The Relationship between Perfectionism and Listening Comprehension among EFL Students of Kerman University

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Abstract

The present study attempted to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and listening comprehension among EFL students of Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman. Gender was taken into account, regarding males and females use of perfectionism.97 Iranian EFL students studying at Shahid Bahonar and Islamic Azad universities of Kerman took part in this study. The students were junior and senior students majoring in English Translation and English Literature. To achieve the required data the following scales were capitalized on: Frost et al. (1990) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) and a 50-item listening test taken from Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL Test. The findings revealed that there was a significant negative relationship between MPS and LC. Furthermore, it was revealed that female subjects were more perfectionist than their counterparts. In sum, MPS yielded a negative relationship with LC with the female subjects being more perfectionists.

Key Words: Perfectionism, Listening Comprehension, Gender.

1- Introduction

Perfectionism is a multidimensional and also a multi-faced construct which renders both adaptive and maladaptive dimensions and influences the way one meets his or her perceived standards. Generally, Pacht (1984) defines perfectionism as "holding standards that are beyond reach or rationality, straining to reach those impossible goals, and defining one's worth by the accomplishment of those standards" (p.386). The traditional view on perfectionism considered it as a negative aspect leading to just negative results. The perfectionists were considered as "all or none" while leading to perfectionism or failure (Beck, 1976; Hamachek, 1978). The perfectionists in this aspect were taken as individuals without self-confidence and had a negative feeling that they should always surpass their present achievement (Missildine, 1963), This traditional view took a unidimensional perspective of perfectionism.

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Hamachek (1978) changed the unidimensional view of perfectionism while presenting a two-faced description of perfectionism, normal and neurotic. In this view it was believed that normal perfectionists seek to make proper use of the construct and the successful consequences would lead to up- and- coming results in the subsequent tasks. By the end of the 1980s, the construct of perfectionism underwent a considerable change. Perfectionism was not a two dimensional issue any longer. It could be related to many factors. As a result, perfectionism became a multidimensional construct. The present studies on perfectionism can be outlined in relation with major dimensions of self and social contexts (Hawkins, 2005).

Hollender (1965) maintains that "perfectionists are too concerned about details and they pay too much attention to orderliness and regularity." (p. 98). This prominence is due to the task of achieving standards for self-evaluation related to performance and a strong need for order (Frost et al., 1990).

As one of the most important language skill, listening has been ignored in most EFL class rooms. Due to its priority in first and second languages, it can be considered as one of the most important skills. Despite the fact that listening had been ignored for many decades (Richards & Renandya, 2002), listening skills have been given more attention over the last two decades and have been capitalized on in methods such as Total Physical Response, Silent Way, Sugges to pedia, and the Natural approach. Apart from anxiety, self-confidence and motivation are among the factors in Krashen's affective filter hypothesis.

The affective filter is raised when learners have low motivation, low self-confidence, and high anxiety; as a result, the amount of language intake will be reduced in spite of high input. Nagle and Sanders (1986) proposed that lapses of the comprehension process probably may occur when anxiety is experienced about failure to understand or being answerable for a response (cited in Sadighi, Sahragard & Jafari, 2009). So far it is clear that anxiety plays an important role in the case of language learning. Lynch (1996), believes listening is an ongoing process of making and reinforcing an interpretation of what a specific text in a particular situation is about, according to the information that seems pertinent at the time. The listener, as a result, receives the incoming data by means of the acoustic signals and, capitalizing on a wide range of knowledge, interprets the incoming data for a particular communicative purpose.

In every communicative moment, listening is a frequently used mode of communication. So, listening has appeared as an important component of language pedagogy to promote facilities for the language learners to enhance their progress in the conveyance of reciprocal information in a speech moments. According to Feyten (1991) listening was an ignored aspect in language acquisition and had not given enough attention until the late 1940s. However, even at that time listening was regarded as the Cinderella skill (Nunan, 2002) which was ignored by applied linguists. In the last 20 years with the progressions in cognitive psychology and linguistics, teaching listening has gained importance with special attention to authenticity and contextualization (Goh, 2008).

