
COPING STRATEGIES ON LISTENING ANXIETY OF SAUDI EFL LEARNERS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT: *Listening anxiety has long since been considered as a problematic component for foreign language learners. Therefore, this study aimed at identifying the strategies utilised by Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in order to alleviate such listening-induced anxiety, which was undertaken by conducting semi-structured interviews with 15 participants. The findings revealed that the learners implemented nine categories of strategy, which emerged from four main themes. The primary themes were: 1) cognitive strategy, which included positive thinking, note-taking, and inferring to guess the meaning; 2) metacognitive strategy, which included preparation, peer-seeking, and self-evaluation; 3) affective strategy, which included relaxation; and 4) memory strategy, which included keywords and semantic mapping utilisation. In brief, this study positions significant implications for the learners, lecturers, and course developers alike.*

KEYWORDS: Foreign language anxiety, listening anxiety, Saudi EFL learners, coping strategy

INTRODUCTION

English is considered as an international language, thus rendering its consistent choice as the mode of communication among speakers of different first-language backgrounds (Jenkins & Leung, 2013). For this particular reason, the demand for learning the language has soared and the need for further investigations regarding English as a foreign language (EFL) learning becomes a priority for researchers. In language learning, a language can be taught or assessed based on the four English language skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Of these skills, listening and its status as a receptive skill has been largely ignored for research and teaching purposes alike. This can be attributed to its nature itself; accordingly, the students can spontaneously acquire the skill via other language skills (Lau, 2015). Therefore, listening is often regarded as a passive language skill despite its fundamental disposition for language acquisition and developing other skills (Vandergrift 1999).

In fact, past research works have highlighted this skill as a particular problematic area for EFL learners. According to Hasan (2000), the number of foreign language learners that encounter problems with this skill is more than other language skills collectively due to it being a

process requiring interpretive activity necessary for understanding a text. Moreover, Vandergrift (1997) has claimed that listening is a complex skill, which is attributable to it involving the skills of hypothesising, predicting, generalising, checking, and revising for the listening inputs. Such level of complexity behind the act of listening can emerge from various elements such as the speed of speech, different accents of speakers, and psychological factors including anxiety, thereby resulting in a poor listening ability (Hamouda, 2013). In particular, anxiety is one of the detrimental challenges faced by EFL learners in the course of learning a foreign language. Language researchers have demonstrated the gravity of the anxiety associated with learning a second or foreign language as a problem. This is due to it possibly hindering the process of language learning, negatively influencing the achievement and performance of the learners, and impeding the development of their foreign language abilities (MacIntyre, 1999).

Accordingly, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) define language anxiety as a “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p.31). Meanwhile, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) describe foreign language anxiety as “the feeling of tension and apprehension, specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (p.24). As a result, different causes have been correlated to this type of anxiety, such as test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1999; Zheng, 2008). In addition, Young (1991) has reported six major causes of language anxiety arising from the three sources, which are the teacher, the learner, and instructional practice. The causes include: 1) learner’s beliefs towards language learning; 2) interpersonal and personal anxiety; 3) instructor’s beliefs and perceptions about language teaching; 4) classroom procedures; 5) interaction between instructor and learner; and 6) language examination.

Regardless, research works undertaken in this area have exposed the fact that the focus on language anxiety, in general, does not provide a full understanding of student anxiety in learning a language. This is attributable to each skill set being characterised by its own types and levels of anxiety (Chang, 2008). Therefore, additional investigation on a specific language skill set should be conducted to explore the phenomenon of foreign language-based anxiety more comprehensively. In accordance to this, scholars have discussed specific language skill sets, such as listening anxiety (Oteir & Aziz, 2017); reading anxiety (Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 1999); writing anxiety (Huwari & Aziz, 2011); and speaking anxiety (Cheng, 2009). In particular, one of the four specific language anxieties requiring additional research is listening anxiety, which has been delineated by a mere and limited number of studies (Chang, 2008; Golchi, 2012; Kim, 2000; Serraj, 2015).

In general, most studies undertaken on listening anxiety have discussed its causes and effects, while only very few focus on identifying the strategies for overcoming the feeling among the learners, despite language researchers believing that its reduction is a significant issue for further investigation (Bekleyen, 2009; Vandergrift, 1999; Vogely, 1998). Gonen (2009) has emphasised that listening is a more spontaneous skill compared to other skills, thereby underlining the need to identify the approaches that may potentially alleviate listening anxiety. Furthermore, studies discussing the coping strategies for listening anxiety are mainly emphasising the teachers' perspectives, whereas this study focuses on those utilised by the students themselves to overcome the feeling.

