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## **A comparative study between Iraqi and Jordanian EFL students' metacognitive awareness of listening to lectures**

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**Abstract**--This study aims to: 1- Identifying postgraduate students' Metacognitive Awareness Listening strategies from the University of Anbar and Jadara University. 2- Identifying the statistically significant differences in postgraduate students' Metacognitive Awareness Listening strategies used in listening to a lecture from the University of Anbar and the Jadara University according to the gender variable. 3- Identifying the statistically significant differences in postgraduate students' Metacognitive Listening strategies Awareness of the University of Anbar and Jadara University according to the type of university. The participants were 26 postgraduate students enrolled in the English language and literature Master's program (in Jadara University – Jordan) and English Literature Master program (in the University of Anbar) during the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022. The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), designed by Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2006), was adopted to collect the data. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were calculated. The results revealed that the postgraduate students have a high-level awareness of Metacognitive Listening strategies, and there are no significant differences in postgraduate students' awareness of the Metacognitive listening strategies due to the gender and the kind of the university (the specialization of the master's program in Iraq and Jordan). In light of the study, the researchers present some recommendations and suggestions.

**Keywords**--EFL students, metacognitive awareness, listening skills.

## **Introduction**

In Iraq and Jordan, English is learned as a foreign language. Learning the English language took place formally in schools and universities. The goal is to reach a good level of language proficiency. Regarding postgraduate studies, here we are speaking about intensive education that needs special learning strategies. In this study, the participants are postgraduate students enrolling in the Master of Arts in English language program and Master of Language and Arts in English program, which means we are dealing with language skills. The students in the master's programme are exposed to lectures that long, at least two or three hours. This long time needs particular learning strategies, and the students need to train themselves to long their attention span. The most important skill is listening skills, which take up most of the lecture that the learners and the university professors use the English language to communicate and exchange information. To this end, it is crucial to reveal the students' metacognitive awareness in listening in order to stand on the significance of using metacognitive listening strategies as presented in Jaleel's (2016) definition: *"Metacognitive awareness means being aware of how you think. Metacognition is the awareness of one's thinking and the strategies one is using. It enables students to be more mindful of what they are doing, and why, and of how the skills they are learning might be used differently in different situations"* (p.165).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Listening to a lecture in the English language from a non-native or native university professor is not an easy task. At the postgraduate study level, listening plays a significant role in comprehending information that explains existing information widely. Listening enriches students' knowledge. From the researchers' experiences in teaching postgraduate students, they realized, from the students' answers in the exams or even in discussions, that they little quote or use the information presented during the lectures; they relied on the written materials and sources. Reviewing the literature and previous studies such as Alhamdawe and Abass (2021), Goh and Vandergrift (2021), Mekhoukh (2021), Olmezer (2021), Krishnan (2020), Maftoon Alamdari (2020), Zarrabi (2020), Chibsa (2019), Manasrah (2019), Zeng and Goh (2018), Jian (2018), Sadatmir et al. (2018), Alhaison (2017), Jaleel (2016). Zarrabi (2016), Rahimirad and Moini (2015), Rahimirad and Shams (2014), Vandergrift and Goh (2012), Assadi (2008) and Vandergrift et al. (2006) found that measuring learners' metacognitive awareness is critical to diagnostics students listening levels and the listening strategies before, during, and after listening. Mendelsohn (2002) found that EFL university students do not develop their listening skills to be able to extract information from lecturers. The university professors, especially at the postgraduate level, assume that the EFL students have enough listening competence to understand the information. The researchers realized that the postgraduate students at the Departments of English prefer to extract information from written materials more than to extract the information from the lectures given in the English language. To this end, this study was conducted.

### **Aims of the Study**

This study aims to reveal the following:

- Identifying postgraduate students' Metacognitive Awareness Listening strategies level from the University of Anbar and Jadara University.
- Identifying the statistically significant differences in postgraduate students' Metacognitive Awareness Listening strategies used in listening to a lecture from the University of Anbar and the Jadara University according to the gender variable.
- Identifying the statistically significant differences in postgraduate students' Metacognitive Listening strategies Awareness of the University of Anbar and Jadara University according to the type of university.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

To achieve the aims of the study, the following hypotheses have been formed:

- The postgraduate students of the University of Anbar and Jadara University have a high level of metacognitive listening strategies Awareness.
- There is statistically significant differences in metacognitive Listening strategies Awareness among the postgraduate students of the University of Anbar and the Jadara University according to the gender variable.
- There are statistically significant differences in postgraduate students' Metacognitive Listening strategies Awareness according to the type of university.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study's outcomes shed light on the students' listening strategies. The questionnaire items enable the students to reveal their abilities and competence in listening; it is a self-reflection tool that helps the students be aware of their listening. After answering the questionnaire, indeed, most students have justified their listening behaviour.

