

Relationship between Autonomy and Listening Comprehension Ability among Iranian EFL Learners

Shiva Safari, English Department, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad Branch, Najafabad, Iran
shiva.saffari@gmail.com

Omid Tabatabaei *

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad Branch,
Najafabad, Iran
tabatabaeiomid@phu.iaun.ac.ir

Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the possible impact of gender and proficiency level on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability among Iranian low and high proficiency male and female EFL learners. One hundred six English learners, based on the results of Oxford Placement Test (OPT), version II, took part in this study. Both female and male learners with the age range of 13 to 29 from two girl language institutes in Khomeynishahr and one boy school in Shahrekord participated in the study. The instruments of the study consisted of an OPT, an autonomy questionnaire, and two listening comprehension tests. First of all, the participants were required to take the OPT and autonomy questionnaire and then in a different session they were asked to sit for the listening comprehension tests. The collected data were analyzed by means of SPSS and the results of statistical analysis indicated that (1) gender could not modify the relationship, (2) proficiency level, on the other hand, had a significant effect on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability and those with higher proficiency outperformed the lower proficiency learners. The findings of this study could have implications for learners, teachers, and material developers.

Keywords: Autonomy, Listening Comprehension Ability, Gender, Proficiency Level, Iranian EFL Learners

Introduction

Since its emergence, autonomy has been subjected to different interpretations and definitions such as independent learning, flexible learning, and student-centered learning (Macaro, 1997). Macaro stated that the need of deriving independent learning is because of developing ‘long-term learner strategies’ which will be of use in the absence of the teacher in current or future learning situations. In flexible learning, the emphasis is on developing broader range of student products namely as “core skills of enterprise learning, study skills and information skills” (Macaro, 1997, p. 168). On the other hand, student-centered learning derives its rationale from the theories of individual learner differences and suggests a learning environment in which it might provide for those differences. As it is expressed in Finch (2002), autonomy became well-known in 1980s and 1990s which concerned “learner-centered aims and methods... to help students become more independent in how they think, learn, and behave” (Finch, 2002, p. 3). As Benson (2001) states, Yves Chalon is considered as the father of autonomy in language learning. But because he died at an early age in 1972, Henri Holec remains an outstanding character within the field of autonomy today. The most cited definition related to the autonomy is that of Holec’s which represents autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981, p. 3). He further stated that in this kind of learning, learners

themselves determine the objectives, progress, and evaluation of learning (Holec, 1981). Another definition is that of Little (1991) who described autonomy as a capacity for critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. Benson (2001) maintained a simple definition for autonomy as “the capacity to take control of one’s learning” (p. 49) in which learners control three levels, (1) learning management, (2) cognitive processes, and (3) learning content.

Benson (2001) continued that these three levels of control are interdependent in that useful learning management relies upon control of the cognitive processes required in learning, while control of cognitive processes has inevitable outcomes for the self-management of learning. Some people (e. g., Little, 1990; Riley, 1988) believe that autonomy and autonomous learning are the same as self-instruction, self-study, self-education, and out-of-class learning, but they are not, because these terms describe different manners and levels of learning by oneself whereas autonomy applies to abilities and attitudes.

Listening comprehension ability is also very important in foreign language studies. It is considered the most frequently used language skill in everyday life (Fang, 2008). In fact, some researchers believe that listening occurs twice as much as speaking, four times as much as reading, and five times as much as writing (e.g., Rivers, 1981; Morley, 1991). Listening comprehension is defined by Vandergrift (1999) as a complex and active process in which the listener must distinguish sounds, recognize vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, and clarify what was gathered in all of the above within the immediate as well as larger sociocultural context of the utterance.

Listening once was considered as a passive skill, but actually it is an active process in which selecting and interpreting of information from auditory traces take place (Richards, 1983; Rubin, 1995). Listening has an important place in language learning due to this fact it is one of the four major skills in language acquisition (Renukadevi, 2014). Renukadevi continues that in addition to the fact that people get to understand spoken language by listening, it also improves three other skills and develops confidence.

The factor which may have some effect on autonomy is learner-centered curriculum. In Iranian context, what is mostly observable is teacher-centered classrooms. Teacher-centered classroom is characterized by transmitting the knowledge from the expert that is the teacher to the novice that is the learner (Harden & Crosby, 2000). But what may have a contribution to autonomy and autonomous learning is learner-centered environment. Learner-centered classroom is described as an environment in which learners are active in the processes of learning (Nunan, 2003). Nunan further stated that autonomous learners are those who can play an active role in their own learning (1999). By considering this definition, it seems that autonomous learning may not happen in teacher-centered classrooms. Therefore, an attempt was made in this study to find out the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners.