In Saudi Arabia, a large number of students have been recognised to experience the feeling of anxiety during listening classes (Hamouda, 2013). This may be imputed to the educational system in the country, which is primarily teacher-centred. Therefore, the students are passive in the listening process and they are merely tasked to memorise the information (Al-Saraj, 2011). A consensus has been reached of Saudi Arabian studies, which are thus devoted to language anxiety, in general, or listening problems (Alrabai, 2014; Al-Saraj, 2011; Hamouda, 2013). In contrast, only a limited number of studies have discussed the listening anxiety, specifically its coping strategies in Saudi Arabia, despite Saudi EFL learners having found to be anxious in their listening classes (Alrabai, 2014; Hamouda, 2013; Oteir & Aziz, 2017). As a result, a comprehensive study on Saudi EFL learners for identifying the strategies for their anxiety reduction in listening classes is sorely necessary. Besides, the majority of Saudi Arabian studies have concentrated on school or university students, whereas very minimal works have looked into the perspective of preparatory year students. Hence, this solidifies the need to conduct a study on the Saudi EFL learners who are enrolling in preparatory year programmes. In particular, this work aims to contribute to the literature of foreign language anxiety by identifying the strategies for listening anxiety reduction. Accordingly, the current study is looking to answer the following research question: What are the strategies that the Saudi EFL learners utilise to reduce listening anxiety?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To ensure reader's familiarity with the main concepts positioned as the theoretical basis for this study, the following conceptualisations are thus discussed: listening problems, listening anxiety, strategies used in listening comprehension, and coping strategies of listening anxiety.

Listening Problems

EFL learners may potentially encounter many problems in listening comprehension in which different researchers have investigated this phenomenon, revealing a wide range of challenges for these learners (Goh, 2000). They can be categorised into three main areas, namely: 1)

linguistic problems; 2) speaker's problems; and 3) text problems. Meanwhile, other associated factors found to be the main factors of listening problems include speed rate, repetition, accents, and paraphrasing (Goh, 1999). Further correlated issues may also consist of the text structure, syntax, and personal factors, such as insufficient exposure to the target language, the lack of interest and motivation, and the feeling of anxiety (Hamouda, 2013).

In the context of Arab learners, they face serious problems in English listening skill, whereby Assaf (2015) has claimed that these EFL learners display difficulties in listening, which are thus classified into syntactic, semantic, and external factors. Another popular study by Hasan (2000) has aimed to determine the students' self-perceived listening problems, there by revealing that missing some parts of a text, non-recall of words, strange pronunciation, and speed of speech are the major problems encountered by Syrian EFL learners in listening comprehension. Moreover, Saudi Arabian studies have depicted problems similar to those found in other Arab countries in relation to listening. In particular, Yousif (2006) has conducted a study at Majmaah University in Saudi Arabia to investigate the problems of first-year students during their listening lectures. It is discovered that the conceptual, linguistic, acoustic, discorsal, and psychological factors have affected their listening capacity. Along the same line, Hamouda (2013) has supported the outcomes of previous studies on the listening problems that Saudi EFL learners faced, outlining speed of speech, anxiety, insufficient vocabulary, and different accents as the majorly encountered issues.

Listening Anxiety

Research on listening comprehension has implicated the manner in which anxiety obviously undermines the listening comprehension process and negatively impact learners' achievement. In listening, the learners cannot control the speed, pronunciation, or accent of the speaker, which leads towards them experiencing the feeling of anxiety. In fact, Sharif and Ferdous (2012) have explained that listening anxiety can be provoked due to learners being especially afraid of misunderstanding what they listen to and worried of interpreting a speech wrongly. Furthermore, other studies such as Krashen (1985), Elkhalaifi (2005), and Vogely (1999) have assured that anxiety is highly provoked in the listening context, thereby causing one addressing the issue is fast becoming crucial.

In literature, some definitions of listening anxiety are available, one of which defines it as the feelings or reactions of individuals that are due to the scenario of learning a language (Young, 1991). It can also be described as the feeling of nervousness and fear of listening to a foreign language (Elkhafafi, 2005), while Scarcella and Oxford (1992) believe that listening anxiety occurs when a task is either unfamiliar or too difficult for learners. Additionally, MacIntyre (1997) explains that it may arise when the listeners worry about misunderstanding, non-understanding, and fearing embarrassing outcomes.

