

An Investigation of Effective Learning Strategies and Their Correlation with Listening Proficiency among Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students

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Abstract

The investigation of foreign and second language learning has long emphasized the importance of affective learning strategies (ALSs) as a key factor in academic achievement. In language learning, ALSs are just as vital as cognitive strategies and serve as essential coping mechanisms that help learners connect the classroom environment to their personal learning strengths. These strategies enable learners to manage the emotional and psychological stresses of language learning, allowing them to tackle challenges as they progress. The use of ALSs is particularly beneficial in enhancing listening abilities, which is a crucial skill in language acquisition.

Early in the process of language learning, developing listening as a receptive skill is critical. Proficiency in listening not only improves comprehension but also facilitates mastery of other language skills, including reading, speaking, and writing. The current study seeks to explore the following objectives :

- 1) The affective learning strategies used by Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.
- 2) The listening proficiency (LP) of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.
- 3) The correlation between ALSs and LP among Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.
- 4) The extent to which ALSs account for variations in LP among these students.

The study involves a random sample of 120 students from EFL preparatory schools in the Kerbala governorate during the 2023-2024 academic year. Two tools were employed: a questionnaire to assess ALSs and the Listening Section of the TOEFL Test (Phillips, 2004). After ensuring the validity and reliability of these instruments,

data was collected and analyzed using various statistical methods. The results reveal that students exhibit a high level of ALSs and a moderate level of listening proficiency. Additionally, a significant statistical correlation was found between ALSs and LP, indicating that affective strategies play an important role in improving listening skills.

Key words: Affective learning strategies (ALSs), listening proficiency (LP), language learning strategies (LLSs).

المستخلص

لطالما ركزت الدراسات المتعلقة بتعلم اللغات الأجنبية واللغات الثانية على أهمية استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية (ALSs) كعامل رئيسي في التحصيل الأكاديمي. في تعلم اللغة، تعد استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية بنفس أهمية الاستراتيجيات المعرفية، حيث تعمل كآليات أساسية لمساعدة المتعلمين على ربط بيئة الفصل الدراسي بقوى التعلم الشخصية لديهم. تمكّن هذه الاستراتيجيات المتعلمين من إدارة الضغوطات العاطفية والنفسية المرتبطة بتعلم اللغة، مما يساعدهم على التغلب على التحديات التي قد يواجهونها أثناء تقدمهم في التعلم. يعد استخدام استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية ذا فائدة خاصة في تحسين مهارات الاستماع، وهي مهارة حاسمة في اكتساب اللغة.

في المراحل المبكرة من تعلم اللغة، يعد تطوير مهارة الاستماع كمهارة استقباليه أمرًا بالغ الأهمية. إن إتقان الاستماع لا يحسن الفهم فحسب، بل يسهل أيضًا إتقان المهارات اللغوية الأخرى، بما في ذلك القراءة والتحدث والكتابة. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف الأهداف التالية:

- 1) استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية المستخدمة من قبل طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقية الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.
- 2) مستوى إتقان الاستماع (LP) لدى طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقية الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.
- 3) العلاقة بين استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية وإتقان الاستماع (LP) لدى طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقية.
- 4) مدى تأثير استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية في تفسير التباين في إتقان الاستماع (LP) بين هؤلاء الطلاب.

تتضمن الدراسة عينة عشوائية من 120 طالبًا من مدارس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في محافظة كربلاء خلال العام الدراسي 2023-2024. تم استخدام أداتين: استبيان لتقييم استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية، وقسم الاستماع من اختبار التوفل (فيليبس، 2004). بعد التأكد من صلاحية وموثوقية الأدوات، تم جمع البيانات وتحليلها باستخدام مجموعة متنوعة من الأساليب الإحصائية. كشفت النتائج أن الطلاب يظهرون مستوى عاليًا من استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية ومستوى معتدلاً من إتقان الاستماع. علاوة على ذلك، أظهرت البيانات وجود علاقة إحصائية هامة بين

استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية وإتقان الاستماع، مما يشير إلى أن الاستراتيجيات الوجدانية تلعب دورًا مهمًا في تحسين مهارات الاستماع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات التعلم الوجدانية (ALSs)، إتقان الاستماع (LP)، استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة (LLSs).

1. Introduction

1.1 The problem and its significance

The subject addressed by this study is as follows: Is there a correlation between Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' affective learning strategies and listening proficiency? Based on the issue statement above, the current study intends to determine the association between Iraqi EFL preparatory school students and their listening proficiency. For some learners, listening to English as a foreign language might be challenging. Students with a bad attitude toward learning may not employ ALS features. Students who do not have a positive attitude towards studying may not activate ALSs.