Literature Review

As Benson (2001) states autonomy is the “capacity to take control of one’s own learning” (p. 47), it is a ‘multidimensional capacity’ that for any individual and even for the same individual in different circumstances or times will take different forms. The most frequently cited and earliest definition of autonomy is that of Holec (1981) as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. There is a slight difference between these two definitions, namely the use of ‘control’ and ‘charge’. Benson (2001) found the term ‘control’ much more appropriate than the terms ‘charge’ or ‘responsibility’ because it is more open to scientific research. Referring back to the Holec’s definition ‘to take charge of one’s own learning’ is to have responsibility for all of

the decisions related to all aspects of learning. These aspects concern “determining the objectives; defining the content and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.); and evaluating what has been acquired” (Benson, 2001, p. 48).

Various different terms such as self-instruction (Dickinson, 1987; Little, 1991), distance learning (Lewis, 1995), individualized instruction (Chaix & O’Neil, 1978; Logan, 1980), have been identified in the literature of autonomy, and amongst them some are considered as synonym and some other have separate meanings (Dickinson, 1987; Pemberton, 1996). Such terms consequently led to a number of misconceptions about the definition of autonomy. Therefore Esch (1996, p. 37) describes what autonomy is not:

1. Autonomy is not self-instruction/learning without a teacher;
2. It does not mean that intervention or initiative on the part of the teacher is banned;
3. It is not something teachers do to learners;
4. It is not a single easily identifiable behavior;
5. It is not a steady state achieved by learners once and for all.

As Dickinson (1987) puts it, an autonomous language learner can be considered as a learner who claims responsibility for his/her own learning without interference of the teacher or outside a formal classroom curriculum. Byram (2004) continues that such a responsibility is for establishing the purpose, content, rhythm, and method of learning as well as monitoring the learning progress, and evaluating its outcome. It is not to be considered that the teacher has no role in such a classroom environment but an autonomous classroom designs a specific role for the teacher. The role of the teacher in an autonomous classroom maybe regarded as a consultant and facilitator (Dam, 2008). Dam maintains that teachers should engage learners in decision making and make them aware of the demands of the classroom. Little (2004) likewise determines the roles of an observer, advisor, and a manager in an autonomous classroom to the teacher. Other thinkers regarded autonomous learners as those who are able to think about their own learning through knowledge about learning and those who are willing to learn in cooperation with others (Allwright, 1990; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991).

In student-centered or learner-centered learning, students themselves affect the content, activities, materials, and the speed of learning (Froyd & Simpson, 2008). Put differently, the learner has the responsibility and activity of learning at its heart; in contrast, in traditional method of teaching, the emphasis is on the instructor and the aim is the coverage of academic content (Cannon, 2000). In a student-centered classroom, learning is facilitated by increasing motivation and endeavor (Corley, 2008). Lea et al. (2003) provide the following principles of the student-centered learning:

- The reliance on active rather than passive learning,
- An emphasis on deep learning and understanding,
- Increased responsibility and accountability,
- An increased sense of autonomy in the learner,
- An interdependence between teacher and learner,
- Mutual respect within the teacher learner relationship,
- A reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process on the part of both teacher and learner (Lea et al., 2003, p. 322).

“Most researchers agree that a major shift is taking place [...] in education away from the teacher-centered classroom toward a learner-centered system where the learner is in control of the lesson content and the learning process” (Fotos & Browne, 2004, p. 4). Reinders (2010) stated that there are different reasons and motives for such a shift in system of education. One of them is

the area of 'learning styles' which based on studies done in cognitive psychology and general education, has the aim of determining ways in which learners differ in their learning preferences. Learners themselves have to say about their learning because learners approach learning tasks in different ways. This area which is known as 'learners' voices' (Benson & Nunan, 2005) tries to recognize better "learners' motivation, reasons for success, fossilization or dropping out, and learners choices in how they approach the language learning processes (p. 42). In this regard learners and learning can be understood with their connection to their context: 'what', 'where' and 'how' (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001).

Making use of a learner-centered pedagogy in a listening class can be applicable. In other words, it is better for the learner to have "some degree of control over the content of the lesson" (Nunan, 2002, p. 240). There are two ways possible to do this: (1) to devise tasks in a way that classroom activities are centered on the learner rather than the teacher; and (2) to give a learner-centered dimension to the teaching materials by involving learners in the process of their learning (Nunan, 2002).

In recent four decades, the interest to the field of autonomy and its related aspects has increased. Therefore, there are numerous studies done in this respect, some of the most related ones of which are elaborated in what follows. Lei and Yu-mei (2012) conducted an empirical study of listening comprehension strategies in autonomous learning environments among 163 students of two intact groups (experimental and control group) of second-year non-English majors in Shandong University (Weihai). This study was performed from September, 2010 to January, 2011. As the authors of study stated, the aim of this study was to find out "the teachability of listening comprehension strategies, the enhancement of students' awareness of applying these strategies in their listening comprehension practice, and positive effects of listening comprehension strategies cast on students' listening comprehension proficiency" (p. 1). The instruments of the study were a questionnaire and a listening comprehension proficiency test. The results of the study indicated that students' strategy awareness and their listening proficiency could be boosted.