According to Joiner (1986), anxiety arising from the listening process emerges from a negative listening self-concept, namely low self-esteem in the specific area. Meanwhile, Kimura (2008) considers listening anxiety as a psychological term, relating it to humane tendencies to avoid situations of evaluation. Moreover, Golchi (2012) is of the belief that it arises as a result of the students' lack of confidence in their speaking abilities. Accordingly, Bekleyen (2009) has discussed listening anxiety as a type of anxiety related to language learners who experience the feelings of worry and tension in situations necessitating the act of listening. In addition, Wheelless (1975) specifically defines the term as a "receiver's apprehension, fear of misinterpreting, inadequately processing, or not being able to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others" (p. 263).

It is interesting to note a negative relationship between language anxiety and listening comprehension, whereby a review of past literature has yielded such finding. In particular, Chen, Zhang, and Liu (2014) have discovered its negative relationship with factors such as learners' proficiency, performance and achievement, learners' self-perceptions, and cognitive capacity. Furthermore, most studies have acknowledged the effect of listening anxiety on the students' performance and achievement accordingly (Kim, 2000; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Vogely, 1998; Serraj, 2015). Zhang (2010) has conducted a study using structural equation modelling to examine the causal correlation between listening anxiety and language performance, finding that it can lead to poor performance. Moreover, it is also negatively correlated with test performance (Bekleyen, 2009), while Al-Sawalheh (2016) has claimed that Jordanian students perceive high anxiety levels and low proficiency as the components affecting their subsequent listening performance. In sum, a review of literature on the effects of listening anxiety has shown that listening anxiety poses harmful effects on language learners across different aspects.

Strategies Used in Listening Comprehension/ Alleviating Listening Anxiety

To understand listening strategies, understanding the language learning strategies is necessary. Rubin (1975) defines language learning strategies as "the techniques or devices that a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p.43). Although these approaches are generally utilised by successful language learners, implementing strategies specifically for each language skill is important towards achieving their successful utilisation. "As for listening, employment of listening strategy use is of crucial importance due to the online processing that takes place during listening. That is, learners have to decode the message, understand, and interpret it in the course of listening" (Gonen, 2009, p. 45). Henceforth, listening strategies can be defined as the techniques and tactics used by a listener to directly or indirectly achieve their purpose of listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 1997). They can be further implemented to facilitate comprehension and make learning effective.

Accordingly, O'Malley and Chamot (1989) have classified listening strategies into three affective groups, namely: 1) metacognitive, 2) cognitive, and 3) socio-affective strategies. First, metacognitive strategies are significant as they control the language learning process, which include planning, managing, and regulating the cognitive learning processes. Vandergrift (1999) has stated that this strategy is a kind of self-regulated learning, consisting of the attempt to plan, check, monitor, select, revise, evaluate, and more. It can be discussed through pre-listening planning strategies, while-listening monitoring strategies, and post-listening evaluation strategies.

Next, the cognitive strategies utilise certain techniques to deal with a listening task, with some examples such as repeating the information heard, summarising the information, organising words, making inferences, and undertaking note-taking techniques. Furthermore, the cognitive strategies are described as problem-solving attitude that learners employ to manipulate their learning tasks and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge or skills (Derry & Murphy, 1986). Moreover, they are related with comprehending and storing inputs in either the working memory or long-term memory for future retrieval. Therefore, they are investigated from the aspects of bottom-up strategies and top-down strategies.

Meanwhile, the social-affective strategies refer to the methods that listeners employ to cooperate with others in order to lower their anxiety and verify their understanding. Some examples include cooperating with colleagues, asking for elaboration, and self-assuring to reduce the anxiety. Habte-Gabr (2006) is of the belief that social/affective strategies are those that are non-academic in nature and involve stimulating learning processes by establishing a level of empathy between the instructor and student.