As a receptive skill listening requires great attention. The crucial role of listening comprehension as an indispensable part of language proficiency has been accepted by experts in the field of EFL learning and instruction (Celce-Murcia, 1997). However, listening was given little attention for many years in the heyday of behaviorism, there was no stance for cognition and learning was deemed as a mechanical process whose control was in the hands of external forces. In the meantime by the advent of cognitive theoreticians, and the attention which was given to brain, the role of the learner variables got recognition and learners' emotions, attitudes, and personalities, as the factors of decisive successful and unsuccessful learning, received substantial attention. Teaching methods put the emphasis on productive skills and overlooked the relation existing between receptive and productive skills (Richards & Renandya, 2002). It is the teacher's prowess to train the students how to listen.

The debilitative effect of faulty listening skills on second language learning is quite profound; as a result, it is essential for the researchers to find and probe the affective variables in listening comprehension to help unsuccessful students to overcome their difficulties.

So the present study gains significance with hope that it might shed more light on the relationship between the psychological factors, perfectionism and listening comprehension.

To put it in a nutshell, this study aims at finding the relationship between the pearls, namely perfectionism and listening comprehension. Gender is taken into account as well.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate and identify the underlying relationship between perfectionism and listening comprehension. Gender, as a demographic factor, is explored regarding the males and females' score of perfectionism.

2- Literature Review

2-1- Perfectionism

One of the first studies to shed light on this issue was performed by Frost and his colleagues who were interested in the relationships between the two multi-dimensional perfectionism measures described earlier (Frost et al., 1993). These researchers found that some subscales of the two perfectionism scales were positively correlated with positive affect and not correlated with negative effect. A study by Frost and Marten (1990), examined how perfectionistic college students vs. non-perfectionist college students expressed a higher level of negative affect while participating in a graded written task, "a situation analogous to social encounters for social phobic patients". A study conducted by LoCicero and Ashby (2000) also examined the relationship between perfectionism and general self-efficacy. The authors found that subjects in these groups reported significantly different levels of self-efficacy.

Perfectionism has also been studied in Iran. Abolghasemi, Ahmadi, and Kiamarsi (2007) investigated the relationship of metacognition and perfectionism with psychological consequences in the Addicts. The sample consisted of 75 substance dependent males selected from the Hamadan city self-representative center for treatment of substance dependence. The results indicated that high levels of metacognition and negative perfectionism can increase the adverse psychological consequences, while a high level of positive perfectionism may decrease those consequences. Jamshidi, Delavarpour, Naghighat, and Latifian (2009) drew a comparison of dimensions of perfectionism between the gifted and non-gifted student. Their study showed that the gifted students acquired lower scores than the non-gifted students in terms of dimensions of organization and planfulness (two subcategories of perfectionism). Also, gender and giftedness had significant interactive effect on struggle for excellence.

2-2- Listening comprehension

Vandergrift (2003) analyzed listening comprehension strategies applied by efficient and less efficient French students in Canada. The researcher chose an authentic text for the material that corresponded to their daily life situation. Data were collected by recordings after the listening task was over. However, from time to time the listening was stopped to give a chance to the listeners to express their thoughts. The findings revealed that first cognitive strategies, then metacognitive strategies, and finally socio-affective strategies were applied respectively. The cognitive strategies applied by the listeners were inferencing, elaboration, use of imagery, translation, repetition, transfer, and summarization. Regarding metacognitive strategies, planning, monitoring, and problem identification strategies were the mostfrequent strategies. The final results indicated that there was a difference in strategy use between efficient and less efficient listeners. Vandergrift reached the conclusion that efficient listeners comprehend more with the use of metacognitive strategies, while less efficient learners have a tendency to apply translation strategies.

