The metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire as a metacognitive-raising tool: Does it work?

Rahman Sahragrard *, Department of English Language and Literature, Shiraz Univeristy, Iran, Islamic Republic of.

Ali Kushki, Department of English Language and Literature, Shiraz Univeristy, Iran, Islamic Republic of.

M. Miri, Department of English Language and Literature, Shiraz Univeristy, Iran, Islamic Republic of.

Farzad Mahmooudi, Department of English Language and Literature, Shiraz Univeristy, Iran, Islamic Republic of.

Abstract

The present study aimed at exploring the influence of a repeated exposure to the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) on EFL learners' level of metacognitive awareness. Participants of the study were forty intermediate university students who were randomly assigned to experimental (n=20) and control (n=20) groups. The experimental group completed MALQ in odd sessions (seven sessions in total) across a semester. The control group, on the other hand, completed it in the first and last sessions of the course as pre-test and post-test, respectively. Results of the study showed that the questionnaire benefited the experimental group in a statistically significant way. Also, findings of the study revealed that less-skilled participants of the experimental groups benefited from the treatment more in comparison to their more-skilled counterparts in the experimental group.

Keywords: MALQ, metacognitive instruction, metacognitive awareness

*ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Rahman Sahragrard**, Department of English Language and Literature, Shiraz Univeristy, Iran, Islamic Republic of. *E-mail address*: rahman.sahragard@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Listening skill, known as the Cinderella of second language learning (Nunan, 2002; Vandergrift, 1997), is arguably the least researched-into and most overlooked of the four skills in language classrooms (Field, 2008; Nation & Newton, 2009; Vandergrift, 2007). In many language curricula, listening is often hailed as a mysterious 'black box', which can be honed only through 'more practice' (Rost, 2001). However, the situation is ironical given that listening is the most used skill in the classroom context (Morley, 1991; Vogely, 1995) and is viewed as the "primary means of L2 acquisition" (Rost, 2002).

This downplaying the role of listening roots in a number of reasons, one of which is the difficulty of teaching the skill given that it is unobservable and intangible (Field, 2008). Perhaps, that is why Flowerdew and Miller (2005) maintain that language teaching methods did not even consider the need for teaching listening at first. Nonetheless, the status of L2 listening instruction is changing, distancing from an emphasis on the product of listening to include a focus on the process (Vandergrift, 2004). Likewise, much increasing heed in listening comprehension research is being paid to learners' self-reports of and their training in understanding and awareness of the processes involved in L2 listening (e.g. Hinkel, 2006; Kurita, 2012; Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodtari, 2006). This way of teaching listening has come to be known as metacognitive instruction or metacognitive approach (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Goh & Taib, 2006).

Now, there is a respectable body of empirical evidence both in EFL (e.g. Fahim & Fakhri Alamdari, 2014; Goh & Hu, 2013; Rahimi & Katal, 2012, 2013) and ESL (e.g. Vandergrift, 2002, 2003; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010) contexts bearing testimony to the effectiveness of L2 listening metacognitive instruction. Research into listening from this vantage point is a relatively nascent undertaking (Goh, 2008), however. It has been shown that metacognitive instruction benefits less-skilled L2 listeners more (Cross, 2010; Goh & Tiab, 2006), is positively related to learners' motivational aspects (Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011; Vandergrift, 2003, 2005), and promotes L2 listening performance (e.g., Al-Alwan, Asassfeh, & Al-Shboul, 2013; Bozorgian, 2012; Coskun, 2010; Fahim & Fakhri Alamdari, 2014; Goh & Hu, 2013; Shirani Bidabadi & Yamat, 2011; Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodtari, 2006).

Along with the growth in empirical evidence about the theoretical and pedagogical aspects of L2 listening teaching and the swing of pendulum to promoting metacognitive knowledge of L2 listeners about the listening process, there has been made both progress and diversity in tools used to get insight into learners' metacognitive knowledge and process of L2 listening. Recently published works have reported the use of diaries (Goh, 1997), interviews (Goh, 2002), and questionnaires (Goh, 2002; Vandergrift, 2002, 2005; Zhang, 2001). In a most recent attempt, Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari (2006) proposed the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) as a tool to measure L2 listeners' metacognitive awareness of L2 listening. Introduction of the questionnaire is of great consequence considering that listening assessment lags behind current views of listening (Rost, 2001) and learners "are rarely assessed on their listening skills and the problems of many weak listeners pass undiagnosed" (Field, 2008). Developers of the questionnaire have referred to research and pedagogical applications of the tool; however, as we will take up the point in the following sections, an imbalance use of the questionnaire has led to a neglect of its pedagogical dimension.