It has been assumed that utilising listening comprehension strategies may further help in alleviating listening anxiety. Studies on listening anxiety and listening comprehension strategy have been found to yield useful strategies in overcoming such anxiety in listening classes (Golchi, 2012; Elkhafaifi, 2005). In particular, Golchi (2012) has claimed that listening anxiety has a negative correlation with listening comprehension and listening strategy use. In line with this notion, Gonen (2009) has conducted a study on intermediate-level Turkish EFL students, thereby finding foreign language listening strategies to be related negatively with each other. This indicates that students with a high level of anxiety did not use effective listening strategies compared to those with a low level of anxiety. Similarly, Moghadam and Ghanizadeh (2015) have undertaken a study on Iranian learners to examine the association between listening anxiety and listening strategies, with results revealing the former to be negatively correlated with the strategies employed by learners. To be precise, those who utilise listening strategies are learners who do not experience anxiety or have a low level of

anxiety when listening to English language. As such, students who implement listening strategies may be less anxious than those who do not.

Furthermore, other studies have explored the specific strategies used to reduce the listening anxiety of learners. Among these, Vogely (1998) has suggested the strategies to reduce listening anxiety among EFL learners and reported 11 strategies classified into four categories to alleviate listening comprehension anxiety. The categories are: 1) strategies related to input (e.g. make input comprehensible, using a variety of inputs, and structure the tasks); 2) strategies related to the process of listening anxiety (e.g. concentrating on the strategies needed and note-taking); 3) strategies related to instruction (e.g. receiving regular feedback, combining listening comprehension with other skills, and creating out-of-class opportunities); and 4) strategies related to personal attitudes of the learners and teachers (e.g. experiencing successes and using anxiety-reducing techniques).

Besides, Bekleyen (2009) in his study on Turkish learners has proposed strategies that are helpful for language learners in alleviating their anxiety in listening. They include improving the listening skills by spending more time on listening, asking for help especially in social situations, and opting for positive thinking strategies to convince themselves that language learning is easy. These findings are in support of Vogely (1998) and Koch and Terrell (1991), which have found that spending more time on listening and being exposed regularly to certain class activities can decrease the level of anxiety that learners experience.

Another study conducted by Arnold (2000) has focused on creating a new way to reduce anxiety. Based on the neuroscientific theory of emotions playing an essential role in one's mental life and affecting how their brain functions, Arnold has utilised a "visualisation" technique to change the learners' mental image of listening. However, it is obvious that most studies have discussed the correlation between listening anxiety and listening strategy use, while only a few have identified the strategies that students employ to overcome the anxiety specifically. Moreover, the literature has shown that only minimum research has been carried out to find the strategies to reduce listening anxiety from the students' point of view. In particular, most works conducted to this end have discussed these strategies through the teachers' or researchers' point of view. In contrast, the present study seeks the information about the most common ways of reducing listening anxiety from the students' perspective in order to fill this gap.

METHOD

Research Design

The present study was qualitative research in nature, which was intended to identify the

strategies Saudi EFL learners utilized in reducing their listening anxiety. To optimally achieve this purpose, a case study research design was used to collect the data needed to answer the research questions. Choosing the qualitative case study research design was undertaken based on two specific concepts. First, a qualitative case study design can be used when the borders of the phenomenon are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009). This study sought to explore the strategies implemented by Saudi EFL learners to alleviate their listening anxiety, where very little data was available about this phenomenon at the time of study undertakings. Second, a qualitative method is suitable when the researcher wants to understand a central problem with specific details. In this study, the aim was to generate a detailed understanding about the listening anxiety phenomenon, specifically the strategies that the participants used to reduce their listening anxiety.

Participants

Purposive sampling was employed in this study to enable the selection of Saudi EFL learners at Majmaah University as the participants, allowing a lot of information to be obtained per the purpose of study. The participants were chosen due to their availability, appropriateness, and possession of features needed for the study (Creswell, 2012). Accordingly, interviews were conducted with the students who experienced anxiety when listening to the English language in their classrooms. To select the suitable participants, the following criteria were taken into consideration: 1) only students in their first semester who enrolled in the Preparatory Year Programme at Majmaah University were involved, 2) only students from the male branches were involved, and 3) students who had lived in countries with English as the first language were excluded.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with 15 participants were utilised to collect the data. This method was suitable for the present study in order to give a full understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Next, the number of participants was obtained based on the data saturation technique. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the size of participants, in general, to be interviewed depends on the data saturation or redundancy that the researcher reaches. Therefore, the interviews were conducted face-to-face, ranged from 20 to 25 minutes per session in duration, and tape-recorded. They included 15 questions and note-taking was taken into consideration during the process. These questions were developed and refined after some modifications from related works and consulting those of expertise in the same field from the department of English language at Majmaah University.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done by first transcribing and double-checking the note-taking and semi-structured interviews ad verbatim. The thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clark