Assuming that such variables are interconnected in the human brain, students who activate such attitudes will have higher linguistic accomplishment if they are accompanied by ALSs, enabling them to take advantage of educational chances (Bagheri & Andi, 2015). Some students are not aware of the advantages of using ALSs to improve their hearing. Language learners' anxiety is significantly decreased when emotional learning techniques are used effectively during listening sessions. According to Yunus (2014), some language learners put off oral communication and listening skills until they are necessary.

Instructors can expose students to new or underutilized strategies while also assisting them in identifying their current ones. A learner's use of ALSs can be automated with practice and instruction (Cottrell, 1999). Therefore, increasing learners' knowledge of language learning strategies and giving them systematic practice,

reinforcement, and the capacity to self-monitor their strategy-use while engaging in language learning activities constitute the core goal of ALSs (Cohen, 2009).

One of the four fundamental skills of any language is listening, which is particularly important when learning a language. One of the most important skills in the EFL context is listening. It is crucial to the process of communication. This is because the primary component of language learning is processing the information that is received as input (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Additionally, one of the biggest challenges still facing students is their listening proficiency (LP). Some of these are mostly related to the fact that the majority of students have trouble with LP because the speaker's rapid speaking causes them to lose focus on what is being stated.

However, the problem of the current study is best expressed through answering the following research questions:

- 1) What is the nature of the correlation between learners' listening abilities and their affective learning styles?
- 2) What are the key affective learning strategies employed by self-directed learners to enhance their listening abilities?

Because of their limited vocabulary, inability to focus on what they are listening to, inability to understand spoken instructions, and lack of motivation to study, students are consequently unable to understand numerous speech components (Ummah, 2012). The most significant factor contributing to hearing difficulties among Iraqi students is a lack of exposure to the target language.

1.2 Aims

- 1) To identify the affective learning strategies (ALSs) utilized by Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.
- 2) To assess the listening proficiency (LP) of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.

- 3) To examine the correlation between the affective learning strategies (ALSs) and listening proficiency (LP) among Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.

1.3 Limits

This study is confined to Iraqi EFL preparatory school students (fifth grade) for the academic year 2023-2024.

1.4 Definitions of the Basic Terms

1.4.1 Affective Learning Strategies

The phrase “learners' feelings, attitudes, motivation, and values” is used to characterize ALSs (Oxford, 1990). The processes and techniques that presenters use to lessen their anxiety, keep an eye on their feelings, and support themselves when speaking might be referred to as affective learning strategies.

1.4.2 Listening Proficiency

LP is the "ability to effectively understand a real spoken passage or text by actively and automatically using one's internalized language and cultural expectation system." Clifford and Cox (2014).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Learning Strategies

“Any sets of operations, steps, plans, or routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information” is how language learning strategies are defined (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). According to Oxford (1990), LLSs are specific actions taken by the learner that facilitate learning and make it easier, quicker, more enjoyable, self-directed, more successful, and more contexts that are adaptable to different. LLSs have recently been broadly characterized as procedures that improve learning assignments. According to Chamot (2004), LLSs are seen as sentient and goal-oriented.

According to Ortega (2009), LLSs are behavioral and mental processes in which students engage in order to take charge of their FL learning. According to Griffiths (2008), LLSs are activities that students voluntarily select to control their learning. LLSs are intricate, dynamic activities that EFL students select and employ in a variety of contexts to finish language tasks and advance their FL development. To satisfy the learning needs of students, LLSs are frequently integrated and managed in a variety of methods. Accordingly, personality type and environmental circumstances decide whether different strategies are applicable (Oxford, 2016).

2.1.1 The Concept of Affective Learning Strategies

"A new paradigm, far beyond language teaching" is how Arnold (2000) characterizes affective language acquisition. Emotions, feelings, moods, and attitudes are all referred to as affect, and they all influence language acquisition. Since the emotional and cognitive components do not conflict, both are essential components of learning (Scovel, 2000). According to Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1996), "Emotions are at the core of human life and the most influential aspect of the learning process."

According to Russell and Barrett (2009), affect is a neurophysiological state that is cognitively accessible as a fundamental, primal, non-reflective experience that is continuously present in consciousness but most pronounced in mood and emotion. Extremes include feeling joyful or miserable, energized or weary, content or discontented, tense or relaxed, and stimulated or depleted. Although a range of internal and external factors influence affect variables, which control reflexes, perception, cognition, and behavior, people are not directly aware of these causal linkages (Russell, 2003).

