studying with 10 successful and 11 less successful students, Vandergrift (1997b) used the method by asking such questions as "What are you thinking now?"; "How did you figure that out?"; "What's going on in the back of your mind?"; "Can you be more specific?"; etc." (p. 391). He found out that the use of cognitive strategies far outweighed the use of metacognitive ones as in the case of Goh's study (1998).

Goh (1998, 2002) collected data from participants by using both methods. He focused on their immediate verbal reports about the listening text provided by the researcher and their weekly listening

diaries “to record a specific listening event and what they did to understand what was said” (Goh, 2002, p. 189). In this way, Goh (1998, 2002) collected data on learners’ in-class and out-of-class listening strategies. The former study gives a comparative report of low-level and high-level students’ use of strategies. High-level students were found to use more listening strategies than low-level students do, which might be another factor behind high-level student students’ success.

In another study by Goh & Hu (2014) the relationship between learners’ use of strategies and their performance in listening tasks of a sample IELTS examination was examined. They found that learners who scored higher in the listening test scored higher on their use of metacognitive listening strategies. In addition, better performers were the ones who reported greater confidence and lower anxiety. Thus, the researchers draw attention to the necessity of increasing learner confidence by helping them to reflect on their own listening, modelling, and showing proficient learners’ use of strategies. For this reason, The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal & Tafaghodtari, 2006) might provide a good starting point for teachers who would like to discover their students’ strengths and weaknesses in listening as it gives a more accurate account of what learners do during listening (Berne, 2004) and it has good psychometric properties in its subscales (Ehrich & Henderson, 2019). Dawenan (2021) who reported studies published between the years of 2016 and 2019 noted that the MALQ was the main data collection instrument to investigate learners’ metacognitive awareness of listening. Zarrabi (2016) compared students’ mean scores on the pre-test and post-test of MALQ to examine the effect of explicit instruction of listening strategies on the metacognitive listening strategies awareness of different learner types and a statistically significant difference was found between two scores. Alhaisoni (2017) also used the MALQ to find the most frequent and the least frequent listening strategies used by EFL medical students. The results revealed that problem-solving and directed attention strategies were used more frequently than mental translation and personal knowledge strategies. Merilia (2019) obtained data from university students by using the MALQ and found that problem-solving as the most frequent strategy and directed attention as the lowest. The difference between the results of the studies by Alhaisoni (2017) in Saudi Arabia and Merilia (2019) in Indonesia shows the need for further research on listening strategies of different language learners in different learning contexts by using the MALQ.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Purpose of the Study

The study was conducted to gain insight into Turkish EFL learners’ use of listening strategies in a Turkish university context where they were observed to receive limited explicit instruction on listening strategies. Therefore, the research question leading the study was: “What are listening strategies of university-level Turkish EFL learners?”

3.2. Setting

The study was carried out in 2012 at School of Foreign Languages at a public university in Turkey where one-year compulsory English program is provided with students majoring engineering and international relations. Students are grouped into three levels of proficiency, namely beginner, elementary and pre-intermediate, based on the results of a placement examination conducted at the beginning of each academic year. The instructional process encompasses all language areas and skills and the courses are not separated as skill-based; they are integrated. By the end of the year, all groups are expected to attain intermediate level of proficiency and evaluated with a final proficiency examination prepared by instructors.

When the research was conducted, listening was treated in the same way as the other language skills are treated by the instructors. In other words, listening exercises and strategy training were confined to the ones in the coursebook (*Success* by Pearson-Longman, 2007 edition). Listening sections took place in each unit with a wide range of text and task types presented by primarily British accent and secondarily American and other accents. Explicit training in listening strategies was included in *Train Your Brain* sections, but the distribution of these sections throughout the book was arbitrary. For instance, in Intermediate student's book these boxes with a specific focus on listening strategies appeared only in units 6 and 8. Furthermore, they appeared like bits of general advice like listening for key words, not getting worried if one does not understand everything, etc. Thus, they were taken as bits and pieces of the coursebook flow, but not at a conscious level of strategy training. Consequently, most of the learners might not have felt strategically trained for listening tasks which took place during lessons and exams.

3.3. Participants

Participants who were first grouped as elementary at the beginning of the academic year followed the Intermediate textbooks at the time of the research. 38 students, 31 of whom were male and 7 of whom were female, participated in the study and their ages ranged between 18 and 22. They received 24 hours of instruction on a weekly basis. The researcher was not the teacher of the participants, but their teacher corroborated the abovementioned lack of explicit strategy training in her class.