(2006) was then adapted to analyse the interviews, whereby the guideline detailed the following steps: 1) familiarising with the data, 2) extracting the initial codes, 3) looking for the themes, 4) criticising the themes, 5) specifying and naming the themes, and 6) generating the report.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In qualitative research, a researcher must ensure that the study's findings are sufficiently authentic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve this aim, the following strategies were employed: 1) member checking-strategy, which was used to avoid a misunderstanding of the real situations, and 2) peer-reviewing strategy, which entailed data review by someone familiar with the phenomenon. The first strategy required the researcher to approach the participants in order to review the data gathered and ensure that the data explanation described their real perspectives about listening anxiety. Meanwhile, the second strategy was ensured by the researcher discussing and reviewing the themes emerged with two professors who specialised in applied linguistics.

RESULTS

Language learners should know that they play an important role in the listening process. Therefore, using effective listening strategies employed by the learners themselves as something contributory towards lowering their listening anxiety is crucial. To do this, conscious and immediate responses made by the participants were utilised to deal with the listening anxiety experienced when listening to English. Accordingly, nine strategy categories used to overcome listening anxiety were found, which were then divided into four themes. The first main theme is the cognitive strategy, which includes positive thinking, note-taking, and inferring to guess the meaning. Then, the second main theme is the metacognitive strategy, which includes preparation, peer-seeking, and self-evaluation, whereas the third main theme is the affective strategy, which includes relaxation. Finally, the fourth main theme is memory strategy, which includes using keywords and semantic mapping. Table 1 shows the themes and sub-themes.

Table 1.

Theme	Sub-theme
Cognitive strategy	Positive thinking
	Note-taking
	Inferring to guess the meaning
Metacognitive strategy	Preparation
	Peer-seeking
	Self-evaluation
Affective strategy	Relaxation
Memory strategy	Using keywords
	Semantic mapping

Cognitive Strategy

Cognitive strategy was the most commonly implemented strategy by the participants in this study to overcome their listening anxiety. The three sub-themes stemming from this main theme included positive thinking, note-taking, and inferring to guess the meaning.

Positive thinking

Positive thinking was used as a strategy to reduce listening anxiety; it entailed the participants using their minds to be confident and comfortable in doing listening tasks. Almost half of them mentioned that they employed the strategy to cope with their anxiety. In particular, Participant 5 reported to think positively when he was doing the listening tasks, stating that: At that moment, I don't blame myself. I know that I gave the wrong answers, but I ignore that. I think that I can do better one day. I stop thinking about the consequences of that problem. Furthermore, Participant 11 expressed a similar view of convincing himself of giving the correct answers in his classes, noting that:

When I was very scared, I listened many times and said to myself that the next (time) will be better. I convince myself that I will answer correctly.

Note-Taking

Note-taking strategy was commonly used by the participants of this study, name nine of 15 participants, in their listening classes. This act means that students take notes while they are listening to recordings. They found that note-taking during listening tasks and then reviewing their notes would facilitate the task. Participant 7 assured that note-taking was a way to be rid of anxiety in listening classes, saying that:

During listening tasks, I was taking notes, identifying keywords, and using symbols. This way is profitable. So, it helps me to get more understanding, which leads to lower anxiety in listening classes.

Concurrently, Participant 4 commented that he utilised doodles and note-taking as a way to help him answer the listening task. He said;

I usually write the important words down. I find it useful as it helps me to recall and perceive the answers quickly.

The note-taking strategy was used by more than half of the Saudi EFL students in order to cope with listening anxiety. This is in line with O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989), who have considered note-taking as one of the cognitive strategies that learners use to decode the message and understand the listening.

Inferring to Guess the Meaning

Another cognitive strategy used by the participants was inferring to guess the meaning. In this study, this act was a coping strategy and an attempt to interpret a speech through an evaluation of the situation, knowledge, and experience of the listener. A few of the participants used this strategy (5 out of 15) in order to overcome their anxiety in listening classes. Participant 6 affirmed that he used this strategy to understand any unknown words, stating that:

I try to understand the difficult words by interpreting the gestures of the speakers about certain topics. Sometimes, I guess that the speaker chooses a certain choice among others as he stressed certain words.

