

# A Follow-up Study on Listening Strategy Use and Self-Efficacy in Relation to Listening Proficiency in EFL

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## Abstract

This study investigates the preliminary results of the relationship between listening comprehension test scores and two questionnaire results of 66 learners of English in an attempt to examine if there are correlations between listening proficiency and listening strategy use, and between listening proficiency and self-efficacy for listening among the students the author taught. The examination is conducted based on the results of the author's previous study (Taguchi, in press) on listening strategy instruction for Japanese learners of English, which suggested that metacognitive strategy instruction may benefit learners only if they have already attained a certain level of listening proficiency. The results also implied that the questionnaires used then might not be able to validate strategy use and self-efficacy of less proficient learners. This study here shows that the participants' listening proficiency was significantly correlated with their strategy use at  $r = .67$  [0.12 - 0.91] and with their self-efficacy at  $r = .67$  [0.12 - 0.91] (both  $ps < .01$ ), and concludes that strategy instruction may not seem to improve less proficient learners' listening performance as much as more proficient learners and that the assessment tools should be used with caution for less proficient learners.

*Keywords:* listening, strategy use, self-efficacy, proficiency, EFL

## Literature Review

There have been studies that stated that teaching listening strategies would enhance learners' listening abilities (e.g., Chen, 2009; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Thompson & Rubin, 1996; Yeldham & Gruba, 2014; Yeldham, 2015). Some listening studies have indicated self-efficacy, which is defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994), is positively correlated with listening performance (Chen, 2007; Mills et al., 2006), and teaching strategies would enhance self-efficacy, especially for weak learners (Goh, 2008).

The basic reasoning behind this assumption is that a learner who uses strategic approaches (learning strategies) to comprehend input effectively can learn new information, retain it and use it to learn more effectively than those

who do not use such approaches (Chamot, 2009), and such learners would be less threatened in facing challenging activities because they believe that they are ready with effective plans –feeling self-efficacy.

Among categories of learning strategies, metacognitive strategies have been found to be useful in the improvement of learners' listening performance by Cross, 2010; Vandergrift & Tafaghondtari, 2010, for example. Metacognitive strategies refer to the strategies a person uses based on his/her metacognitive knowledge, which is thought to be categorized in three kinds of knowledge – 1) person knowledge - knowledge about how an individual and factor around him/her affects the person's learning, 2) task knowledge –knowledge of the purpose, demands and nature of learning tasks, and 3) strategy knowledge – knowledge about which strategy can be used to achieve a goal (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, pp. 86-87). Proficient language users are considered to be able to employ metacognitive strategies effectively, specifically by evaluating their comprehension, changing their focus - whether they should pay more attention to details or gist, recalling their own knowledge and/or experience and adjusting their understanding (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). They comprehend a text better than those who are not equipped with such strategies.

Teaching metacognitive strategies for listening has been advocated not only because it seems to improve learners' performance but also because it would enhance learners' self-efficacy (Graham & Macaro, 2008). "Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave" (Bandura, 1994, p. 72). Metacognitive strategy instruction would improve self-efficacy of learners, making them more assured of their capabilities and less threatened in facing challenging tasks.

The previous study the author conducted (Taguchi, in press), however, has indicated that metacognitive listening strategy instruction itself may not seem to improve learners' listening performance or their self-efficacy for listening, because both the experimental group and the control group, irrespective of receiving strategy instruction, showed improved listening performance after the treatment period. The author attributed this improvement in both groups to the sheer amount of listening time and activities (over the course of 8 weeks, for a total of 160 minutes), and suggested that this discrepancy from previous studies that claimed instruction would improve learners' performance appears to come from the difference in the level of the participants' proficiency of the target language. Those who have already achieved a certain level of proficiency would not have benefited from a course as short as 160 minutes over 8 weeks. Therefore, the author suggested that her study participants did not gain much from the instruction because their proficiency was not still high enough to learn and use strategies effectively for better comprehension and that there seems to be a certain level of the listening proficiency, which can be measured by TOEIC listening scores, in order to take advantage of strategy instruction. This also implies that strategy use and self-efficacy among less proficient learners may not be as closely related to their performance as more proficient learners. In other

words, when it comes to less proficient learners, those who think they use strategies effectively may not actually use them effectively and comprehend better, and those who answer in a questionnaire they have high efficacy may not actually have that high self-efficacy, and vice versa. This is concerned with the validity of the assessment tools that metacognitive strategy instruction studies have widely used.