Reviewing the related literature, there are numerous ways to promote learner autonomy. Ismail and Yusof (2012) took the advantages of language learning contracts as a strategy in order to improve learner autonomy among ESL learners. Qualitative and quantitative data were both employed in this study. Information gathered from the contracts, transcriptions of learner conferences, and interviews compromised the qualitative data. The quantitative data, on the other hand, consisted of the obtained results of a three-part questionnaire. There were 141 freshman university students participating in this study from which 22 took part in learner conferences and interview voluntarily. The findings of the study indicated that "learners' experience with the learning contracts were shaped by their perception on perceived gains, sources of motivation, challenges and usefulness of the contracts" (p. 472).

Zhalehgooyan and Alavi (2014) investigated the contribution of learner autonomy to listening comprehension problems of EFL learners. For the purpose of this study, 100 MS and BS students were randomly selected from two different universities. To discover the differences in the sensed problems of listening comprehension of learners with different levels of autonomy, two questionnaires were used: listening comprehension problems questionnaire and autonomy questionnaire of listening comprehension skills. The findings of this study showed (1) learners who are at different levels of autonomy have significance differences in the six aspects of listening comprehension problems, (2) a significant difference was found between the educational levels and the perceived problems of language learners, and (3) significance

differences of male and female students were observed in conception, problems from the listener, problems of listening materials and knowledge of grammar.

The purpose of this study was to investigate if there was a significant relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability among Iranian male and female EFL learners when proficiency level was in focus. Accordingly, the following research questions and null hypotheses were put forward:

Research questions

An attempt was made in this study to find appropriate answers to the following questions:

- 1) Does proficiency level have a significant impact on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability among Iranian EFL learners?
- 2) Does gender have any significant impact on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability among Iranian EFL learners?

Research hypotheses

In doing the research, two null hypotheses have been formulated which are as follows:

- 1) Proficiency level does not have a significant impact on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability.
- 2) Gender does not have a significant impact on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability.

Methodology

Participants

The sample of this study was chosen from two different girl language institutes in Khomeynishahr, Isfahan, and one boy school in Shahrekord. A total number of 120 Persian native EFL learners initially took part in this study, but based on the scores of the OPT, the obtained results of 106 of them were suitable for the purpose of the present study. Male learners were chosen from two different classes and female learners from seven different classes. The required data were gathered from February to May 2015. Sixty out of 106 participants were male with the age range of 13 to 16, and 46 participants were female with the age range of 13 to 29. Data were gathered in two semesters of winter and spring. In these two semesters, fewer learners usually participate in English classes because most of them are school students; therefore, the number of students in each class was lower than what the number of a real class should be. Consequently, the researchers had to gather data from more classes to meet the requirements of the study. As the requirements of the study, all of the participants were given the OPT in order to divide them to two groups of high and low proficiency.

Instruments

Three instruments which were utilized in this study included the OPT, the autonomy questionnaire, and the listening comprehension test.

OPT

OPT is a standard test which is used worldwide in order to put learners in their appropriate classes according to their proficiency level. This test is designed by Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES, 2001). Two parts are included in this test with the total item numbers of 60. As the requirement of this research, all of the learners were told to answer just the first part consisting of 40 grammar and

vocabulary questions. Geranpaye (2003) estimated the reliability of this test and it turned out to be 0.85 for the 40 items test and around 0.9 for the 60 item test.

Autonomy questionnaire

The second instrument of this study was the learner autonomy questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed by Kashefian (2002). Two parts were included in this questionnaire: the first one was related to the demographic information of the learners and the second part related to the role of autonomy in L2, covering 40 five-point Likert-scale items. Hashemian and Soureshjani (2011) used Cronbach alpha and computed the internal consistency of the questionnaire, and the reliability index was found to be 0.72. Three professors of IAU, Najafabad Branch were asked to confirm the validity of the questionnaire and it turned out to be valid.

Listening comprehension test

In this study, two levels of proficiencies were needed: one high proficiency and one low proficiency. As the name of the levels suggests, it was not advisable to administer the same listening comprehension test to both levels because low proficiency learners might be put at a disadvantage. Consequently, two listening comprehension tests were chosen, listening part of *TOEFL Test Strategies* (2004), for high level learners and *Person to Person, Test Booklet 2* (2006) for low level learners. These two tests are both standardized tests, the reliability and validity of which were affirmed in previous studies. Listening part of TOEFL consisted of 3 parts with 50 multiple-choice items. Directions for each part were included before each part started. For the low proficiency level learners, two units of *Person to Person*, each unit consisting of 20 items (true/false, multiple choice, etc.) were selected. The listening comprehension tests were administered in a separate session in order to avoid the effect of fatigue.