Furthermore, Participant 10 remarked that making predictions might help a listener in imagining what the speaker said, explaining that:

I use guessing to answer listening conversations. I understand the topic from the context. Also, I make predictions about what the topic is. This way helps me much better in listening so that I can guess 30% of the speech.

Another participant commented that the intonation of the words and gestures used by the speaker would be a fruitful avenue to reduce listening anxiety. Participant 13 said:

I imagine how the speaker feels at some particular point. I can guess whether he agrees or not. In addition, I predict from the intonation of speech of how the speaker's status is.

Metacognitive Strategy

The second type of strategy stemmed from this study was the metacognitive strategy. It encompasses strategies that manage and control the learning process through planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning activities. Three metacognitive strategies emerged from the participants' responses in this study, namely: preparation, peer-seeking, and self-evaluation.

Preparation

In this study, preparation was implemented as a strategy to reduce listening anxiety, which contextually indicated the efforts exerted such as preparing for the tasks, monitoring any warnings, and reading about the listening activities were used to overcome anxiety. Nine of 15 participants mentioned it as one of the strategies they utilised to reduce listening anxiety. The technique included doing more exercises, reading the transcriptions of the listening tasks, and attending more courses for improving the listening skill. Accordingly, Participant12 explained how he tried to improve his listening skill:

Practice in listening daily, I always do this when I am free. I listen to my course activities. I also listen to some lessons on YouTube and listen to anything in English. Day after day, I feel that my understanding is better in listening. Meanwhile, Participant15 commented that he prepared by listening to English everywhere:

I always listen to English. When I am driving, I listen to English news. I also watch English movies. Moreover, I prepare for listening classes at home. This is very important as you feel that the English language is near to you.

Peer Seeking

The second sub-theme that emerged from the main theme of metacognitive strategy was peer-seeking. This means the realisation one has that their classmates have the same problem, which is feeling anxious in listening classes. This feeling leads them to be more comfortable and encourages them to talk and discuss this problem together. Almost half of the participants (6 of 15) used peer-seeking as a coping strategy to reduce their listening anxiety. Participant 7 commented:

Sometimes, I feel that discussing this problem with my partners is more comfortable than with the teachers. I can describe my situation better as my friends will help me and advise me (in a) friendly (manner). On the other hand, talking with teachers would be formal, and I feel shy to talk with them.

In a similar vein, Participant 13 noticed that some of his peers employed this strategy to deal with listening anxiety. He said:

I ask my friends when I am not able to answer. I feel also more relaxed when I see my classmates have experienced listening anxiety.

Self- Evaluation

Self-evaluation was the third sub-theme that emerged from the main theme of metacognitive strategy, which meant that the students evaluated their work and progress appropriately. Five of the 15 participants mentioned that they used this strategy to reduce their listening anxiety, whereby Participant 14 commented that he would monitor his study and assess whether he could fulfil the listening tasks:

I ask myself if I am managing my study correctly or not. I also think about my progress in the study whether it is efficient. This way helps me very much as I can judge at which level I am, then I can start making remedial plans to improve my abilities.

Affective Strategies

The fourth theme that emerged from the participants' responses on the strategies utilised to reduce listening anxiety was the affective strategy, with only one sub-theme stemming from this strategy, namely relaxation. Relaxation is defined as the steps taken by the students to be more relaxed in order to overcome the feeling of anxiety. Seven out of 15 participants resorted to this strategy in coping with the anxiety of listening, generating certain statements as an explanation for the strategy. They said:

Participant2: "Calm down, don't worry and take it easy."

Participant4: "I also relax and try to forget what has happened."

Participant10: "I take deep breathes before the listening starts, then I try to be normal and focus more."

Participant13: "I go out and play football and do something I like to get rid of the anxiety."

Memory Strategy

One of the important strategies highlighted by the participants was memory strategy, which was employed to remember or retrieve new information. For instance, this included the use of keywords, imagery, elaboration, semantic mapping, and imagining sounds in memory. Accordingly, two sub-themes were derived from memory strategy, namely using keywords and semantic mapping.

Using Keywords

Using keywords was the first sub-theme that emerged from the main theme memory strategy, whereby eight of the 15 participants reported this method helped to reduce their listening anxiety. Participant 5 and 9 admitted that this strategy played a crucial role in overcoming the feeling of anxiety. In particular, Participant5 commented:

I underline the keywords before listening to the track. Also, during the listening, I determine

the main words that I feel are important. This could facilitate or give a positive impression of the topic.