Chien (2006) investigated the listening difficulties and strategies of college English students on a TOEFL test. The results disclosed that planning, monitoring, self-evaluation, key word, top down, and bottom up processing strategies were the most frequent strategies which were applied. Furthermore, more proficient listeners made use of strategies such as self- management, voice inferencing, top down inferencing, elaboration, and listening for the key words, while mid- proficient listeners applied self-evaluation and bottom up strategies and finally low- proficient listeners applied translation strategies.

The relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and listening comprehension has been taken into account in Iran. Sadighi, Sahragard and Jafari (2009) conducted a study to find the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and listening comprehension. Based on their findings, there was a significant and negative relationship between these two factors. That is the higher the anxiety the lower the comprehension of listening among the subjects. In their study it was revealed that the number of years played a significant role among the subjects. That is a senior, for instance, performed better than a freshman. Finally, they found that female subjects were more anxious than their counterparts.

Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011) launched a study to explore the relationship among listening performance, metacognitive strategy use and motivation. There were 82 students who were majoring inEnglish Translation and Literature at AllamehTabatabai and Shahid Beheshti Universities in Tehran. The data collection was carried out by three instruments: Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire, Academic Motivation Scale, and the listening section of the TOEFL. After administering the listening section of the TOEFL, students were to fill the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire and Academic Motivation Scale. There was a notable correlation between metacognitive strategy useand listening performance, listening performance and intrinsic motivation, and finally metacognitive strategy use and intrinsic, extrinsic motivation.

Kazemian (2012) also studied the relationship among metacognitive listening strategies, foreign language classroom anxiety, and listening comprehension. Making use of 100 subjects, foreign language classroom anxiety scale, and a listening section of the TOEFL, the researcher found a negative relationship between metacognitive strategies and classroom anxiety. The researcher also found that the more use of these strategies reduces the degree of anxiety and increases the score of listening comprehension.

Research Questions

This study aims at seeking answers to the following major and minor questions:

Major research question:

1. Is there any relationship between perfectionism and listening comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?

Minor research question:

2. Is there any significant difference among males and females regarding the score of perfectionism?

3- Methodology

3-1- Participants

The subjects in this study were 97 EFL students studying at the department of foreign languages of Islamic Azad and Shahid BahonarUniversities of Kerman. These subjects (67 female and 30male), were randomly chosen from junior and senior students majoring in EnglishTranslation and English Literature. From a statistical point of view 30.9 percent were male and 69.1 percent were female. Their age ranged from 20 to 22 since they were chosen from among junior and senior students.

However, in some cases some exceptions were seen since very few students were older than other students. All these students were native Iranian and spoke Persian as their mother tongue. They had all taken the university entrance exam for B.A level and they were busy studying their courses at university. Most of these students were native to Kerman; however, others were from Shiraz, Isfahan, and southern cities. Totally 110 questionnaires were distributed among the students which yielded only 97 completed questionnaires.

Finally, last but not the least, the reason for selecting junior and senior students was that students at higher level of proficiency are believed to have more experiences of doing listening tasks.

3-2- Instruments

In order to obtain the required data on the variables of this study, the followingscales were utilized:

1. Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990)
2. TOEFL listening test (Phillips, 2001)

3-2-1- The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS)

Frost et al. (1990) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale consists of 35 items in a five 5-point Likert type questions about perfectionism. These 35 items are designed to measure six dimensions of perfectionism. The instructions for this part were: "How much is the following statement true for you as a perfectionism factor?" The participants were required to choose one of the alternatives: 1. not true, 2.mostly not true, 3.not either true or untrue, 4.to some extent true, 5.true. For each item, the highest degree of perfectionism receives five points and the lowest, one point. Students" scores can range from 26 to 130.Thus, the higher the score, the stronger the perfectionism level.

3-2-2- The TOEFL listening test

In order to measure the subjects" listening comprehension, they were given a 50-item listening test taken from Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL Test by Phillips (2001). This test is composed of 50 items and including three sections. The first section is comprised of 30 questions and measures the listener's ability to comprehend short conversations between two people. The second section includes 8 questions and measures the listener's ability in comprehending longer conversations. Finally, the last section includes 12 questions and assesses the listener's ability in comprehending long talks.