Procedure

The process of data collection began in February and ended by May 2015. Before the process of collecting the data began, the one of the researchers explained the aim of the study to the learners and made them sure that their information and scores would not be used except for the purpose of this specific research. First of all, the OPT (2001) was administered. As the test itself states, about 30 minutes was allocated to complete it. Depending on the preference of the teacher, in some classes it was administered in the beginning of the class time, but in other classes at the end. Based on the Alte or the Council of Europe, the level of the participants was determined. Those who answered 24-30 out of 40 items correctly were considered as lower intermediate or B1, and those who answered 31-40 out of 40 items correctly were considered as upper intermediate or B2 (B1 and B2 are based on the Council of Europe level).

After this step, the autonomy questionnaire was distributed among the students. The difficulty level of the questions was sufficiently appropriate so that all of the learners could understand them without difficulty, especially lower proficiency learners. However, in order to make sure that there was no need for translation, the questionnaire was piloted with 10 low proficiency learners from a girl language institute in Khomeynishahr who were excluded from final study. One of the researchers was present to answer the learners' possible problems while they were completing the questionnaire and it turned out that they had no difficulty answering the questionnaire. Therefore, there was no need to translate this questionnaire for lower proficiency level learners. The learners were required to answer this questionnaire in about 15 minutes. Depending on each class limitations and teacher discretion, in some classes each test was

administered in a separate session but in other classes OPT and autonomy questionnaire were administered in the same session.

The last session was allocated to the implementation of listening comprehension tests to avoid the effect of tiredness. About twenty minutes was devoted to the *Person to Person* test and the audio was played once. Almost no learner had difficulty answering these tests in terms of time. All of the learners completed the test in the specified time. The listening part of TOEFL which was chosen for the upper intermediate level learners took about 45 minutes. Because this test was somehow difficult to answer, the beginning of the session was allocated to it. The audio was played just once as the real TOEFL is administered.

Results

The present study used a correlational design to examine the relationship between male and female L2 learners' level of autonomy and their listening comprehension ability, and for learners at different levels of proficiency. The results obtained for each research question are presented below.

Results for the first research question

As stated before, the first research question of the study asked "Does proficiency level have a significant impact on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability among Iranian EFL learners?" Pearson product moment correlation was used twice to reach the answer: once to calculate the correlation between low proficiency learners' autonomy and their listening comprehension, and once to explore the relationship between high proficiency learners' autonomy and their listening comprehension.

Table 1. Results of Pearson Correlation for the Relationship between Low Proficiency EFL Learners' Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

			Autonomy	Listening
Autonomy	Pearson	Correlation	1	-.03
	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)		.82
	<i>N</i>		58	58
Listening	Pearson	Correlation	-.03	1
	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)	.82	
	<i>N</i>		58	58

Based on Pallant (2010), the correlation between autonomy of the low proficiency learners and their listening comprehension ability was also shown to be a very weak negative one due to the fact that Pearson r was $-.03$. This weak negative relationship between low proficiency learners' autonomy and their listening comprehension, as one might expect, did not reach statistical significance because the p value in front of *Sig.* (2-tailed) was greater than the level of significance ($p = .82 > .05$). As a result, it could be construed that low proficiency EFL learners' autonomy was not significantly correlated with their listening comprehension. Figure 1 also illustrates this.