ALSs are techniques that students can do to boost their self-esteem or reduce negative emotions like anxiety (Oxford, 1989). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), ALSs include:

- a) Seeking explanation, examples, or confirmation from a colleague or instructor.

- b) Working together with peers to evaluate learning tasks, solve difficulties, exchange knowledge, and get feedback on written or spoken performance.
- c) Applying psychological strategies to learning tasks in order to lower anxiety and increase confidence.

According to Oxford (1990), affective intelligence encompasses "emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values." Because of this, it is challenging to define the emotive realm within clear parameters. Self-esteem, attitudes, motivation, anxiety, culture shock, inhibition, risk-taking, and tolerance for ambiguity are among the concepts that spread like a fine-spun net. Affective temperature regulation techniques, self-encouragement techniques, and anxiety reduction techniques are the three categories of ALSs.

Affective learning techniques may be organized utilizing ALS components to lower anxiety, support oneself, and keep an eye on one's emotions. These tactics have an impact on how knowledge is created and stored in the brain (Oxford, 1990). Consequently, ALS usage becomes one of the factors influencing students' speaking performance (Wijirahayu & Dorand, 2018), and if incorporated into the curriculum in a clear and concise manner, approaches may undoubtedly result in success (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

By employing the ALS components to lower anxiety, support oneself, and keep an eye on one's emotions, one may organize affective learning techniques, which have an impact on how information is created and stored in the brain (Oxford, 1990). Because of this, ALS use becomes one of the factors affecting students' speaking performance (Wijirahayu & Dorand, 2018). If ALS strategies are explicitly incorporated into the curriculum, they can undoubtedly result in success (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

2.1.1.2 Importance of Affective Learning Strategies

Affective learning techniques are crucial, particularly for students who don't have encouragement or support from their teachers or peers to study (Oxford, 2011). A range of personality features, such as feelings about oneself and the people we

contact with, are part of the development of affective components, or feelings (Brown & Lee, 2015). It is believed that psychological problems such anxiety, poor self-esteem, and negative attitudes hinder language development in learners who use ALSs (Ata Allah, 2016).

Garay and Etxebarria (2012) claim that ALSs assist students in achieving and preserving emotional homeostasis while they are learning. Learning becomes simpler, faster, more enjoyable, self-directed, more successful, and more situation-adaptable with ALSs. ALSs boost students' confidence and self-worth, expedite the achievement of predetermined objectives, reposition students to appreciate their instructors, classmates, and schools, and have an impact on the use of cognitive techniques (Oxford, 1990). Last but not least, using ALSs aids language learners in improving their ability to acquire FL, growing more self-reliant, and understanding the most effective learning strategies (Mostafavi & Vahdany, 2016). By using these techniques, FL students learn how to effectively communicate with people and control their emotions and attitudes toward learning.

Chou (2004).

2.1.2 Taxonomy of Affective Learning Strategies

LAS, ESS, and TETS are the three primary domains into which Oxford (2011) separates ALSs. Eleven sub-strategies are included in this taxonomy: using a checklist, listening to your body, taking calculated risks, rewarding yourself, communicating your feelings to others, offering positive comments, and keeping a language learning notebook. Three to four sub-strategies make up each major category.

2.1.2.1 Lowering Anxiety Strategies (LAS)

When speaking a foreign language, learners frequently experience anxiety. Students may employ a range of methods, including deep breathing, music, laughter, meditation, and progressive relaxation, to lessen their nervousness. By calming the body's muscles, progressive relaxation reduces tension. Breathing deeply involves

using both the diaphragm and the lungs. According to Oxford (1990), it is a helpful integrative body-mind exercise for managing affective problems and stress.

According to Brown et al. (2013), deep breathing encourages calmness. In order to focus on one's thoughts and lessen the anxiety that often prevents language learners from speaking, meditation involves focusing on a sound or image in the mind. Additionally, music is used to calm the pupil and create an environment that is conducive to language acquisition. By providing comedy, laughter may also be utilized to boost motivation and alleviate boredom. Students can discover ways to laugh, such watching funny movies, listening to jokes, or reading books that make them laugh.