3-3- Data collection

The current study was carried out during the class time in the second semester of the academic year (2011). The researcher first gave the listening test to the subjects. The listening test took about 35 minutes. As far as the test was taken from a well-established publication (Longman), it provided the subjects with necessary directions. Furthermore, nearly all the subjects had the experience of sitting for a TOEFL test beforehand. After the listening test, the researcher spent nearly ten minutes to explain about the MP scale. Then they were given MPS to fill out. The subjects were given whatever time that they needed.

4- Results

In order to determine the descriptive statistics of the variables thedescriptive analysis was carried out. These results are presented in Table1.

Table1: The Descriptive Statistics of MP and LC

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	S D	Variance
MPS	97	68.00	54.00	122.00	89.11	15.23	232.20
LC	97	26.00	20.00	46.00	33.29	5.24	27.50
Valid N (Listwise)	97						

The analysis of the data reveals that Pearson correlation coefficients between MPS and LC is -0.76 with the P-values of 0.00 which is less than the significant level of $\alpha = 0.05$. This suggests that there is a strong negative relationship between these two variables. That is the higher the MPS the lower the LC and vice versa. The correlation between these two factors is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between MPS and LC.

		MPS	LC
MPS	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.76[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
	N	97	97
LC	Pearson Correlation	-0.76[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	
	N	97	97
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The second research question in this study probed the score of males and females regarding MPS. A sample T-test was utilized to compare the means of males and females. Table 3 shows the means of males and females.

Table 3: The means of males and females

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
MPS	Female	67	92.14	14.85
	Male	30	82.33	14.06
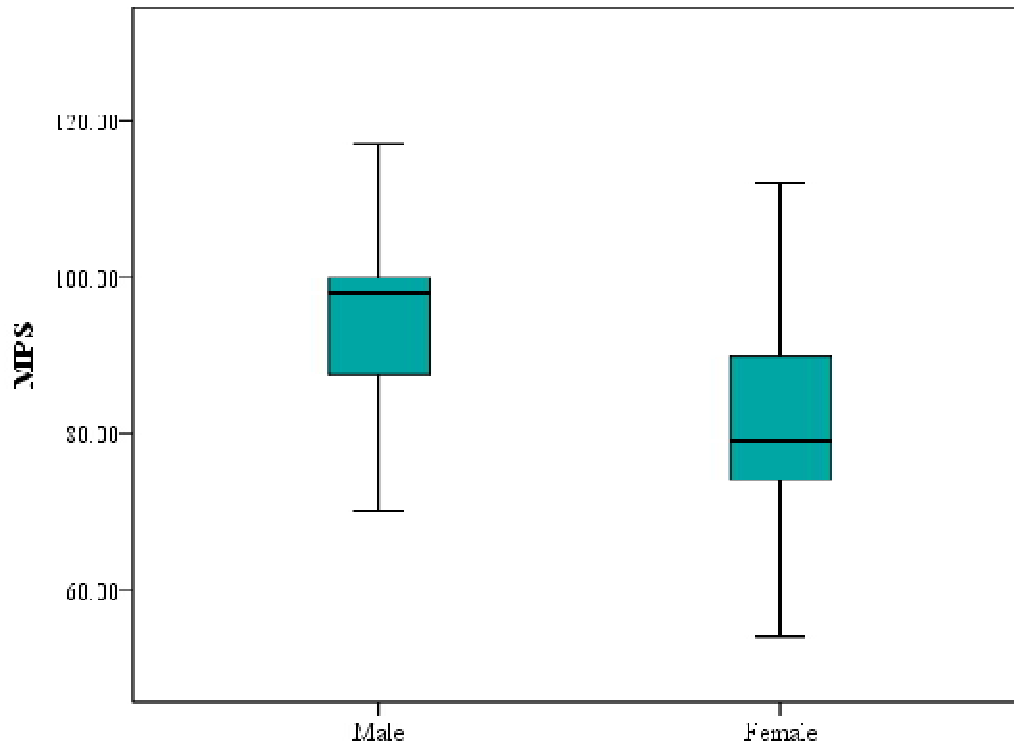
Figure 1: Boxplot for Distribution of MPS in Males and Females

As the figure above shows female subjects tend to be more perfectionist during the test in relation with their counterparts.