Strategy instruction has been investigated and found to be effective for learners. This study attempts to make a contribution in real application of such strategy instruction to the classroom. The author explores whether it is possible to reliably use the two questionnaires - one measuring the participants' listening strategy use and the other measuring their self-efficacy for listening, which the author employed in the previous study, by investigating correlations between listening proficiency and listening strategy use, and between listening proficiency and self-efficacy for listening among three proficiency levels of learners.

## Method

### Participants

The participants consisted of economics majors at a private university in Tokyo enrolled in two 1st year required English courses ( $n=54$ ) and an elective TOEIC advanced course the author taught in 2016 ( $n=12$ ). The students' English proficiency ranged from A2 to C1 on CEFR.<sup>1)</sup> The majority of the participants' native language was Japanese. Two knew Chinese as their parent(s) was from China, but they grew up in Japan and have been educated at Japanese school throughout their lives. The data used in this study is only from those who submitted their Informed Consent Agreements, which allowed the author to obtain their TOEIC scores from the university

Table 1  
*A Demographic Profile of the Study Participants*

Number of Students	TOEIC IP Listening Score Range <sup>2)</sup> (Mean, SD)
$n=66$ (40 males, 26 females)	175-460 (268.86, 57.07)

### Assessment Materials

**Assessment Material 1 Measure of Listening Proficiency.** As an assessment for the participants' listening performance, the students' TOEIC Listening Section scores (with 100 multiple-choice questions, 45 minutes) were obtained as a listening proficiency assessment. The scores of the students in the required English courses are from the test in April 2016, and those in the advanced TOEIC course are from the one given in January or

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1) The participants' average TOEIC listening score is 268.9, which is CEFR A2 to B1, according to the Education Testing Service website.

July, 2016.

**Assessment Material 2 Questionnaire A - Measure of Listening Strategy Use.** In the first class of the 2016 spring semester English course in April, the students completed two questionnaires; one was the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ, Vandergrift et al., 2006, Appendix A), and the other was about self-efficacy, which is to be explained below. Those who were enrolled in the TOEIC advanced course completed the questionnaires in December 2016. The MALQ is a 6-point Likert scale questionnaire that assesses five distinct factors in listening: planning and evaluation (“the strategies that listeners use to prepare themselves for listening, and to evaluate the results of their listening efforts”); directed attention (“the strategies that listeners use to concentrate and to stay on task”); personal knowledge (“listeners’ perceptions concerning the difficulty presented by L2 listening and their L2 listening self-efficacy”); (no) mental translation (“the strategies that listeners must learn to avoid if they are to become skilled listeners”); problem-solving (“a group of strategies used by listeners to make inferences - such as strategic guessing - and to monitoring these inferences”). The internal reliabilities of these factors were reported to range from .68 (for the four items on the directed attention) to .78 (for the three items on the mental translation) (Vandergrift et al., 2006, p. 446).

**Assessment Material 3 Questionnaire B - Measure of Self-Efficacy for Listening Activities.** The other questionnaire used for this study was the one developed by Kassem (2015) with the purpose of measuring the level of the participants’ listening self-efficacy (Appendix B). It consists of 40 items, and uses a 6 point-Likert scale, although the original version had a 5-point scale. This measures (1) progress: how a respondent perceives his/her present performance compared with his/her past performance (2) observational comparison: how a respondent perceives his/her performance compared with his/her peers’ and (3) physiological states: how a respondent feels during listening, (4) strategic awareness: whether a respondent can handle a listening task and overcome difficulties, and (5) challenge: whether a respondent is willing to face such a task.

**Instrument Reliability** The following (Table 2) shows the level of internal consistency of the questionnaire used in this study. The reliabilities for TOEIC Listening Test, MALQ and Self-Efficacy here are from Hatrak and Yu, 2010, Vandergrift et al., 2006 and Kassem, 2015, respectively.

## Results

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2) Scores on TOEIC Listening Section range from 5-495.

Table 2

*Instrument Reliability for Five Factors in MALQ and Self-Efficacy Questionnaire*

	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
TOEIC Listening Test	.92-.93	100
Planning/Evaluation	.75	5
Directed Attention	.68	4
Person Knowledge	.74	3
(no) Mental Translation	.78	3
Problem-solving	.74	6
Self-efficacy	.92	40

In order to investigate the relationship between the TOEIC Listening scores and the two questionnaire results, the author divided the participants into three groups based on their listening scores. The mid scorers are those whose scores were between 0.5 SD (28.53) below the mean (268.86) and 0.5 SD above the mean, the low scorers are those whose scores were 0.5 SD below the mean, and the high scorers are those whose scores were 0.5 SD above the mean. The details are in Table 3.