2.1.2.2 Encouraging Self-Strategies (ESS)

These techniques explain how pupils motivate themselves to learn. Sub-strategies including “positive statements, taking risks wisely, and rewarding yourself” are part of ESS. Students who create positive affirmations are more confident in their capacity to learn a new language. To evaluate his performance, the student might write or create a positive statement. The second is “taking risks wisely”. By using constructive self-talk, it shows that the learner takes a fair chance on learning FL, even if they fail or run into problems. “Rewarding yourself” suggests that the learners themselves are the source of the reward. A student may, for instance; watch their favorite TV program as a reward for doing well on assignments (Oxford, 1990).

2.1.2.3 Taking Affective Temperature Strategies (TATS)

Students use these techniques to evaluate their own attitudes, motivations, and feelings toward studying a foreign language (FL). TATS is a set of strategies that involve expressing your feelings with someone else, utilizing a checklist, listening to your body, and maintaining a language learning diary. “Paying attention to the signals of the body.” is implied when you listen to your body. The body is affected by both positive and negative emotions in different ways. Tension, worry, fear, and anger are the negative sensations, while happiness, interest, relaxation, and pleasure are the

positive ones. The student must first understand these feelings in order to control them. When learning a FL, a checklist might help the student identify his motivations, attitudes, and feelings.

To gauge their feelings and attitudes on earning a FL, the student may make a checklist daily or every few days. Students can communicate their ideas, attitudes, and views about the FL process by keeping a language learning diary or journal. When it comes to sharing your feelings with others, it is crucial for learners to speak with friends, parents, relatives, and teachers in order to express their feelings while studying FL. Oxford, 1990.

In this investigation, the Oxford Taxonomy of ALSs (1990) is used. Such a taxonomy, according to the researcher, is the most comprehensive and pertinent to the aim of the study. When producing data regarding the use of ALSs to improve speaking ability, the researcher is searching for a classification that makes a clear distinction between affective and social strategies.

2.2 Listening Skill

Howatt and Dakin (1974) assert, "Listening is the ability to identify and comprehend what others are saying." This involves understanding grammar and vocabulary, understanding meaning, and understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation. This supports the assertion made by Renukadevi (2014) that listening is crucial for language learners because it enables them to acquire vocabulary, syntax, word stress, and pronunciation. It also enables them to understand texts based only on tone of voice, pitch, and accent—all of which can only be achieved through listening. Without a thorough understanding of the information, learning cannot be improved.

According to Brown (2001), listening is an essential language-learning ability since: According to Brown (2001), listening is a crucial skill for language learners as it enables them to pick up the linguistic knowledge needed for conversation. According to Hendrawaty (2019), the first and most crucial skill that pupils need to master while learning a new language is listening. Since it is a receptive talent, language learners

can pick up new words by listening to or hearing what they have already heard. The capacity to create is influenced by the capacity to receive. Pupils with strong listening skills will comprehend and even excel in productive skills like writing and speaking.

In addition, Rost (2013) defines listening as “the process of receiving what the speaker actually says, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating and responding to meaning with the speaker, and creating meaning through involvement, imagination, and empathy.” According to Chamot (1995), listening is also thought of as a mental process in which information is filtered by the listener's short-term, working, and long-term memory after being absorbed by the auditory and/or visual sensors. Moreover, the listener selects and evaluates information to understand it, according to Vandergrift (2006).

Hidayat (2013) asserts that as listening is a prerequisite for effective communication, it is a crucial ability that must be developed. An individual's capacity for good listening has a substantial impact on the caliber of their interpersonal relationships. “Active listening,” which transcends proficiency as an act of sympathetic understanding of the speaker and goes beyond understanding as comprehending the message content, is a component of Thomlison's (1984) model of hearing. Rost (2002) asserts that there are two main reasons for the variety of definitions provided by scholars. First, researchers frequently use both general and specific terminology when discussing listening. Discrete listening features are the foundation of the second explanation.

2.2.1 Listening Proficiency

LP has a significant role in language learning. Language proficiency, as defined by Richards and Schmidt (2013), is the “process of understanding speech in a first or second language.” The role of specific linguistic elements (such as phonemes, words, and grammatical structures), as well as the listener's expectations, the setting and

context, prior knowledge, and the topic, are the main topics of research on listening proficiency processes in second language learning. Hamouda (2013) asserts that LP is a collaborative process where listeners help to create meaning. Grammatical forms, emphasis, intonation, sound discrimination, prior knowledge, and other linguistic or non-linguistic cues aid understanding oral content.