5- *Discussion*

Regarding the second research question in this study which sought to explore the relationship between perfectionism and listening comprehension a relatively negative significant relationship was found. The Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables was found to be is -0.76. Therefore, it can be concluded that those learners who try to be more perfectionistic might miss some points during a listening section. This deficiency might be linked to their efforts to understand every sing word. As it was mentioned above, perfectionism and TA hold a positive relationship between each other; as a result, a cautious conclusion can be drawn that the more the degree of perfectionism the more TA will be experienced. In order to right get to the point, TA and perfectionism both have a negative relationship with listening comprehension. Therefore, a causal modeling is required to explore the direction of this relationship.

Razmi (2012) explored Iranian EFL Learners' Metacognitive Listening Strategy Preferences in Relation with their Perceived Self-Efficacy and Perfectionism. The researcher came to the conclusion that learners who strive for perfection in a specific listening task are able to use more metacognitive listening strategies. Moreover, learners with high levels of personal standards and concern over mistakes face the difficulties with more persistence, and consequently use more metacognitive listening strategies. As a result, the finding in this study is indirectly in contrast with Razmi's (2012) study.

The findings of this study indicate that learners that strive for perfection in a specific listening task are less able to fulfill the task.

Moreover, learners with high levels of perfectionism face the difficulties with comprehending the overall message of the listening task since they expect themselves to understand every word.

Therefore, since perfectionism is linked to one's perceived standards in different pedagogical tasks, it clarifies the way perfectionism affects the success or failure of an individual's performance in listening tasks.

The second research question in this study sought to explore whether any difference exists between males and females regarding the score of perfectionism. Making use of an Independent Sample T-test, it was revealed that there is a difference between males and females regarding the score of perfectionism. The male subjects' mean was 82.33, while the female subjects' mean was 92.14. There is a 10-point difference between these two groups. This difference can, however, be justified in terms of the number of the two groups of males and females. It can cautiously be claimed that since the number of female subjects was greater so did the mean of this group. A few studies; however, considered gender and perfectionism, but the researcher did not have any access to these studies to bring them here. Honesty always pays off!

It would be rational to name some limitations involved in this study. The implementation of this study is not without its drawbacks. However, the existing limitations could be considered as food for thought for other researches within the same field in order to cast light on the unknown dark spots of listening comprehension. The small sample size in this study may influence the opportunity to generalize the findings of the investigation. Only ninety seven subjects took part in this study. As a result, the generalizability of the findings might be under question. Second, the limited amount of time and space incapacitates the study. Therefore, it justifies the researcher to include only two factors in this study. Moreover, this study made use of just self-report scales. The unidirectional gathering of data deprived this study to make use of triangulation of data collection. Interviewing and observation were missing in the present study. The only way of data collection in this study were the self-report questionnaire namely, MPS and also the TOEFL listening test. The accuracy of the findings in this case may be affected by factors such as social desirability and halo effect. Other researchers could make use of an acceptable triangulation of data collection such as valid interviews and reliable observations.

Moreover, it is not possible to make causal statements based on the model of this study. Gender was probed in this study; however, due to time consideration it was not probed with the second factor that is listening comprehension. Gender differences can be also investigated with regard to listening comprehension.

Furthermore, there are different factors affecting the listening comprehension, such as anxiety, learning styles, motivation, extraversion, and introversion, to name just a few. This study, due to time and space considerations, investigated only one factor, namely perfectionism. Last, but not the least although significant findings were drawn; the present study used a cross-sectional design. A longitudinal design would provide a more thorough evaluation of perfectionism and listening comprehension.

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