1.1 Conceptual framework of the study

It seems that providing a definition for metacognition prior to reporting relevant empirical studies is in order. Metacognition is commonly referred to as thinking about thinking (Anderson, 2002). Nonetheless, it must be stipulated that it is fundamentally distinct from shallow thinking about an event in retrospect. In fact, "metacognition results in critical but healthy reflection and evaluation of thinking that may result in making specific changes in how learning is managed, and in the strategies chosen for this purpose" (Anderson, 2008).

Metacognition was initially conceived of as "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them". Also, it was conceived of as "active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes in relation to the cognitive objective or data on which they bear, usually in the service of some concrete goal or objective" (Falvell, 1976). In other words, metacognition entails the content we are thinking about, the reason why we are thinking about it and the ability to monitor and orchestrate thinking processes (Goh, 2008).

Falvell (1979) posits that metacognitive awareness encompasses metacognitive experience and knowledge. The former refers to the feeling we have about a task at hand; "any conscious cognitive or affective experiences that accompany and pertain to any intellectual enterprise" (p. 906) while the latter contains our beliefs and knowledge about learning. The metacognitive knowledge is comprised of knowledge about person, task, strategy use (Flavell, 1979). Person knowledge encompasses knowledge about the person as a learner; more specifically, it contains knowledge about how to tackle a task and accompanying problems as well as knowing how to build up and control one's feeling of anxiety and confidence. The other component, task knowledge, refers to knowledge about task features, which can influence task difficulty and consequently task performance and outcome. Further, strategy knowledge includes the strategies that learners undertake to meet their objectives. Regarding listening, Vandergrift (2008) contends that metacognitive strategies encapsulate "thinking about and directing listening".

1.2 The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ)

In light of recently accrued evidence (e.g. Bolitho, Carter, Hughes, Ivanic, Masuhara, & Tomlinson, 2003; Wilson, 2003) suggesting the positive impact of being aware of strategies and other variables on language learners' listening development, Vandergrift et al. developed and validated the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), whose aim is to assess L2 listeners' metacognitive awareness and perceived use of strategies while listening to oral texts. According to the developers of the questionnaire, it is rested on research and theory about listening in general and Flavell's (1979) conception of metacognition in particular, based on which there are three types of metacognitive knowledge, namely person, task, and strategy (see Wenden (1998, 1999) for a detailed discussion of the metacognitive knowledge types and the importance of metacognitive knowledge for language learning).

Having reviewed the literature on metacognition, listening comprehension, and self-regulation, the researchers prepared an initial draft of MALQ. Following the administration of a preliminary draft of the questionnaire to a large respondent sample (N = 966) and meticulous analysis of the data using explanatory factor analysis, some revisions were made to the questionnaire. One year later, the revised draft was administered to another large sample (N = 512) and this time, the results were analyzed conducting a confirmatory factor analysis, from which 21 randomly ordered items emerged which related to the following five distinct metacognitive knowledge factors: directed attention, mental translation, planning and evaluation, problem solving, and person knowledge (see the method section).

Also, to find a relationship between the reported listening behavior in the MALQ and real listening behavior of the respondents, the MALQ data was correlated with the respondents' scores obtained from a listening comprehension test. The correlation coefficient (r= .36, p < .001) was found to be statistically significant, indicating a link between metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension performance in such a way that 13% of the variance in the participants' listening performance could be explained by their awareness of the L2 listening process.

The distinction of MALQ becomes clear when the weaknesses of other questionnaire tools used to assess learners' metacognitive awareness of the L2 listening (Goh, 2002; Zhang, 2001; Vandergrift, 2005; Vogely, 1995) are revealed. According to Vandergrift et al., previous

questionnaires are too long and incomprehensive, modified from a reading measurement, and above all, none have undergone meticulous validation procedures.