Table 3

*Mean and SDs of TOEIC Listening Test Scores of All the 66 Participants and Three Levels*

	TOEIC Listening Scores
<i>Mean</i>	268.86
<i>SD (0.5 SD)</i>	57.97 (28.53)
Low scorers ( <i>n</i> =28)	from 175 (the lowest) to 240.32
Mid scorers ( <i>n</i> =19)	from 240.32 to 297.40
High scorers ( <i>n</i> =19)	from 297.40 to 460 (the highest)

As Table 4 shows, a positive correlation is statistically significant in the whole group of the participants (*n*=66) in the relationship between the listening proficiency and the listening strategy use ( $r = .39$ , [0.16-0.58]) and the proficiency and the self-efficacy for listening ( $r = .32$  [0.08 – 0.52]) at the 0.01 level. Overall, those who use strategies more frequently perform the listening task better, and those who have higher self-efficacy perform the task better, and vice versa. This table also shows that among the high scorers, an even stronger correlation ( $r = .67$ , [0.12 – 0.91]) in both relationships was found at the 0.01 level, while such statically significant positive correlations were not found among the low scorers or mid scorers.

This means that in the case of the low and mid scorers, even when they answered they used strategies more frequently, it does not mean they performed in a listening task better. Or even those who performed a task better thought they used strategies less frequently. The high scorers, on the other hand, performed better when they answered they used strategies more frequently, and vice versa. The same is true of self-efficacy. It

Table 4

Correlations between TOEIC Listening Scores and Listening Strategy Use and between TOEIC Listening Scores and Self-Efficacy for Listening (Pearson's *r*)

Levels	Listening Strategy Use	Self-Efficacy for Listening
All	0.39**	0.32**
Low Scorers ( <i>n</i> =28)	0.17	0.05
Mid Scorers ( <i>n</i> =19)	0.18	0.22
High Scorers ( <i>n</i> =19)	0.67**	0.67**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

suggests that the low and mid scorers may have had a false self-efficacy, or the questionnaire failed to assess their self-efficacy with reliability and/or validity.

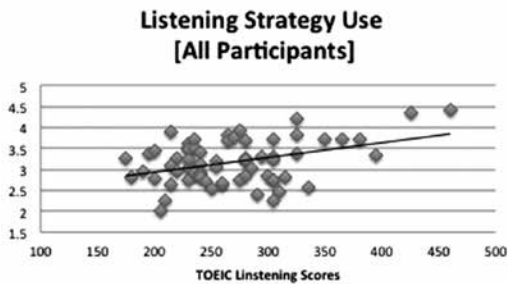


Figure 1. Relationship between TOEIC listening scores and listening strategy use of all the study participants.

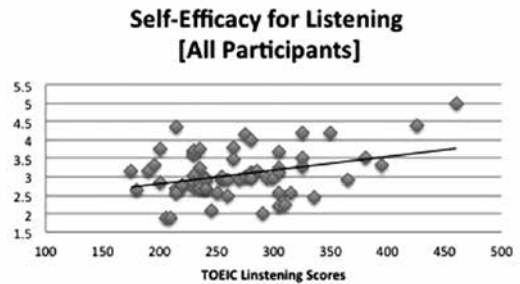


Figure 2. Relationship between TOEIC listening scores and self-efficacy scores for listening of all the study participants.

In comparison with those of all the study participants, the stronger correlations among the high scorers are clearly seen in the scatterplots below, showing steeper lines in Figures 3 and 4 (high TOEIC scorers) than those above, Figures 1 and 2 (all the participants).

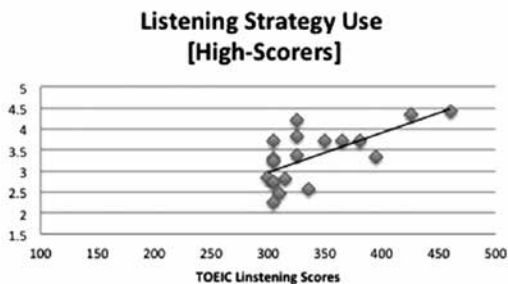


Figure 3. Relationship between TOEIC listening scores and listening strategy use of the high TOEIC scorers.