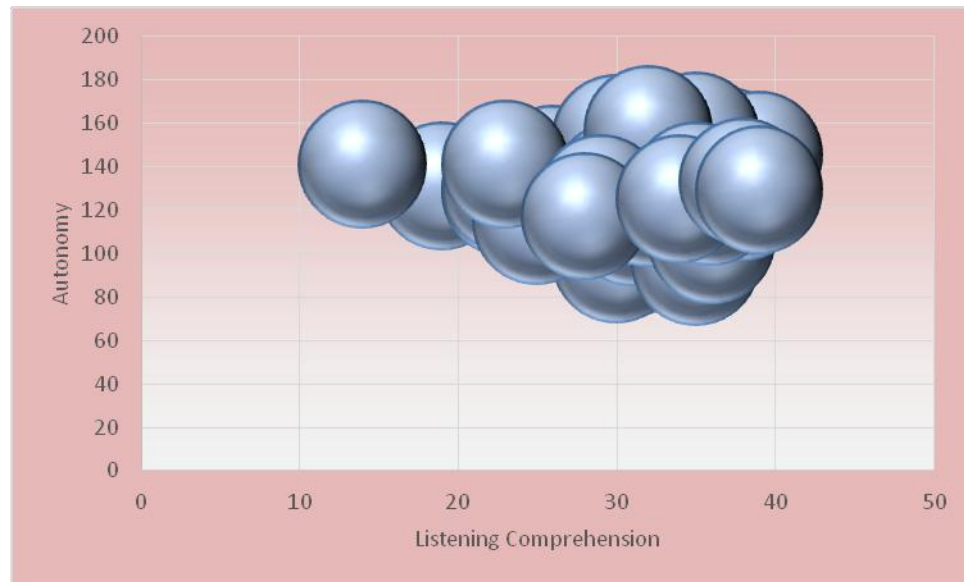


Figure 1. The Relationship between Low Proficiency EFL Learners' Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

A quick glimpse at the scatterplot above reveals that the relationship between low proficiency EFL learners' autonomy and listening comprehension was a very weak negative one. Table 2 shows the relationship between high proficiency learners' autonomy and listening comprehension.

Table 2. Results of Pearson Correlation for the Relationship between High Proficiency EFL Learners' Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

			Autonomy	Listening
Autonomy	Pearson	Correlation	1	.37
	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)		.009
	<i>N</i>		48	48
Listening	Pearson	Correlation	.37	1
	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)	.009	
	<i>N</i>		48	48

As Table 2 depicts, the correlation between the autonomy of the high proficiency learners and their listening comprehension was found to be a moderate positive relationship owing to the fact that Pearson r equalled .37. In addition, this moderate positive relationship between the autonomy of the high proficiency EFL learners and their listening comprehension reached statistical significance since the p value in front of *Sig.* (2-tailed) was less than the alpha level ($p = .009 < .05$). As a result, it could be understood that high proficiency EFL learners' autonomy and their listening comprehension were significantly correlated. This is also graphically represented by Figure 2 below.

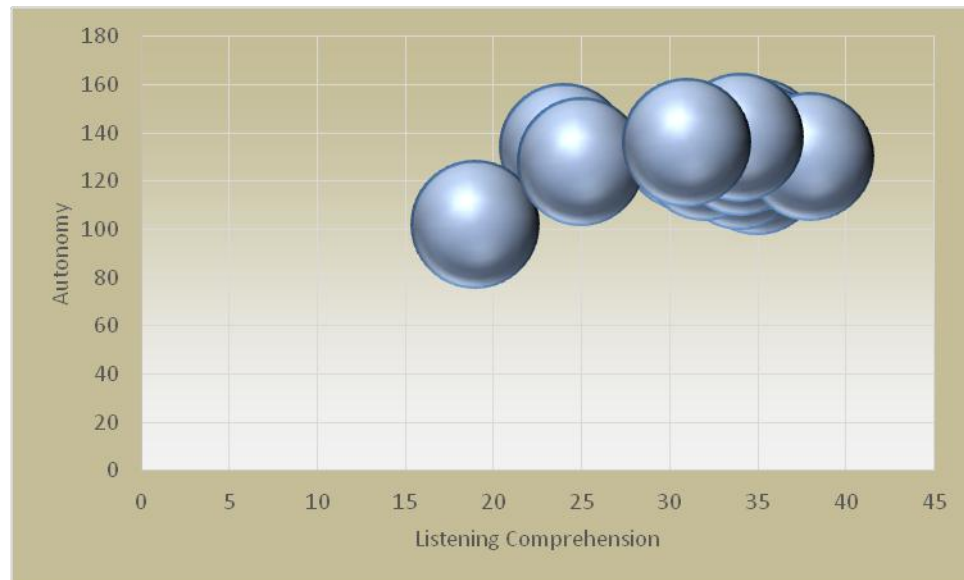


Figure 2. The Relationship between High Proficiency EFL Learners' Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

There was a moderate relationship between the two variables under investigation here. High proficiency language learners managed to gain high scores on both autonomy questionnaire and listening comprehension test. The overall conclusion from this part, which could be the answer to the first research question, is that high proficient learners outperformed low proficient learners both in their listening comprehension and also in the scores of autonomy questionnaire.

Results for the second research question

The second research question of the study posed "Does gender have any significant impact on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability among Iranian EFL learners?" The results obtained through running Pearson product moment correlation formula are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Results of Pearson Correlation for the Relationship between Male EFL Learners' Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

			Autonomy	Listening
Autonomy	Pearson	Correlation	1	.06
	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)		.63
	<i>N</i>		59	59
Listening	Pearson	Correlation	.06	1
	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)	.63	
	<i>N</i>		59	59

As is shown in Table 3, the correlation between the autonomy of male EFL learners and listening comprehension was a very weak positive correlation because Pearson r was equal to .06, and this relationship failed to reach statistical significance since the p value in front of *Sig.* (2-tailed) exceeded the alpha level ($p = .63 > .05$). It could thus be concluded that male EFL

learners' listening ability was not significantly correlated with their autonomy. Figure 3 depicts this graphically.