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Instruments

The first instrument was written version of think-aloud protocols to gather concurrent verbal report from learners about their strategy use during listening (Goh, 1998). Secondly, "The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire" – MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006) was used which is a "self-report measure for assessing L2 listeners' metacognitive awareness and use of strategies when listening to oral texts" (Vandergrift et al., 2006, p. 438) and its validity and factorial reliability was ascertained (Vandergrift et al., 2006). It was also piloted by the researcher with another group of students at the same proficiency level (N=19) and its reliability value of Cronbach's alpha was found .763.

3.4.2. Procedures

Since the researcher conducted the pilot study with her own students, she carried out the actual research procedures in two different classes with the permission of the researcher's colleague. When she entered the classroom, the researcher briefly introduced herself and her research purposes. Following this introduction, the participants were assured that their responses were not going to be graded and they were informed about the procedures. They were given a few minutes to overview the questions and allowed to ask questions regarding the items or the procedures. Then, the outset of the process was announced.

Two lectures from the preparation kit of TOEFL (2003) had been chosen for listening tasks on grounds that TOEFL listening sections include topics familiar to students like academic, class-related or campus related issues (Kılıçkaya & Çokal-Karadaş, 2009). Moreover, the comprehension questions were balanced in terms of implicitness and explicitness. In both texts, two questions were explicit and two were implicit. Another reason for choosing these lectures was their lengths. The first lecture took 1:08 minutes and the second one took 1:59 minutes, both of which would not take much class time. Thus, these lectures were chosen to allow for learners' listening twice, taking notes and answering the questionnaire. After listening to each paragraph of the lectures, listening device was paused and the participants were allotted time to answer the relevant open-ended comprehension questions and the Turkish version of the question of "How did you figure that out?" (Vandergrift, 1997b). The question was particularly asked in Turkish to enable the participants to express their thinking processes better in their mother tongue.

At the end of each paragraph of the listening texts, the learners were given a few minutes to answer the comprehension question in English and the retrospective question in Turkish. After completing this procedure, the texts were listened to uninterruptedly for checking answers. Following the listening task, the questionnaire was distributed to the participants.

3.4.3. Analyses

For quantitative data, means and standard deviations of the questionnaire items were calculated by means of statistical programs in order to understand the participants' general tendency. Qualitative data were gathered from the participants' open-ended responses and put into categories in Goh's (2002) inventory of listening strategies.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Quantitative Data Analysis Results

The questionnaire results are discussed on the basis of the frequencies of participants' responses. A six-point Likert scale was administered in which the numerical values represent below: 1: strongly agree, 2: agree, 3: partially agree, 4: partially disagree, 5: disagree, and 6: strongly disagree. Means and standard deviations for each item are tabulated.

Table 1. Mean Values and Standard Deviations of the Questionnaire Results

ITEMS		MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
planning and evaluation	1. Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen.	2.89	1.1
directed attention	2. I focus harder on the text when I have to understand it.	2.15	0.88
mental translation	3. I translate in my head as I listen.	2.78	1.37
problem-solving	4. I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of words I don't understand.	2.84	1.1
directed attention	5. When my mind wanders, I recover my concentration right away.	3.81	1.46
problem-solving	6. As I listen I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic.	3.31	1.01
problem-solving	7. I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand.	2.34	1.12
planning and evaluation	8. Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to.	3.56	1.32
mental translation	9. I translate key words as I listen.	2	1.09
directed attention	10. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	2.64	1.13
problem-solving	11. As I listen I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realize that it is not correct.	2.89	1.15
planning and evaluation	12. After listening, I think back to how I listened, and about what I might do differently next time.	2.84	1.32
directed attention	13. When I have difficulty understanding what I hear, I give up and stop listening.	3.89	1.52
problem-solving	14. I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't understand.	2.54	1.23
mental translation	15. I translate word by word as I listen.	3.36	1.63

problem-solving	16. When I guess the meaning of a word, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess makes sense.	2.94	1.03
planning and evaluation	17. As I listen, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.	3.18	1.04
planning and evaluation	18. I have a goal in mind as I listen.	2.21	0.74

The items above were grouped in terms of “planning-evaluation”, “directed attention”, “mental translation” and “problem-solving” in Vandergrift, et al. (2006); thus, items in the same groups are discussed together.