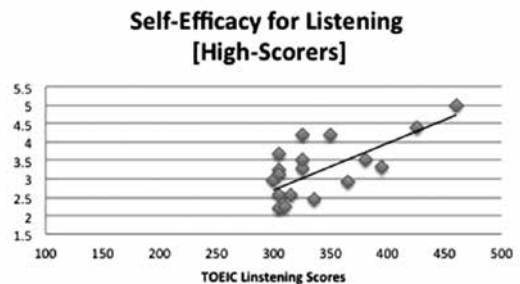


Figure 4. Relationship between TOEIC listening scores and self-efficacy for listening of the high TOEIC scorers.

## **Discussion**

This preliminary analysis has suggested that the two questionnaires, one measuring listening strategy use and the other measuring self-efficacy for listening, would show a positive correlation with learners' listening proficiency in general. A further analysis has indicated, however, that a correlation may not be revealed among learners with lower listening abilities, although a stronger correlation would be found among those with higher listening proficiency. This implies that the two questionnaires may not be very useful to conduct a reliable investigation on rather low proficiency learners in terms of their listening strategy use and self-efficacy for listening.

A possible reason for the lack of correlations among the less proficient participants in this study, different from other studies, may be because many of the study participants in those studies may have had much higher language proficiency of their target language than such Japanese learners of English that the author regularly teaches. The study participants here are in Japan, where English is not used on a regular basis at all, and their native language, Japanese, has more differences in countless aspects from English. Regarding the participants in previous studies on listening strategy use and self-efficacy for listening, they were enrolled in "an advanced-level English" course (Cross, 2010), or studied French in the US (Mills et al., 2006) or Canada (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010), which reasonably allows us to assume many of the learners spoke English as their native language or a semi-native language and learned a target language (French), which shares much more common linguistic features with English than Japanese, and studied in ESL, not EFL.

If the discrepancy of the study here from other studies is based on the difference in the participants' target language proficiency, English instructors in Japan should use caution instructors in Japan should use caution before implementing strategy instruction in the classroom, especially in teaching low proficient learners. The MALQ questionnaire might not be able to reliably measure actual learners' use of strategies when the participants are not very proficient. The self-efficacy questionnaire may not be able to accommodate well those who believe they are capable of engaging in challenging tasks positively but actually feel threatened in facing such tasks in reality.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has attempted to demonstrate whether listening strategy use and self-efficacy would be closely related to learners' listening abilities by using the TOEIC listening scores and the two questionnaires. Although the data analysis here has suggested that learners who use listening strategies more often are those who have higher listening proficiency and vice versa, and that that is more clearly seen among more advanced learners, questions remain before such a suggestion would be accepted. First, the assessment tools need to be tested with wider groups of learners. Not only was the number of participants in this study small, but

also the levels of proficiency were limited, which was from low to intermediate. As mentioned earlier, in the case of other published studies, the proficiency seemed to be much higher. To apply these questionnaires to more general learners with the purpose of assessing listening strategies use, self-efficacy of learners, and to measure the effectiveness of listening instruction, closer examinations of the reliabilities and validities of the questionnaires need to be conducted. Another limitation of this study is that the timing of administering the questionnaires and the TOEIC test should have been close to each other for all the participants. The design of listening strategy instruction also needs to be scrutinized. Depending on the proficiency, instruction has to be carefully planned and executed. Validating assessment measures is important, but planning a course design to help learners gain autonomy should not be neglected. It seems clear that further investigation in the area of strategy instruction is necessary to explore better ways to support learners' language acquisition.

### Appendix<sup>3)</sup> A

#### **Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) and List of Metacognitive Strategies Instructed to the Participants<sup>4)</sup> (adapted from Vandergrift et al., 2006)**

1. Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen. (PLAN)<sup>3)</sup>
2. I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding. (DIRECTED)
- 3.<sup>4)</sup> I find that listening is more difficult than reading, speaking, or writing in English. (PERSON)
4. I translate in my head as I listen. (MENTAL)
5. I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand. (PROBLEM)
6. When my mind wanders, I recover my concentration right away. (DIRECTED)
7. As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic. (PROBLEM)
8. I feel that listening comprehension in English is a challenge for me. (PERSON)
9. I use my experience and knowledge to help me understand. (PROBLEM)
10. Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to. (PLAN)
11. I translate key words as I listen. (MENTAL)
12. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration. (DIRECTED)
13. As I listen, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realize that it is not correct. (PROBLEM)

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3) Appendices A and B are originally written in English. The author/researcher of this study translated them into Japanese for the participants.