### **Limits**

The study is limited to the following:

- Participants: The postgraduate students who enrolled in the master's program in English literature and the postgraduate students who enrolled in the master's program in English language and literature.
- Location: The master in English literature program is located in the Department of English, College of Arts, the University of Anbar in the Anbar province – Iraq. The master's program in English language and literature is located in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Languages, Jadara University, Irbid Province, Jordan.
- Duration: The study was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022.

## Literature Review

Children are aware of the sound they hear. The children with special needs are more influenced by the familiar voice, especially their parent's voices. The importance of listening skills increases when a child joins the learning process. In this phase, the child begins to engage in social interactions and needs to develop a listening device to interact successfully. Children who suffer from communication difficulties need to develop their listening ability. The difficulties may be maintaining attention span to listening activity or attention to auditory skills. At the school level, the children with hearing - loss face difficulties developing their listening skills competence (Williams, 2017). Listening comprehension happens when a listener understands the incoming messages. The received messages may be auditory or visually (Field, 2008). Thus, listening is not an easy task done via hearing.

Hearing is uncontrolled action that is exposed to but listening to a task that needs to pay attention to the speaker(s) and need interaction to comprehend the message (Assadi, 2018). Listening in a native language is different from listening to messages produced in a foreign language; the listening mechanism is different, and one needs to use different listening strategies to comprehend the meaning (Mekhough, 2021). Listening process and product Approach reviewing the literature concerning teaching listening skills, the process-oriented approach and product-oriented approach are the most investigated approaches in experimental and descriptive studies such as Go and Vandergrift (2021), Jameel (2020), Santos and Graham (2018), Aziznia et al. (2017), Nguyen and Abbott (2016), kotorowicz-Jasinska (2009), Liubiniene (2009), Vandergrift (2004), and Vandergrift (2015). These studies show that the product-oriented approach has been investigated more than the process-oriented approach. The product approach focuses on the learners' comprehension of a spoken language (Siegel, 2012). The process approach focuses on helping the learners use the most suitable listening strategies that fit them to overcome comprehension problems; it is concerned with metacognitive listening strategies. (Zarrabi, 2016)

Vandergrift (2014) described the listening process approach as a two sides interactive task, the role of the students is to develop their listening skills, and the role of the teachers is to guide the learning process. Practising the process approach means training on the metacognitive listening strategies to predict and listen, discuss and listen, and listen and reflect (Vandergrift, 2012). The goal of listening is the level of comprehension and the outcomes. This process approach emphasizes the metacognitive listening strategies that provide a wide range of training, assessment (self-evaluation), and a broad open scope of listening learning opportunities—learning how to listen and adopt some listening learning strategies is not enough to equip EFL students with listening competence. Thus, metacognitive strategies are the solution for long-term listening behaviour development (Mekhough, 2021). The focus on listening skills in most pedagogical studies is since listening occupies more than 45% of the lesson time, and most tasks are done via listening; thus, the excellent listener more successful than the others is (Manasrah, 2019).

Listening skills play a significant role in EFL students' language development.

Hagen et al. (2021), Mart (2020), Sejdiu (2017), Kim and Pileher (2016), and Renukadevi (2014) found a strong correlation between students' language achievement and mastering listening skills. Some difficulties and obstacles accompany mastering listening, and to overcome them, metacognitive strategies are the solution. Going back to Flavell (1979 cited in Jaleel's, 2016: 165), who is considered the first researcher who investigates the field of metacognitive, he classified metacognitive knowledge into three types as follows:

- Awareness of knowledge: what a learner knows, what does he not know, and what a learner wants to know.
- Awareness of Thinking: it is a process of "understanding cognitive tasks", and the learner needs to think about what s/he wants to complete the task.
- Awareness of Thinking Strategies: understand approaches, methods, and strategies to direct learning.

The metacognitive strategies include a high level of thinking and enable the EFL learners to control their listening behaviours and measure their awareness of listening strategies that they practice either consciously or unconsciously and also to be able to assess their listening competence and make their listening process confirmed. These facts have been by Alhmdawee and Abass (2021), Rivera et al. (2021), Olmezer (2021), Goh and Vandergrift (2021), Zeng and Goh (2018), Jian (2018), Sadatmir et al. (2018), and Rahimirad and Moini (2015). Krishnan et al. (2020) found that EFL students can overcome listening comprehension difficulties to a lecture by enhancing and motivating their metacognitive awareness. Metacognitive strategies can be taught to EFL students (Chibsa, 2019). To be aware of listening strategies means to be aware of the mental process during the listening process (Mekhoukh, 2021; Rivera et al., 2021; Olmezer, 2021; Krishnan et al., 2020; and Manasrah, 2019).