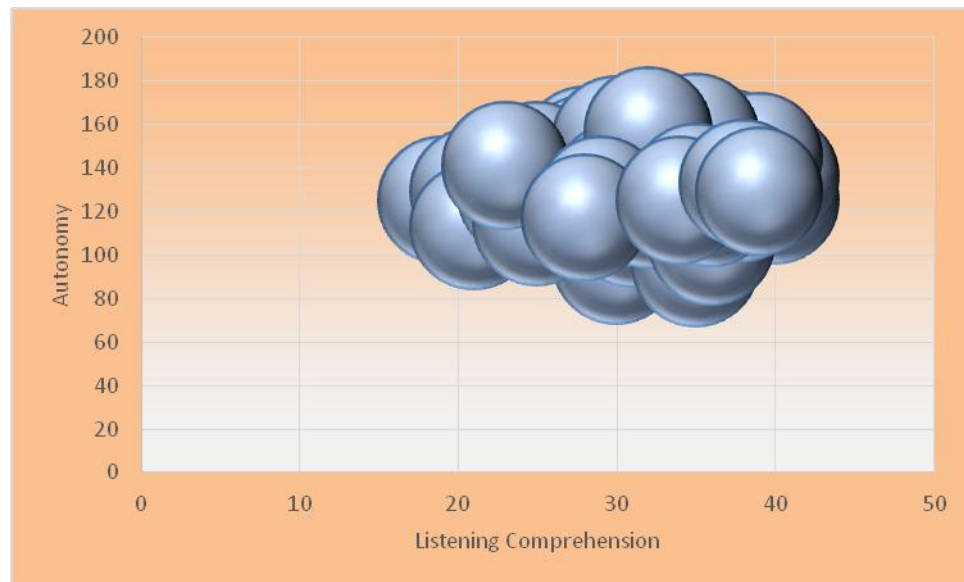


Figure 3. The Relationship between Male EFL Learners' Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

It could be clearly seen in the scatterplot in Figure 3 that the hypothetical line formed by connecting the circles shows a small rise, which indicates a weak positive relationship between male EFL learners' autonomy and listening comprehension. Table 4 presents the results of correlation between females' autonomy and their listening comprehension.

Table 4. Results of Pearson Correlation for the Relationship between Female EFL Learners' Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

			Autonomy	Listening
Autonomy	Pearson	Correlation	1	.28
	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)		.053
	<i>N</i>		47	47
Listening	Pearson	Correlation	.28	1
	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)	.053	
	<i>N</i>		47	47

According to the obtained results in Table 4, the correlation between the autonomy of the female EFL learners and their listening comprehension was a weak positive one because Pearson r turned out to be .28. As was the case with male learners, this weak positive relationship between the autonomy of the female EFL learners and listening comprehension was not of statistical significance because the p value in front of *Sig.* (2-tailed) was more than the level of significance ($p = .053 > .05$). Hence, it could be inferred that female EFL learners' listening comprehension ability was not significantly correlated with their autonomy. This result is graphically represented in Figure 4 below.

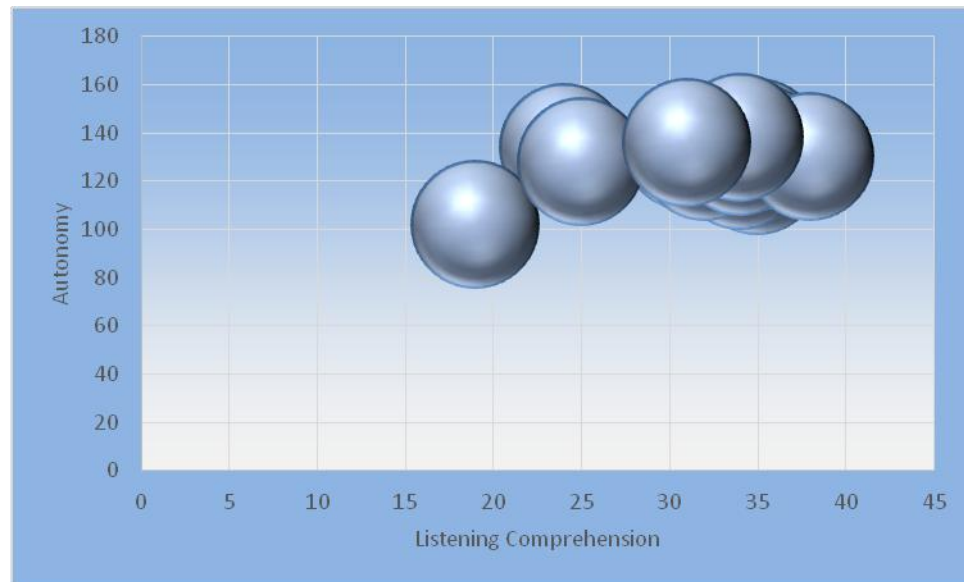


Figure 4. The Relationship between Female EFL Learners' Autonomy and Listening Comprehension

It is evident in the scatterplot in Figure 4 that the relationship between the autonomy of female EFL learners and their listening comprehension was a weak positive one. The overall conclusion from the results presented in this part could be that there was a weak relationship between EFL learners' autonomy and listening comprehension, and that gender could not modify this relationship.