Developers of the questionnaires propose both research and pedagogical applications for the MALQ. They maintain that the questionnaire can be used as a diagnostic and consciousness-raising tool at the hand of researchers to trace and diagnose L2 listeners' metacognitive awareness of L2 listening and as a self-assessment, pedagogical tool for language learners to chart their present and future levels of metacognitive awareness. However, as it will be illustrated in the next section, reported studies in the literature have literally exclusively benefited from the research potentials of the MALQ and the other side of the coin, the pedagogical, has been left uncharted.

1.3 MALQ studies

As referred to above, Vandergrift et al. (2006) state that the questionnaire can serve both research and instructional purposes. That is, it can be administered to groups of learners as an instrument for getting insight into and measuring their different aspects of metacognitive awareness of L2 listening and it can also play pedagogical roles in the form of a "simple and effective checklist for prompting learners to reflect on their listening" (Goh & Hu, 2013).

Several recent metacognitive-based studies have drawn on the MALQ as the tool to measure L2 listeners' metacognitive awareness of the listening process. Aiming at investigating the relationship between metacognitive awareness and listening performance in general and the influence of different aspects of metacognitive awareness on listening performance of a group of Chinese adolescent learners in particular, Goh and Hu (2013) used the MALQ to unveil the learners' knowledge of listening strategies and perceptions of themselves as L2 listeners.

Having analyzed the questionnaire results, Goh and Hu reached a nuanced understanding of different metacognitive aspects of the participants and how this related to their listening performance. Accordingly, metacognitive knowledge could explain 22% of the variance in the listening performance of the participants. Rahimi and Katal (2012) administered the MALQ to 122 Iranian university students and 116 high school students in order to explore the relationship between metacognitive awareness of listening strategies and educational level. The researchers found and reported general and specific findings. Generally, all the participants' level of metacognitive listening strategy awareness was satisfactory; they were more aware of problem solving strategies, and less aware of person knowledge strategies. However, MALQ results showed that in comparison to university students, high-school students demonstrated more awareness of listening strategies in general and mental translation and person knowledge in particular.

In the same vein, benefiting from the MALQ as the measurement tool, Rahimi and Katal (2013) examined the impact of metacognitive instruction on raising 50 Iranian EFL learners' metacognitive awareness of learning strategies and their listening comprehension and oral language proficiency. Having analyzed the scores obtained by the learners in the MALQ, the researchers reported a statistically significant increase in the metacognitive awareness of the experimental group in comparison to the control group.

In line with the above but with a motivational dimension added, Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011) investigated the relationship between metacognitive awareness, motivation, and listening performance using the MALQ as the instrument to measure the learners' level of metacognitive awareness beside a TOEFL listening test and the Academic Motivation Scale. Findings of the study indicated a positive relationship between metacognitive awareness and listening performance (only relevant part has been reported here).

Exploring the same research venue, Vandergrift (2005) explored the relationships among 57 core French learners' motivation, listening comprehension proficiency, and metacognition. The researcher applied the MALQ to elicit the participants' use of metacognitive strategies. According to the results of the study, the greater strategy use the learners reported, the more

intense their motivation was found to be, suggesting a link between metacognition and motivation. O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2009) conducted a study to see how the learners' metacognitive awareness of the listening strategies developed over a course of time and how their participants' reported listening strategy use was affected by language proficiency level and repetition of the academic texts they were exposed to. Through administering analyzing the MALQ to the participants, the researchers found the biggest gains in the awareness of problem solving, personal knowledge strategies, a little change in directed attention strategies, a slight increase in mental translation strategies, and no change in planning and evaluation strategies.

As is clear from the studies reviewed, the measurement quality of the MALQ has been at the cynosure of researchers yet the pedagogical dimension of the questionnaire has been overlooked as evidenced by anecdotal reports in the literature addressing this facet. Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), for example, explored the impact of a metacognitive and process-based pedagogical cycle on the listening performance of 106 university-level students of French as a second language assigned to experimental and control groups. The researchers employed the MALQ to gauge the change in the metacognitive knowledge of the participants about listening in three time points, viz. beginning, middle, and end of the study. Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) found that both the experimental and control groups showed some change in the five components of the questionnaire across time. Since the control group did not receive process-based instruction, the researchers attributed the change in the metacognitive awareness levels of the control group to the potential effect of exposure to and reflection on the MALQ at the three time points during the study.