In line with this view, Participant 8 commented that using keywords in listening helped him to guess the meaning from the whole context:

Actually, I read the all of the questions and determine the main ideas and words through underlining the keywords. This makes me understand more about the topic and focus on specific things.

Semantic Mapping

In contrast, one of the coping strategies seldom used by the participants was semantic mapping. It is a technique that explains the ideas by arranging such ideas in order to pay attention to some of the important vocabulary that will occur in listening. A few participants (4 out of 15) mentioned semantic mapping as a strategy to reduce their listening anxiety. Participant 6 commented that he looked for synonyms for the unknown words in the listening and linked them together. He said:

I think of synonyms for the important words as the keywords in the questions may not be exactly mentioned in the listening. Therefore, I resort to focusing on synonyms for the words as soon as possible.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to identify the strategies in reducing listening anxiety among Saudi EFL learners. The findings indicated that these learners implemented nine strategies, which were thus categorised into four main strategies. They were: 1) cognitive strategy, 2) metacognitive strategy, 3) affective strategy, and 4) memory strategy. A review of the literature failed to comprehensively mention the strategies to reduce listening anxiety, thereby rendering it difficult to directly compare the obtained results with other similar studies.

Based on the findings, the cognitive strategy was the most commonly utilised technique by Saudi EFL learners to overcome their listening anxiety, which could be divided into three types. First, positive thinking as a strategy is used to deal with listening anxiety, similar to that found by Kondo and Ling (2004) and Mahmud and Suryana (2015). These works have found that the positive thinking strategy is intended to shift anxious students from a stressful situation to perceiving them as pleasant and positive cues. According to Oxford (1999), positive thinking is “a kind of self-encouragement that helps learners to get rid of emotional and negative ideas” (p.67).

Second, the note-taking strategy is another strategy used by Saudi EFL learners to cope with listening anxiety. In fact, it has been underlined as a strategy for facilitating listening

comprehension, while this study shows that note-taking can also be used to alleviate listening anxiety. This result is consistent with the findings of Vogely (1998). Moreover, O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) have considered it to be one of the cognitive strategies that learners utilise to decode a message and understand the listening task.

Third, inferring to guess the meaning is a strategy employed by the Saudi EFL students towards overcoming their listening anxiety, which is also described by O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989). The scholars have further suggested certain inferential types for listening tests.

Moreover, the findings of this study showed that students employed metacognitive strategies to be less anxious, specifically preparation, peer-seeking, and self-evaluation. This finding is in accordance with those of Kondo and Ling (2004), Mahmud and Suryana (2015), and Bekleyen (2009). Furthermore, Dalman (2016) has found that the learners who are less anxious in communication and negative evaluation show a tendency for more cognitive, meta-cognitive, and affective strategies utilisation. Another type of strategy implemented is the affective strategy in order to reduce the listening anxiety, namely through relaxation. This result is congruent with other studies such as Kondo and Ling (2004) and Vogely (1998).

Additionally, the last strategy used by the participants of this study is memory strategy, specifically by utilising keywords and semantic mapping in order to remember and retrieve information. Accordingly, this finding is consistent with those expressed by Kondo and Ling (2004).

This study provides some implications from the findings and knowledge acquired. Theoretically, most studies on foreign language listening anxiety have been done quantitatively through correlational research and do not account for the participant's viewpoint about the issue. Only a few studies have been done on listening anxiety using a qualitative methodology. Thus, this study can fill in the gap and provide more insights into this particular phenomenon. On the other hand, the general consensus of this issue has been discussed from the teachers' or researchers' perspective. In contrast, this study offered a discourse based on the students' perspective.

Practically, the present study yields implications for the lecturers, learners, and course developers accordingly. First, the lecturers should be aware of the importance of reducing anxiety in listening. It is hoped that the strategies used by Saudi EFL learners as observed in this study can help these lecturers to guide their students in reducing their listening anxiety. Furthermore, the learners should utilise certain strategies to overcome their listening anxiety, whereby the findings of this study yielded several affective strategies. Techniques such as

relaxation and practicing may thus help them in lowering their anxiety during listening classes. Meanwhile, course developers should apply affective listening strategies in order to help students in reducing their anxiety. They should be aware that the students are able to detail useful strategies and techniques that can further improve the process of learning. It is henceforth recommended that more studies are conducted on Saudi EFL learners using a different focus, such as female or graduate students as the studied population.

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