For testing learners’ use of planning and evaluation strategies, items 1, 8, 12, 17 and 18 are used. While items 1, 8 and 18 are related to planning, items 12 and 17 are related to evaluation. Items 1 and 18 gauge the participants’ goal-orientedness before and during listening and the participants’ mean scores display their agreement with the statement. Item 8 is relevant to learners’ going back to their background listening knowledge constructed in previous listening texts. Interestingly, their mean score ($M=3.56$, $SD=1.32$) is just between partially agree and partially disagree. In other words, most of them seem to have a listening aim, whereas, they may not be very sure about drawing on their previous listening experiences. Item 12 is related to learners’ taking a critical approach to their listening and item 17 measures learners’ self-checking during listening. The mean scores for both items are close to each other, which means that they are supportive of evaluating their listening process.

In the directed attention category, items 2, 5, 10 and 13 take place. While the mean scores in items 2 and 10 indicate that learners “agree” with focusing harder and getting back into track in case of losing concentration, scores in items 5 and 13 draw a slightly different picture. Recovering concentration away ($M=3.81$, $SD=1.46$) and giving up listening due to having difficulty ($M=3.89$, $SD=1.52$) were almost partially disagreed. Particularly, the mean score in item 13 signals that an important number of learners are not much in favor of giving up listening when they do not understand.

With regard to mental translation, items 3, 9 and 15 are directed. While learners agree with doing translation in general ($M=2.78$, $SD=1.37$) and translating key words ($M=2$, $SD=1.09$), they partially agree with the idea of word-by-word translation ($M=3.36$, $SD=1.63$).

Finally, problem-solving strategies are measured in items 4, 6, 7, 11, 14 and 16. In items 4 and 14 the participants’ strategies of inference are tested. Learners are found to agree with the ideas of guessing unfamiliar words from familiar words and from context. Learners also agree with checking the comprehension of their guesses through contextual clues with a mean score of 2.94 ($SD=1.03$), which can almost be taken as “partially agree” in item 16. Items 6 and 7 are related to learners’ use of topical

knowledge and world knowledge respectively. While learners agree with using topical knowledge, they partially agree with using their experience and general knowledge to understand a listening text. In item 11, flexibility of changing their misinterpretation is measured and the participants agree with the strategy with a mean score of $M=2.89$ ($SD=1.15$).

In sum, the respondents' general tendency is between agreeing and partially agreeing with the strategies in the items; in other words, none of the items were found to be strongly accepted nor strongly rejected. Even though these figures give the impression that learners have a tendency to use listening strategies, they may not suffice to clarify how learners use them indeed as Creswell (2005) reminds, this kind of self-reported information presents only what people think rather than what they do. Thus, in order to analyze what learners actually do in terms of strategy use, open-ended responses in their retrospective accounts are examined.

4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis Results

The listeners were required to write their retrospection on how they figured out the answers right after they listened to the sections of the listening texts. Out of 38 answer sheets, 9 of them were completely left blank and 6 of them included sentences irrelevant to the research purposes. Therefore, responses in 23 sheets were analyzed.

4.2.1. Listening Text 1

The first question of the first listening text (What was in pattern books?) was explicit and answered correctly by 17 students. 12 of these students gave retrospective account of their answering process. 2 students' answers were word-by-word translation of the section, 1 student accounted that "I made a guess based on what I heard", which can be named as prediction (Goh, 2002) and 9 of the answers were based on inferences. 4 students accounted making inferences from key words like "date", "American houses", "19th century" and 1 of them explicitly stated "focusing on the key word". 1 student applied knowledge about the target language (Goh, 2002), that is, he/she used linguistic clues to make the inference: "I found the answer after the phrase 'used for'". 2 students used contextualization; in other words, they related one part of the text to another (Goh, 2002) by stating that "I understood it from the last sentence" and "I reached this answer from the explanation coming before 'pattern books'". The remaining 2 students made inferences on the basis of the general idea they drew from the texts: "The text was about the past" and "The text was generally about architectural constructions".

The second question (According to the speaker, why were the pattern books so popular?) was implicit and 12 students answered it correctly and all of these students gave account of their responses. 2 students totally translated the section. 4 of the students noted their inferences based on key words of "popular" and "price". 2 of them used contextual clues to account for how they answered: "when the speaker started to list the reasons of its popularity" and "from the sentence which included 'cost more'". 3 students stated that they inferred from "comparison of prices" which is the general idea of the text. Different from all of the above, 1 student used his/her world knowledge by mentioning that "The cost must have been low for such a book".