Discussion and Conclusions

As it was previously stated, an attempt has been made in this study to investigate the impact of proficiency level on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability, and finally to determine the impact of gender on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability.

Addressing research hypothesis one

The first research hypothesis stated "Proficiency level does not have any significant impact on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability." Based on the findings of the study and the results of Pearson product moment correlation, it was shown that low proficiency EFL learners' autonomy was not significantly correlated with their listening comprehension, but high proficiency EFL learners' autonomy and their listening comprehension were significantly correlated. Therefore, this hypothesis was rejected. By comparing the results of this study with those of other related studies, it can be stated that findings of the current study were backed up by the related literature. For instance, Dafei (2007) in a study exploring the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency of 129 learners found out that students' English proficiency and learner autonomy were significantly and positively related to each other. On the other hand, findings of the present study disapprove that of Zarei and Zarei (2015), due to the fact that their findings revealed that language proficiency cannot influence learner autonomy. According to Holec (1980), an autonomous learner is a person who freely chooses teacher-direction and for all aspects of learning takes responsibility. Low proficiency

learners lack these characteristics of autonomous learners, but the high proficiency learners have such characteristics. This result could be interpreted in this way that as the learners become more proficient in their process of learning and reach higher levels of proficiency in language learning, they also become more confident and independent. Therefore, it could be stated that more proficient learners in terms of listening comprehension ability, reached higher levels of autonomy and independency. This could be the reason why higher proficiency learners demonstrated higher levels of autonomy in contrast to lower proficiency learners.

Addressing research hypothesis two

The second hypothesis of the study was “Gender does not have any significant impact on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability.” According to the results of the study, it could be concluded that there was a weak relationship between EFL learners’ autonomy and listening comprehension, and that gender could not modify this relationship. Thus this hypothesis was thus approved. Comparing the results of this study with those of Varol and Yilmaz (2010) study, one can infer that the results of both studies concurred. Varol and Yilmaz (2010) attempted to clarify the possible similarities and differences between female and male learners in terms of autonomous language learning both inside and outside classroom, and found out that there was no significant difference between female and male learners with regard to their autonomous behaviors. In contrast to some researchers (Boyle, 1987; Burstall, 1975; Ehrlich, 2001) that state female learners show superiority in their process of second language learning, Piller and Pavlenko (2001) stated that the role of gender in second language acquisition is still under-researched. The results of the present study indicated no significant impact of gender on the relationship between autonomy and listening comprehension ability. This result could lend an approval to the findings of Piller and pavlenko (2001), yet a disapproval to the findings of Burstall (1975), Boyle (1987), and Ehrlich (2001).

Another possible reason for this finding is the age range of the participants. As it was mentioned earlier, the age range of female learners was 13 to 29; on the other hand, the age range of male learners was 13 to 16. The impact of this difference could not be ignored and it could be the reason why the researchers could not reach any statistical differences between the female and male learners.

References

- Allwright, R. L. (1990). *What do we want teaching materials for? Currents in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arkoc, E. (2008). *The impact of learner autonomy on the success of listening comprehension*. Master’s thesis, Edirne Trakya University, Turkey.
- Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. Harlow: Longman/Pearson Education.
- Benson, P. (2002) Autonomy and communication. In P. Benson, & S. Toogood (Eds.), *Learner autonomy 7: Challenges to research and practice* (pp. 10-28). Dublin: Authentik.
- Benson, P., & Nunan, D. (2005). *Learners’ stories: Difference and diversity in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Byram, M. (Ed.). (2004). *Routledge encyclopedia of language teaching and learning*. London: Routledge.
- Cannon, R. (2000). *Guide to support the implementation of the learning and teaching plan year 2000*. ACUE: The University of Adelaide.

Chaix, P., & O'Neil, C. (1978). *A critical analysis of forms of autonomous learning (autodidaxy and semi-autonomy) in the field of foreign language learning*. Paris: UNESCO.