In the words of O'Malley et al., (1989) "Listening proficiency is an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning using clues from contextual information and prior knowledge, while relying on a variety of strategy resources to fulfil the task requirement." Rather than learning every word in the spoken language, the main goal of listening is to absorb the meaning that is conveyed by the text (Lund, 1990). Therefore, the listener has to be able to hear sounds, connect them to meaning, and retain the information for later use in addition to comprehending the text. As a result, effective listening requires the listener to recall what is said (Cohen, 1990).

2.2.2 Listening Proficiency Process

The ability to distinguish between sounds, recognize vocabulary and grammatical structure, comprehend stress and intonation, and relate them to the current context are all considered to be important components of LP, which is viewed as a complex dynamic process. Since listening is frequently the first skill that students acquire, it is an inclusive talent that supports vocabulary and grammatical proficiency (Vandergrift 1999).

In their discussion of this active process, Clark and Clark (1977) suggest four processes that are involved in proficiency: Raw speech is stored in the short-term memory of listeners. Sort the information that was heard into components according to its purpose and substance. After identifying the components, they are used to formulate propositions and connect them to form a coherent message. The listener erases the original message form and saves the propositional meanings in long-term memory after recognizing and recreating them.

2.2.3 Types of Listening Proficiency Processes

2.2.3.1. Bottom-Up Processing (BUP)

It is generally accepted that the language process proceeds in a certain order, starting with the least amount of information and working its way up to the most (Buck, 2001). Listening, especially in BUP, benefits from the same mindset. This method involves the listener concentrating on the smallest elements of spoken text instead of individual words, then phrases, which are then combined to create proficiency (Harmer, 2007).

According to Schwartz (1998), BUP are text-based, meaning that the listener depends on the words, syntax, and sounds that make up the message. According to Buck (2001), language proficiency is thought of as a trip through several stages or levels, with the results of one phase serving as the input for the next higher step.

2.2.3.2 Top-Down Processing (TDP)

Numerous viewpoints suggest that different kinds of information are not processed in a predetermined order or sequence. They start attacking the first point of view, which maintains that it is possible to decipher the statement's meaning without first decoding its sounds. The impact of other knowledge kinds (non-linguistic knowledge), such as environmental knowledge, which is the subject of TDP, is to blame for this. The BUP, which begins with the students' past knowledge, is reversed in the TDP (Buck, 2001). According to Richards (1990), TDP is the process of interpreting a communication's content by drawing on prior knowledge. He makes a distinction between several types of prior knowledge.

- Demonstrated subject matter expertise.
- Contextual or situational knowledge.
- Schemata and scripts are used to store information in long-term memory.

2.2.3.3 Interactive Processing (IP)

IP combines top-down and bottom-up strategies to enhance spoken text proficiency. It was widely held in the early 1980s that TDP was the sole treatment that enhanced L2 LP. It is now widely accepted that in order to improve LP, TDP and BUP should be combined. Additionally, according to Vandergrift (2003), LP is an IP in which listeners require both language expertise and background information in order to read messages, rather than a TDP or BUP. Additionally, he points out that listeners' desire for listening, language proficiency, and subject familiarity all influence how much they use BUP and TDP.

2.2.4 Listening Proficiency Problems

LP may be difficult for students who speak a second or foreign language. Numerous scholars have focused on various issues and documented a broad spectrum of hearing impairments experienced by students learning a second or foreign language (Goh, 2000; Liu, 2002). All of the issues that may arise during the three stages of perception, processing, and usage are linked to LP problems. Despite not being linear, these phases are related. A listener may need to change their concentration from one phase to another in order to understand the information, depending on the nature of listening (Vandergrift, 2003). Table 1 best illustrates listening proficiency issues.

Table 1 Problems Related to Different Phases of Listening Proficiency.

Perception	Parsing	Utilization
Do not recognize words they know	Quickly forget what is heard	Understand words but not the intended message
Neglect the next part when thinking about meaning	Unable to form a mental representation from words heard	Confused about the key ideas in the message
Cannot chunk streams of speech	Do not understand subsequent parts of input because of earlier problems	
Miss the beginning of texts		
Concentrate too hard or unable to concentrate		

3. Methodology and Results

This section discusses the tools used, the demographic and sample selection process, and the study method. The statistical methods employed to evaluate the gathered data are also demonstrated and validated, as are the validity, reliability, and other psychometric qualities of the instruments.

3.1 Participants

During the academic year 2023/2024, 120 fifth-grade preparatory school students from the Kerbala Governorate were randomly selected to make up the study's sample.