4) The items here are also used as a list of strategies to teach metacognitive strategies, although the items were presented in groups according to the four types: Planning/Evaluation, Directed Attention, Person Knowledge, Mental Translation, and Problem Solving.

5) The abbreviations stand for Planning/Evaluation (PLAN), Directed Attention (DIRECTED), Person Knowledge (PERSON), Mental Translation (MENTAL), and Problem Solving (PROBLEM).

6) The underlined items are reverse-scored.



14. After listening, I think back to how I listened, and about what I might do differently next time. (PLAN)
15. I don't feel nervous when I listen to English. (PERSON)
16. When I have difficulty understanding what I hear, I give up and stop listening. (DIRECTED)
17. I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't understand. (PROBLEM)
18. I translate word by word, as I listen. (MENTAL)
19. 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. (PROBLEM)
20. As I listen, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension. (PLAN)
21. I have a goal in mind as I listen. (PLAN)

## **Appendix B**

### **Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (adapted from Kassem, 2015)**

- 1 Listening to English is a pleasant activity for me.
- 2 When I compare myself to other students in my class, I'm a good listener.
- 3 Before I listen to an English text, I don't feel that I'll understand it well.
- 4 I often end up translating word by word without understanding what I've listened to.
- 5 I can handle more challenging listening materials than I could before.
- 6 I believe that I'm a poor listener.
- 7 Listening material for EFL learners should be delivered at a slower rate than the rate of native speakers.
- 8 When listening to English, it's easy for me to make guesses about the parts I miss.
- 9 I feel stressed when I listen to English material.
- 10 I believe that my listening comprehension improves with time.
- 11 When I listen, I don't have to try as hard to understand as I used to do.
- 12 When I listen, I can answer more questions than other students.
- 13 I have the ability to improve my listening skill.
- 14 It bothers me if the teacher gives me listening assignments.
- 15 I understand what I listen to better than I could before.
- 16 I feel more relaxed and confident when I read than when I listen.
- 17 When listening to English material, I know how to guess difficult vocabulary items.
- 18 In the listening class, I like to volunteer to answer questions.
- 19 I often get so confused that I cannot remember what I've heard.
- 20 I can make a plan about the listening task before I begin to listen.
- 21 When I find listening difficult, I usually give up.
- 22 When I listen, I recognize more words than before.
- 23 I have no problem listening to someone who speaks English fast.
- 24 I have the ability to concentrate on the content to which I listen.
- 25 I don't feel confident in my English listening skills.
- 26 I know what strategies to use when I listen to English.

- 27 I feel uncomfortable listening without a chance to read the transcript of the speech.
- 28 I'm one of the best listeners in my class.
- 29 If listening gets difficult for me, I am successful at fixing it up.
- 30 I can concentrate more when I listen than I could before.
- 31 When I listen, I need less help than I used to.
- 32 I know what to do when I don't understand what I'm listening to.
- 33 When listening to English, I get nervous when I don't understand every word.
- 34 Listening is easier for me than it used to be.
- 35 My understanding of difficult listening material doesn't improve.
- 36 The more difficult the listening task is, the more challenging and enjoyable it is.
- 37 I feel good about my listening comprehension skill.
- 38 I am less confident in my listening skill than other students.
- 39 I can understand what I listen to even if I don't know several vocabulary items.
- 40 Lack of control over listening material isn't a problem for me.

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日本語タイトル「EFLにおけるリスニング方略使用・自己効力感とリスニング力の関連について」

日本語要旨 本稿は英語学習者におけるリスニング方略使用・自己効力感とリスニング力の関連についての調査結果である。著者が先行調査で示した比較的リスニング力が低い学習者に対してはリスニング方略指導の効果が低い、また広く使用されている方略調査と効力感調査における妥当性に疑問があるという点を調査するため実施した。被験者全体において、リスニング力と方略使用・リスニング力と自己効力感、それら2つにおいて統計上有意な正の相関関係が見られた。中でもリスニング力の高い学習者には2つの関連性について更に強い正の相関関係が検出された。一方リスニング力が低い学習者では統計上有意な相関関係は見られなかった。方略指導を実際に行っても学習者の元々のリスニング力が低い場合は効果が期待できない可能性があること、そういった学習者に対しては効果測定のための評価ツールの妥当性について調査が必要であることを提案した。

キーワード:リスニング、方略、自己効力感、言語使用能力、EFL