As noted above, the pedagogical aspect of the questionnaire merits more attention since other suggested and practiced approaches to metacognitive instruction such as the pedagogical cycle introduced by Vandergrift (2004) may take noticeable time and training getting used to. Besides, some practitioners may face limitations in implementing the approach in classroom settings given the dominance of the product-oriented approach to listening (Goh, 2010) and the strict policies adhered to in some learning settings. However, the MALQ has some traits that make it a good option for language teachers, some of which are as follows: it is easy to administer, can be used with a large number of learners, and its administration is not time consuming. More importantly, as reported in Vandergrift et al, 13% of the respondents' listening performance was accounted for by their metacognitive awareness of L2 listening due to exposure to the MALQ. Given this, exploring the pedagogical facet of the questionnaire merits further research. To our knowledge, addressing this dimension of the questionnaire as the main focus of an experimental study is its first in its kind, where we raised the following two research questions:

1. Does repeated administration of MALQ lead to any significant gains in Iranian EFL learners' awareness of metacognitive listening strategies?

2. Is there any significant difference between less- and more-skilled listeners in terms of gains in metacognitive awareness of listening strategies?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants were two intact classes of intermediate Iranian female and male EFL students aged between 19 to 26 years old. They were majoring in the English Language and Literature at Lorestan University, Lorestan province, Iran. Prior to conducting the study, the participants' voluntary participation was sought and they were also told that they could withdraw their participation whenever they wished. Except for some general information regarding the study, the participants were not informed about the purpose of the study, nor did they know in which group they were placed. This 'incomplete disclosure' (Mackey & Gass, 2005) of information regarding the purpose of study and its procedures was justified as it was essential to the aims of the research project (i.e., informing the participants of the purpose of the study

could bias their responses to the questionnaire) and helped reduce the intervention of Halo effect (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The classes were assigned to experimental (n = 20) and control (n = 20) groups at random. In the interest of research ethics and given the positive effects of metacognitive awareness, at the end of the study both the experimental and control groups were asked to attend a session in which the second author explained the general purpose of the study, the questionnaire, and the value of a focus on the process of listening. Following Cross (2010) and Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), the learners in the experimental group were assigned to less- and more-skilled listeners based on the scores obtained from a pre-test administered to them in the first session. The learners whose scores were lower than the mean were considered as less-skilled listeners and those above the mean as more-skilled ones.

Only one instructor participated in the study. To keep the effect of material variable constant, the experimental and control groups listened to the same materials. That was done to hold the possible effects of differences between the materials covered for the two groups constant.

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ)

The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) developed by Vandergrift et al. (2006) (see previous sections) was used to collect the required data. The scale consists of 21 items which are subsumed under the following subscales (Table 1): problem solving, planning and evaluation, mental translation, person knowledge, and directed attention. In what follows, the factors will be explained drawing on Vandergrift et al. (2006). The problem solving subscale represents those strategies which are used by listeners to interfere and to monitor these inferences. The Planning and evaluation factor shows strategies that listeners employ to prepare themselves for listening and to evaluate the outcomes of their listening efforts. The third factor, mental translation, is related to learners' online mental translation strategy. According to Vandergrift et al., L2 listeners must avoid this if they are to be skillful listeners. The fourth factor, person knowledge has to deal with L2 listeners' perceptions about the difficulty of L2 listening and their self-efficacy in L2 listening. The last factor, i.e., directed attention, represents those strategies that help L2 listeners to concentrate and to stay on task. The questionnaire uses a 6-point Likert scale to elicit respondents' responses, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Shirani Bidabadi and Yamat (2011) and Rahimi and Katal (2013) have used the questionnaire in the context of Iran and reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.85 and 0.76, respectively, showing that the questionnaire has a good internal consistency.

Table 1. The questionnaire's subscales and the items they represent.

MALQ subscales	MALQ items
Directed attention	2, 6, 12, 16
Mental translation	4, 11, 18
Planning and translation	1, 10, 14, 20, 21
Problem solving	5, 7, 9, 13, 17, 19
Personal knowledge	3, 8, 15

2.3 Procedures

2.3.1 General Procedure

The MALQ was distributed among the experimental and control groups immediately following their involvement in an authentic listening task. According to the developers of the MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006), this is important 'so that students would have a specific task on which to base their responses'. The participants were told to make a link between what they listened to and the items of the questionnaire so as to strengthen their response bases. The two

listening classes were run based on the traditional, product-oriented approach. According to Goh (2010), in the product-oriented approach to listening, great weight is attached to the outcome of students' listening, i.e., correct responses given to comprehension questions with little attention given to the process of listening. Each session, the participants listened to an authentic task and they were required to provide answers to the following comprehension questions.