3.2 Data Collection (Instruments)

To explore the correlation between the two variables, the following instruments were piloted and then applied:

1) Listening Proficiency Test: Students' LP is assessed using the TOEFL standardized test's LP module (Phillips, 2004). The test consists of fifty questions divided into three halves. Each question has a 12-second time restriction for responses. The instructions, examples, and actual test are all included in the 35-minute tape. It is required of students in Part (A) to listen to two people converse briefly. There is a question at the end of each discussion that has to be answered on the response sheets. There are thirty discussions and thirty questions in this area. There are eight questions and longer conversations in Part (B). There are twelve questions and speeches in Part (C). Because every question is multiple-choice, the scoring system for these objective questions is (1) for the right response and (0) for the incorrect one.

2) Affective Learning Strategies Questionnaire The researcher adopted a questionnaire based on Oxford 1990; Villardón-Gallego et al., 2013 & Al-Bahadli, 2020 in order to gather the necessary data. The questionnaire's fifty-five items are categorized into three sub-domains as follows :

- There are 13 techniques for lowering anxiety.
- There are 15 elements for encouraging self-strategies.
- There are 27 techniques for taking affective temperature.

2.3 Results

The current study's findings are based on an analysis of the students' responses to the LP test and the ALSs questionnaire. ALSs and LP had a correlation coefficient of 0.740. A t-test was employed to determine the association's significance. At the significance level of 0.05 and with (358) degrees of freedom, the calculated t-value is (20.555), which is substantially greater than the critical rate of 1.96. According to this t-value, there is a direct correlation between ALSs and LP.

Table 2 Statistical Indicators of Listening Proficiency test

Mean	23.01
Median	23
Mode	24
Standard Deviation	2.369
Variance	5.61
Skewness	0.247-
Kurtosis	0.748
Minimum	14
Maximum	30
Range	16

Table 3 Affective Learning Strategies ALSs

Listening Proficiency	No. of participants	Correlation coefficient	T-Value		Significance level 0.05
			computed	critical	
	120	0.740	20.555	1.96	significant

4. Discussion of Results

This study reveals that Iraqi EFL high school students employ effective social learning practices that significantly contribute to the improvement of their listening proficiency (LP). The students utilize their affective learning strategies (ALSs) in a way that positively influences their LP, helping them to overcome challenges in language learning. The data gathered from the study instruments demonstrate a statistically significant amount of LP among the participants, highlighting the effectiveness of their ALSs in enhancing their listening skills.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals a clear statistical correlation between the students' use of ALSs and their LPs. This indicates that the strategies students adopt to manage their emotions, motivation, and attitudes towards learning directly impact their ability to comprehend spoken language. Additionally, the study finds that the ALSs employed by Iraqi EFL preparatory school students help explain the variations in LP, suggesting that these strategies are integral in shaping students' listening abilities. This research is focused on Iraqi fifth-grade EFL students from the Kerbala Governorate during the 2023–2024 academic year.

5. Conclusions

In the light of the preceding results and discussions related to the aims of the study, it is concluded that:

- 1) The significant correlation between learners' listening abilities and their affective learning styles suggests a direct and positive relationship between these two factors. Affective learning styles involve the emotional and motivational aspects of learning, such as a learner's attitude, anxiety levels, and emotional engagement with the material. When learners effectively manage their emotions and stay motivated, they tend to have improved listening comprehension skills. This connection highlights the importance of addressing emotional and psychological factors in language learning, especially in listening tasks, where focus and emotional resilience are crucial for success.
- 2) Self-directed learners, who actively engage in analyzing, assessing, and forming opinions in various learning contexts, tend to exhibit stronger listening abilities. These learners approach listening tasks with a high degree of metacognitive awareness, using strategies to monitor their comprehension and adapt when needed. By taking responsibility for their learning, they not only absorb information more effectively but also apply critical thinking skills to enhance their understanding of spoken language. As a result, self-directed learners are better equipped to overcome listening challenges, make connections between spoken and written content, and develop more comprehensive language skills.

6. Recommendations

After surveying and discussing the results of the study, it is recommended to:

- 1) **Promote the Awareness and Use of Affective Learning Strategies (ALSs):** Educators should teach students to apply affective learning strategies (ALSs) to manage stress and improve language learning, especially listening.
- 2) **Integrate Listening Proficiency Practices in Language Curriculum:** Incorporate varied and consistent listening exercises into the curriculum to improve proficiency and expose students to real-life listening contexts.
- 3) **Encourage Self-Reflection and Self-Monitoring of Learning Strategies:** Encourage students to reflect on and monitor their use of ALSs to overcome emotional and cognitive barriers and enhance listening skills.

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