Corley, M. (2008). Professional factsheet No. 5: Adult learning theories. *California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project*. Retrieved on January 11, 2015, from <http://www.calpro-online.org/documents/AdultLearningTheoriesFinal.pdf>

Dam, L. (2008). How do we recognize an autonomous classroom? Revisited. In *Learner autonomy: What does the future hold?* Proceedings of TESOL Symposium, Faculty of Languages, University of Sevilla, Spain.

Dickinson, L. (1987). *Self-Instruction in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Esch, E. (1996). Learner training for autonomous language learning. In R. Pemberton, S. L. Edward, W. W. F. Or, & H. D. Pierson (Eds.). *Taking control: Autonomy in language learning* (pp. 164-75). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Fang, Z. (2008). Going beyond the fab five: Helping students cope with the unique linguistic challenges of expository reading in intermediate grades. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(6), 476-487.

Finch, A. (2002). Autonomy: Where are we? Where are we going? *JALT CUE-SIG Proceedings*. (pp. 15-2). Retrieved February 14, 2015, from <http://www.finchpark.com/arts/autonomy/index.htm>.

Fotos, S. S., & Browne, C. (2004). *New perspectives on CALL for second language classroom*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Froyd, J., & Simpson, N. (2010). *Student-centered learning addressing faculty questions about student-centered learning*. Retrieved from http://cclconference.org/files/2010/03/Froyd_Stu-CentredLearning.pdf

Geranpaye, A. (2003). A quick review of the English Quick Placement Test. University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. *Extract form Research Notes*, 12, 8-10. Retrieved Jan 29 from 2015 http://www.uniss.it/documenti/lingue/what_is_the_QPT.pdf

Hashemian, M., & Soureshjani, K. H. (2011). The interrelationship of autonomy, motivation, and academic performance of Persian L2 learners in distance education contexts. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 1(4), 319-326. doi:10.4304/tpls.1.4.319-326

Harden, R. M., & Crosby, J. (2000). AMEE Guide No 20: The good teacher is more than a lecturer – the twelve roles of the teacher. *Medical Teacher*, 22, 334–347.

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy in foreign language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Ismail, N., & Yusof, M. A. (2012). Using language learning contracts as a strategy to promote learner autonomy among ESL learners. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 66, - 472–480. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.11.291

Kashefian, S. N. (2002). *An investigation into college EFL learners' beliefs demonstrating their predispositions towards learner autonomy*. Unpublished master's thesis. Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.

Lantolf, J. P., & Pavlenko, A. (2001). Second language activity: Understanding learners as people. In M. Breen. (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* (pp. 141-158). London: Pearson.

Lea, S. J., Stephenson, D., & Troy, J. (2003). Higher education students' attitudes to student-centered learning: Beyond 'educational bulimia'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(3), 321–334.

Lei, W., & Yu-mei, L. (2012). An empirical study of listening comprehension strategies in autonomous learning environment. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 9(11), 1695-1701.

Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy1: Definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.

Little, D. (2004). Constructing a theory of learner autonomy: Some steps along the way. In K. Makinen, P. Kaikkonen, & V. Kohonen, (Eds.), *Future perspectives in foreign language education*, (pp. 15-25). Oulu, Finland: Publications of the Faculty of Education.

Logan, G. E. (1980). Individualized foreign languages instruction: American patterns for accommodating learner differences in the classroom. In H. B. Altman, & C. V. James, (Eds.), *Foreign language teaching: Meeting individual needs* (94-110). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Macaro, E. (1997). *Target language, collaborative learning and autonomy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Morley, J. (1991). Listening comprehension in second/foreign language instruction. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (2nd Ed) (pp. 81-106). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Pallant, J. (2010). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Pemberton, R. Edward, S. L., Or, W. W. F., & Pierson, H. D. (Eds.). (1996). *Taking control: Autonomy in language learning*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Renukadevi, D (2014). The role of listening in language acquisition: The challenges and strategies in teaching listening. *International Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 4(1), 59-63.

Richards, J. (1983). Listening comprehension: Approach, design, procedure. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(2), 219-240.

Riley, P. (1988). The ethnography of autonomy. In A. Brookes & P. Grundy (Eds.), *Individualization and autonomy in language learning* (pp. 12-34). Oxford: Modern English Publications and the British Council.

Rivers, W. M. (1981). *Teaching foreign language skills* (2nd Ed). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rubin, J. (1995). The contribution of video to the development of competence in listening. In D. Mendelsohn, & J. Rubin, (Eds.), *A guide for the teaching of second language listening* (pp. 151-165). San Diego: Dominic Press.

Vandergrift, L. (1999). Facilitating second language listening comprehension: Acquiring successful strategies. *ELT Journal*, 53(3), 168-176.

Zhalehgooyan, B., & Alavi, S. M. (2014). Contribution of learner autonomy to listening comprehension problems of EFL learners. *Frontiers of Language and Teaching*, 5(1), 86-98.