The third question (According to the speaker, who uses pattern books today?) was an explicit question and answered by 7 students correctly, 5 of whom accounted for their answers. 2 students applied word-by-word translation and 3 students used key words of “historians” and 1 of these students expressed his/her hearing “two jobs”.

The last question of the first text (What course would be most appropriate?) was an implicit question. 4 students were able to give a correct answer and 2 of them accounted for their responses. 1 student stated that “I wrote it because it was used frequently in the text”, which denotes relying on a key word. The other student wrote a more elaborate account: “At the beginning of the lecture, the speaker in a class said something like ‘the topic of today’s class is pattern books’”. Here it can be assumed that the student made inferences with the help of contextual clues.

4.2.2. Listening Text 2

The first question of the second lecture was implicit (For whom is the talk intended?) and it was answered by 2 students correctly and 1 student gave an account of his/her understanding from the general meaning of the text.

The second question was explicit (What benefit does the program offer to participants?) and responded by 8 students, 5 of whom wrote an account. 1 student made a word-by-word translation. 1 student reported combining three key words of “medical”, “six months” and “experience” to make an inference. Three students, in unison, stated that their responses were based on “the speaker’s listing” of opportunities, which can be classified as “contextualization”.

The third question was implicit (According to the speaker, what is one disadvantage of a rural medical practice?). 5 students’ responses were correct and 3 students accounted their strategies. 1 student did a word-by-word translation, 1 benefitted from the key words of “money”, “earn”, etc. Another student focused on the linguistic clues of “first” and “second” signaling the coming of disadvantages.

The final question of the second text was explicit (Why did the speaker find the program ‘great’?) and 14 students gave correct responses. 8 students wrote accounts. 2 students wholly translated what they heard. 2 students paid attention to the utterances following the word “great”, because they reported their prediction that the answer would come after the word “great”. 3 students mentioned using key words of the paragraph and 1 used contextualization strategy: “She thought that lots of opportunities were provided thanks to this program, so she counted a few”.

The numbers of strategies in written think-aloud reports are put into a chart below.

Table 2. Numbers of Cases Reporting Use of Strategies

Listening Items	Word-by-word translation	Using key words	Using linguistic clues	General meaning of the text	World knowledge	Prediction	Contextualization
Text 1-Q 1 (explicit)	2	4	1	2	2	1	2
Text 1-Q 2 (implicit)	2	4	-	3	1	-	2
Text 1-Q 3 (explicit)	2	3	-	-	-	-	-
Text 1-Q 4 (implicit)	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Text 2-Q 1 (implicit)	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Text 2-Q 2 (explicit)	1	1	-	-	-	-	3
Text 2-Q 3 (implicit)	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Text 2-Q 4 (explicit)	2	3	-	-	-	2	1

As seen above, despite examining 23 sheets, few accounts were obtained for certain items. In addition to the participants' avoidance of reflecting on their listening process, the respondents' uses of strategies do not display much variety. Using key words to make inferences, mental translation and contextualization are the leading strategies. In addition, more strategies were accounted for explicit items than implicit items. This might be due to the difficulty of answering implicit items and putting higher-level abstract thinking skills into words. The reason behind learners' having difficulty in putting

abstract thinking into words may lie in the backwash effect of listening tests at university preparatory classes because listening skills are tested mostly by multiple-choice, completion, matching and dictation (Paker, 2013), which have mostly one correct answer. Having compared learners' cognitive processes in multiple-choice test items and listening-to-summarize tasks, Rukthong (2021) found that learners went through lower-level cognitive processes like word recognition and parsing in multiple choice tests. In contrast, listening-to-summarize tasks required learners to employ not only higher-level semantic and pragmatic processing but also several types of listening strategies which were not used in multiple-choice test items. Hence, Turkish EFL learners' lower achievement in answering implicit open-ended questions and lack of recounting their thinking processes might be attributed to their habitualized engagement in low-level cognitive processes in listening tasks.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Turkish EFL learners' use of listening comprehension strategies are analyzed in this study within four subcategories: planning-evaluation, directed attention, mental translation and problem-solving (Vandergrift, et al., 2006). The participants' responses to the questionnaire on a 6-point Likert scale were gathered and their written think-aloud protocols following the listening tasks were obtained.