2.3.2 Experimental and control group treatments

Data was collected across one semester. This prolonged exposure to the questionnaire is supported by the metacognitive literature where some researchers hold the view that more prolonged metacognitive instruction courses bring about an increase in listening proficiency of learners (e.g. Graham & Macaro, 2008). Throughout the semester and only in odd sessions, once a week the participants in the experimental group listened to an authentic listening task and provided answers to the activities following. Immediately, subsequent to the completion of the follow-up activities, the MALQ was administered to them. The same procedure was repeated for each of the ensuing odd sessions. At the end of each session, the questionnaires were collected and then, coded using session dates. Due attention was paid not to miss registering the dates of the questionnaires for each session, without which it was impractical to trace the chronological changes in the metacognitive awareness of the participants. Feeding data into SPSS was put off to a week after the last session. The aim was to include data of the students who were present in all data collection sessions. Contrary to the repeated exposure of the experimental group to the MALQ, the questionnaire was administered to the control group only in two time periods, namely at the beginning and end of the study. Following Vandergrift et al. (2006), all through data collection sessions, the instructor kept hammering away at the point that there were no right or wrong answers, their utmost forthrightness was appreciated, and the only thing the researchers favored was their accurate and careful appraisal of how they try to make sense of oral texts. On the whole, the experimental group took the questionnaire seven times.

2.4 Data coding

Following Goh and Hu (2013), the Likert-scale points ticked by the learners for 18 of the items (21 items in total) were coded as their scores for the items. Hypothetically, if a given participant chose a Likert-scale point of 3 for item 9, his/her score for the item was considered to be 3. In order to prevent introducing response bias into the total scale scores obtained for the participants and getting a decreased reliability index of Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Pallant, 2013), items 3, 8, and 16 were reverse-coded. Since the MALQ has five subscales, two sets of scores were calculated for the participants. The score for each of the subscales was computed by averaging the scores for all the items of each of the subscales. This helps understand in which subscale the participants made progress most (the results for this analysis has not been reported in the present study). The second sets of scores were related to the participants' total MALQ scores. To obtain this total score, each participant's scores obtained for the subscales were averaged.

2.5 Data analysis

Data were analyzed by conducting a Mann-Whitney U Test and a one-way between- groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) in SPSS (Version 20). An alpha significance level of 0.05 was set for all the tests.

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3. Results

The first research question of the study aimed at finding whether a mere, repeated exposure to the MALQ would result in an increase in the listening metacognitive awareness of the experimental group and whether this increase was significant in comparison to that of the control group. To understand this, the mean scores of both experimental and control groups on pre- and post-tests were compared (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the experimental and control groups

Groups	Administration	Mean	SD
Control group	Pretest	3.53	.517
	Posttest	3.62	.459
	Pretest	3.67	.652
Experimental group	Posttest	4.31	.352

As Table 1 indicates, as a result of the treatment, the experimental group's MALQ mean score (M = 4.31) on the post-test is higher than that of the control group (M = 3.62). A one-way between- groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was run to see if the mean difference was statistically significant. Following Rahimi and Katal (2013), the covariate was the students' scores on MALQ pretest (Table 2).

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta square
Corrected Model	2573.956	2	1271.894	15.457	.000	.422
Intercept	4586.715	1	4365.826	55.239	.000	.531
MALQ pretest	1516.676	1	1516.676	16.669	.000	.262
Group	1121..242	1	1121.242	11.284	.001	.215
Error	3865.127	37	74.650			
Total	345037.000	40				
Corrected total	6579.110	39				

As presented in Table 2, the results of ANCOVA indicated that the difference between the control and experimental groups in posttest was statistically significant, $F_{(1, 37)} = 11.284$; p=.001, meaning that the treatment has produced significant gains in the experimental group.