In terms of planning-evaluation strategies, the participants tended to give clear responses to goal-orientedness. Most of the participants were found to "agree" with the strategy of having a plan before listening and a goal while listening. However, this agreement was not reflected upon their practices. Before listening to both texts, learners were allowed to read the comprehension questions to determine their goal for listening. Furthermore, at the beginning of the listening texts the TOEFL speaker announced the topics: "Listen to a talk given in a university class" and "Listen to a talk about the medical profession". Nonetheless, an important number of the respondents (N=9) left questions related to prediction unanswered. Planning-evaluation strategies also involve self-evaluation and checking comprehension, but these dimensions of the strategy were not agreed on clearly either. The substrategies of thinking similar texts and periodical comprehension checking during listening were mostly "partially agreed". However, checking comprehension after listening and making a post-listening evaluation was "agreed" by most of the students. Therefore, it can be deduced that the participants might not be familiar with the idea of checking during listening and they tend to do it after listening as a final revision of their answers.

On the other hand, use of mental translation strategies was shown both in the questionnaire and the think-alouds. An important number of students "strongly agreed" and "agreed" with translating as they listen and the majority of the students "strongly agreed" with translating key words, which was also supported by think-aloud reports as well. While some learners wrote word-by-word what they understood from the text, some of them wrote Turkish equivalents of keywords.

These results may be due to the backwash effect of listening examinations of the school where the research was carried out. In such tests, the researcher observed the participants display a high level

of anxiety for fear of missing a word during listening. Even at hearing the word “TOEFL listening test” during the data collection procedure, some learners articulated their anxiety. Therefore, they might extend all their energy on fully concentrating on the text without applying any strategies such as having a goal in mind or synthesizing their listening background with the current listening task. However, Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari (2010) note that overcoming a compulsion to process what one hears word by word is an important characteristic of skilled listening: “When listeners overcome the urge to systematically translate, they can allocate more attentional resources to metacognitive processes such as monitoring and problem solving” (p. 489). In line with this finding, this study puts forth the participants’ tendency to be clearer about their use of directed attention and mental translation strategies in comparison to their use of problem-solving and planning and evaluation strategies.

Moreover, since the participants were not explicitly and systematically trained about listening strategies, their questionnaire responses and retrospective accounts may not necessarily refer to their strategic knowledge. They might be the result of various factors like past listening experiences with in-class listening, interacting with a speaker of English, etc.; therefore, this lack of explicit instruction might deprive learners of increasing their aural knowledge and performance (Goh & Hu, 2014). On the other hand, lack of explicit strategic knowledge may stem from teachers’ lack of strategic knowledge as well. Graham, Santos & Francis-Brophy (2014) investigated foreign language teachers’ stated beliefs and practices in terms of teaching listening. The research results displayed that the teachers were not fully aware of the significance of listening strategies, learner exploration, prediction and discussion of listening. In addition, the majority of both newly qualified and experienced teachers had had no in-service training in teaching listening before and they were found to have similar views about listening. For this reason, learning listening strategies gains importance for both foreign language teachers and learners since the results highlight the need for exerting conscious and systematic effort upon the idea of strategy training. Strategy training is evidenced to yield promising results (Bao, 2017; Go & Hu, 2014; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010; Zarrabi, 2016)

Teaching listening strategies should first be assumed as different perspectives to listening, understanding and evaluating, not as guaranteed paths to success. Strategy training can be handled as a separate component of a language teaching program in which learners receive guidance on how to best exploit their potentials by means of strategies. Considering differences in each learner’s needs and learning characteristics, individualized sessions focusing on problematic areas can be put into practice. Particularly, the deficiencies in problem-solving and planning-evaluation strategies should be overcome with a specific focus on inferential and checking comprehension techniques.

Most importantly, in order to prevent the strategy of directed attention from being overused to understand every single test item, listening skill should be saved from being a nightmare for learners. Although the negative impact of proficiency tests cannot be minimized entirely, institutional practices can warm learners to the idea that listening is not a frightful section of tests; instead it is just a part of communication. To illustrate, rather than sticking to traditional listening tasks, interactive listening can

be put into practice. In a high-technology era, regular online conferences with English-speaking people can be included in both teaching and testing practices. Vandergrift (1997a) reminds that “Students listen to oral texts in order to obtain information and complete a comprehension task, without intervening or interacting for purposes of clarification or feedback. Interactive listening, on the other hand, requires the listener to take a more active role by interacting with an interlocutor, requesting clarification or providing feedback in order to ensure successful communication” (p. 494). By giving chances to learners to communicate with a genuine speaker in addition to listening to audio recordings, learners can work on their strategies at ease. As Paker suggests (2013), more contextual and communicative test items in which learners may feel flexible to respond without too much anxiety to make mistakes can be provided. Considering the backwash effect of tests on language learners, implementation of this suggestion may positively change the ways how listening is taught and tested and how learners perceive it.

In order to systematize strategy training, retrospective think-aloud protocols can be used more frequently and systematically in language learning classes. Students can be encouraged to write learning logs, journals and portfolios to keep track of their listening progress. They can also be required to report their experiences and use of strategies during listening to conversations or small talks in English outside school. Such kinds of activities and assignments may accelerate the likelihood of learners’ habitual and regular use of listening strategies.

With regard to the limitations, this study with its sampling and data collection procedures is a small-scale one, which points out the necessity of further support in different contexts with more participants and more data collection instruments. A widely used procedure of think-aloud protocol was converted into a written form to quicken data collection procedure, but reliability and validity of this device can be ensured in validation studies.

A longitudinal and experimental study keeping track of what strategies learners use from beginning of an academic year till its end and whether there are any strategic and changes and positive effects on learners’ listening processes can exhibit strengths and weaknesses of a possible strategy training program.

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APPENDIX I

Transcripts of Listening Comprehension Texts and Comprehension Questions

Questions 38 through 41. Listen to a talk given in a university class.

(woman) In today's class we'll be examining some nineteenth-century pattern books that were used for building houses. I think it's fair to say that these pattern books were the most important influence on the design of North American houses during the nineteenth century.

This was because most people who wanted to build a house couldn't afford to hire an architect. Instead, they bought a pattern book, picked out a plan, and took it to the builder. The difference in cost was substantial. In 1870, for example, hiring an architect would've cost about a hundred dollars. At the same time, a pattern book written by an architect cost only five dollars.

At that price, it's easy to see why pattern books were so popular. Some are back in print again today, and of course they cost a lot more than they did a hundred years ago. But they're an invaluable resource for historians, and also for people who restore old houses. I have a modern reprint here that I'll be passing around the room in a moment so that everyone can have a look.

38. What was in pattern books?
39. What course would this talk be most appropriate for?
40. According to the speaker, why were pattern books so popular?
41. According to the speaker, who uses pattern books today?

Questions 47 through 50. Listen to a talk about the medical profession.

(woman) It seems like only yesterday that I was sitting where you are, just finishing my first year of medical school and wondering if I'd ever get a chance to use all my new knowledge on a real live patient!

Well, I have good news for you! You don't have to wait until your third or fourth year of medical school to get some hands-on experience! The dean has invited me here to tell you about the university's rural opportunities program. If you enroll in this program, you can have the opportunity this summer, after your first year of medical school, to spend from four to six weeks observing and assisting a real physician like me in a small rural community. You won't have to compete with other students for time and attention, and you can see what life as a country doctor is really like.

The program was designed to encourage medical students like yourselves to consider careers in rural communities that are still understaffed. It seems that medical students are afraid to go into rural family practice for two reasons. First, they don't know much about it. And second, specialists in the cities usually make more money. But, on the up-side, in rural practice, doctors can really get to know their patients and be respected members of the community.

I participated in the program when it first started and spent six weeks in a small rural town. Let me tell you, it was really great! I got to work with real patients. I watched the birth of a child, assisted an accident victim, and had lots of really practical hands-on experience — all in one summer. And to my surprise, I found that country life has a lot to offer that city life doesn't — no pollution or traffic jams, for instance!

My experience made me want to work where I'm needed and appreciated. I don't miss the city at all!

47. For whom is the talk intended?
48. What would be a successful result of the program being described?
49. What benefit does the program offer to participants?
50. According to the speaker, what is one disadvantage of a rural medical practice?

APPENDIX II

The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire Items (Vandergrift et al., 2006)

For each item, write the number that shows what you think.

1 = Strongly agree

2 = Agree

3 = Partially agree

4 = Partially disagree

5 = Disagree

6 = Strongly disagree

1. Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen.
2. I focus harder on the text when I have to understand it.
3. I translate in my head as I listen.
4. I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of words I don't understand.
5. When my mind wanders, I recover my concentration right away.
6. As I listen I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic.
7. I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand.
8. Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to.
9. I translate key words as I listen.

10. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.
11. As I listen I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realize that it is not correct.
12. After listening, I think back to how I listened, and about what I might do differently next time.
13. When I have difficulty understanding what I hear, I give up and stop listening.
14. I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't understand.
15. I translate word by word as I listen.
16. When I guess the meaning of a word, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess makes sense.
17. As I listen, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.
18. I have a goal in mind as I listen.