The second research question of the study sought to see whether the less- and more-skilled listeners in the experimental group developed a different level of metacognitive awareness at the end of the study. That is, if the groups benefited equally from the treatment. According to Table 3, the mean score of the less-skilled group (M = 9.65) was higher than the mean score of the more-skilled group (M = 7.49).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the two groups

	N	Mean	SD
Less skilled	**12**	9.65	1.24
More skilled	**8**	7.49	1.39

To find out whether the mean difference between the two groups was statistically significant, a Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted (Table 4). For space purposes, the 'Ranks' table does not appear here.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U Test for the less-skilled and more-skilled Groups Post-test

Test Statistics[a]

	Score
Mann-Whitney U	49.500
Wilcoxon W	94.500
Z	-1.820
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.014

a. Grouping Variable: group

According to Table 4, the z value is −1.82 with a significance level (p) of p=.014. The probability value (p) is less than or .05, so the result is significant. That is, there is a statistically significant difference between less-skilled and more-skilled Groups Post-test. The effect size calculated for this part of the analysis is: r= -1.82 × 4.47= 0.40. This would be considered a rather medium effect size using Cohen (1988) criteria of .01=small effect, .30=medium effect, .50=large effect. Also, as Table 5 shows, the less-skilled group has a higher median (Md=7) than that of the more-skilled group (Md=5.50), showing that the former group has benefitted from the treatment more.

Table 5. Median Table

sex	N	Median
1 Less skilled	12	7
2 More skilled	8	5.50
Total	20	6

4. Discussion

The first research question of the study aimed to find whether the effects of exposure to and reflection on the MALQ could raise the learners' awareness of metacognitive listening strategies in a statistically significant way. According to the results of the study, the treatment did enhance the metacognitive awareness of L2 listening strategies in a significant way in comparison to the control group. This finding is supported by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), who reported an increase in the level of metacognitive listening strategies of the control group. The study is of critical importance since it is the only study which reported this dimension of the questionnaire. Adopting an empirical design, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari taught the experimental group using a metacognitive-based methodology. However, the control group was not given the treatment and only did receive the MALQ at the beginning, middle, and the end of the course. The researchers were mindful of the potential influence of the exposure to and reflection of the questionnaire, observing:

> The effects of exposure to and reflection on the MALQ statements by the control group also need to be noted. Although they did not experience the experimental pedagogical cycle, participants in the control group did complete the MALQ at three different points during the study. Each time that they considered and selected their degree of agreement with a MALQ statement, these participants were reflecting on the metacognitive and cognitive processes underlying L2 listening. The potential effect of this consciousness-raising in the control group cannot be minimized.

Accordingly, since the learners in the experimental group did think about the items each time they were exposed to the questionnaire, the questionnaire acted as a consciousness-raising tool. However, it should be noted that there seems to be a threshold for this function of the questionnaire to work. Similar to the control group in Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari's study, the

gains in the metacognitive awareness of the learners in the control group of the present study was not of statistical significant, implying that for the questionnaire to implicitly enhance metacognitive awareness of L2 learners, it should be administered in the long run and in a number of times. Additionally, in line with Goh (2010), it can be argued that the questionnaire functioned as a tool for provoking and sustaining guided reflection. In other words, the repeated task of answering the questionnaire in relation to various tasks prompted the learners to make their various aspects of metacognitive knowledge more explicit. Further, since the questionnaires were administered on odd sessions regularly, the learners might have been stimulated to not only think back about the listening task they have undertaken but also think ahead about the tasks they are going to do in future. Consequently, the process of thinking back and ahead has assisted the learners to bring the underlying listening processes into their conscious attention.

The results can also be justified from a Vygotskian-inspired sociocultural theory (SCT). Vygotsky (1978) stipulated that all kinds of knowledge and awareness are initially shaped at inter-psychological level (i.e. in interaction between people and outside world); having been constructed at social plane, the knowledge and awareness are transformed to intra-psychological plane. Vygotsky went on to add that human beings' relationship with the outside world is not direct but mediatory; that is, we use various physical and symbolic mediatory tools to construct knowledge and awareness. Therefore, in light of Vygotskian mindset, it can be argued that the questionnaire scaffolded the learners in the experimental group to build metacognitive awareness of listening strategies that they lacked and unable to construct on their own. Moreover, the repetitive relying on the crutch of the questionnaire aided the learners to take in the constructed knowledge at outside social plane.

The second research question intended to see how less- and more-skilled listeners benefited from exposure to the questionnaire. The mean scores of the two groups at the end of the study indicated that less-skilled listeners made statistically significant gains (p<0.05) in the level of metacognitive awareness of listening process in comparison to the more-skilled counterparts. Also, as presented in Table 5, the less-skilled group showed a higher median (Md=7) in comparison with the more-skilled group (Md=5.50), confirming that the less-skilled benefitted more from the treatment when compared to the more-skilled group. From this perspective, the findings of the study support those of Goh and Taib (2006), Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), Cross (2010), and Rahimi and Katal (2013) who also reported a less-skilled listener edge. However, our study is different from the studies reported from one aspect. That is, in the present study metacognitive instruction was operationalized in terms of exposure to the MALQ, whereas in the studies reported above metacognitive instruction was given expression to in the form of a pedagogical cycle introduced by Vandergrift (2004). However, the point is that research carried out to date indicates that metacognitive instruction materialized in either form benefits less-skilled listeners more. The study's contribution to the literature is that even when the metacognitive treatment is in the form of a mere exposure, it is likely that less-skill listeners benefit more. A number of justifications have been put forward for this. Cross (2010) believes that more-skilled listeners benefit from metacognitive instruction less as they may have "already reached a comparatively solid level of understanding and orchestration of bottom-up and top down skills and strategies" (p. 414). This means that metacognitive instruction may make less difference for more-skilled listeners, when compared to less-skilled counterparts, as they have already developed mechanisms for a fluent synchronization of skills and strategies for an enhanced listening and thus, metacognitive-based procedure may have precious little lure for them.

Cross, also, relates this more-skilled dilemma to the difficulty level of either or both text and task and believes that these may act as a "threshold beyond which more-skilled listeners are unable to show progress..." (p. 414). Thus, building on and expanding Cross's words, it turns out that in the case of less-skilled listeners since there is still room for progress as their threshold level has not been achieved yet, they look for ways to promote their listening ability. So, it can be hypothesized that the questionnaire items catered for this need of the less-skilled listeners as

being aware of the listening process helps them to learn more about it and consequently, benefit from it more (Pressley, 2002).

More justification for the advantage of less-skilled listeners comes from Goh (2008). The researcher holds that when listening, hearing and thinking processes occur 'inside the head' of learners and "the processes are not easily observed by others or even by the learners themselves". Goh continues to say that metacognitive activities, i.e., exposure to and reflection on the MALQ in the present study, help learners uncover these processes and generate "scaffolded learning experiences where novices obtain guidance and support from experts". Drawing on this, it is likely that the questionnaire acts as a kind of support and guidance, on which less-skilled listeners rely more and as a result, they are more of a beneficiary than more-skilled learners. Also, this less-skill advantage can be ascribed to a lack of transfer of natural approaches to listening from the source language to the target language (Goh & Taib, 2006). Thus, they have to invest more in metacognitive instruction. Drawing upon Goh and Taib (2006), it can be hypothesized that in the present study metacognitive awareness had a kind of novelty effect on the less-skilled listeners and this, consequently, led them to focus and to glean more from the exposure to and reflection on the questionnaire.

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the developmental potentials of the MALQ in an EFL context. As findings of the study disclosed, exposure to and reflection on the questionnaire resulted in significant gains in metacognitive awareness of the listening process in the experimental group. Besides, results of the study confirmed the claim that metacognitive knowledge of the listening process benefits less-skilled students more (e.g. Cross, 2010; Goh & Taib, 2006). In view of the point that metacognitive instruction is, unlike its long history, just beginning to receive more attention in language classes and thus, it may be challenging for some teachers to practice it, the MALQ questionnaire can provide a useful short-cut for them to benefit the procedure.

In addition, as often as not when language teachers experience a change in their classroom practices, some following challenges loom large, among which reference can be made to interference with common classroom practices and time-consuming nature of new procedures. The questionnaire circumvents limitations of this kind and thus, it is highly recommended that teachers use the tool in their listening classrooms. It is worthy to note that this study has opened up some avenues for further research. First, although this study unveiled that repeated exposure to and reflection on the questionnaire could significantly raise the experimental group' metacognitive awareness of listening strategies, its impact on fostering listening comprehension remained unexplored; thus, other studies can address this issue. Second, this study was conducted with the participants at university level; therefore, other studies can examine the generalizability of findings to other language learners at different proficiency levels. Last but not least, future studies can delve into learners' perceptions of the use of questionnaire as an instructive tool by holding an interview or retrospective methods (e.g. stimulated recall).

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