In this study, the researchers realize that the postgraduate students neglect the importance of listening skills as part of learning master's programme course, and they focus mainly on the written materials, most of the postgraduate students focus on passing the exam which can be done via learning to written materials, and this is the critical point which distinguishes the levels of students. As a good listener, students usually write well answers, which results from integrating information from the lectures and the written materials. Such students' answers characterize by comprehensiveness, lengthening the answers, reinforcing the answers with examples, logical explanation, the existence of students' language style, and deep understanding. Listening to the lectures can develop students' understanding more than relying on written material only.

Therefore, metacognitive listening strategies must be activated to obtain better results and innovative education. The listening process passes through several phases; the metacognitive listening strategies have a significant role in each phase, even in the Post-listening-phase (Krishnan et al. (2020). As Schoenfeld (1987) defined 17, Metacognitive is "thinking about one's thinking", which means that an EFL student can monitor and evaluate his/her listening task and strategies. In the pedagogical context, the three knowledge fields integrate to achieve the educational goal: task knowledge, strategy knowledge, and personal knowledge (Jia et al. 2019) Alhaison, 2017; Karlen, 2017; Karlen and Compagnoni,

2017; and Karlen, 2016). This study focuses on the strategy knowledge and metacognitive strategies that EFL students use to achieve the task.

### **Previous Studies**

To the researchers' best knowledge, there are scarce studies investigating postgraduate students' awareness of metacognitive listening strategies; thus, the most relevant studies have been selected. Maftoon and Alamadri (2020) investigated the impact of Metacognitive strategy instruction on students' metacognitive listening awareness. The participants were 60 male and female intermediate school students. A metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire with a listening test was used to collect the data. The finding revealed that before implementing the experience, the students did not have enough awareness of listening strategies, and the metacognitive strategies instruction has improved their listening awareness. Also, there was no significant difference between the male and female students' metacognitive listening awareness.

Wang and MacIntyre (2021) found that to overcome EFL students' listening competence, Metacognitive is the remedy. Raising EFL students' metacognitive awareness encourages students to listen effectively in previous studies. Ivanovska (2019) found that the more students practice critical thinking, they more employ metacognitive listening strategies in listening tasks. Zarrabi (2017) investigated EFL students' style and their metacognitive listening strategies awareness. The participants were 135 female students from an intermediate school in Iran. A metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire and Reid, learner style questionnaire, was used to collect the data. The findings revealed that each student has his/her listening style, and they have a good awareness of metacognitive listening strategies.

Rahimirad and Shams (2014) investigated the effect of activating metacognitive listening strategies on EFL university students' metacognitive awareness of listening to lectures in the English language. The participants were 50 male and female students from the English literature department at a state university in Iran. The IELTS test and the metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire collected the data. The finding revealed that the instructional program had improved the students' metacognitive listening awareness. Also, there was no difference between male and female students' metacognitive awareness. Selamat and Sidhu (2011) investigated EFL University students' perceptions toward the use of 'Metacognitive Strategies Instruction' in enhancing students listening abilities in the lectures. The participants were (34) male and female students from grade one from 6 faculty of Education in Malaysia. A questionnaire and "semi-structured" interview were used to collect the data. The findings revealed that the use of Metacognitive strategies had improved students' listening abilities to the lectures delivered in the English language, and they became more effective in understanding information from the instructors.

## Methodology

### The Participants

The participants are 26 male and female postgraduate students. The participants from the University of Anbar- Iraq are enrolled in the master's program of English Literature, and the participants from the Jadara University – Jordan are enrolled in the English language and Literature master's programme. The participants' distribution is shown in table 1.

Table 1  
Participants distribution

University	males	females	Total
University of Anbar	5	6	11
Jadara University	4	11	15
Total	9	17	26

### The Instrument

To achieve the study's aims, the researchers adopted the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), designed by Vandergrift et al. (2006). The questionnaire was used by 197 researchers and scholars from 2007 to 2022. The questionnaire consists of 21 items; the authors calculated its validity and reliability in 2006. To use the questionnaire in this study, its validity and reliability have been calculated. The questionnaire was given to jury members (from Iraq and Jordan) who specialized in methodology and applied linguistics to verify the validity. All the jury members agreed to adopt the items without any modifications, and the items are suitable to the Iraqi and Jordanian contexts. The reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, which was found to be 0.92 at the significance level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) for this study, which means very high stability.

### Procedures

To answer the research question, the following procedures were conducted:

- Identifying the gap concerning postgraduate education.
- Review the literature and previous studies to decide the instrument of the study.
- Adopting Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), designed by Vandergrift et al. (2006).
- Verifying the reliability and validity of the questionnaire.
- Identifying the participants.
- The researchers did not get participants' informed consent since they have participated as volunteers. It is not an obligation to all participants.
- Designing the questionnaire via "Google Forms" and distribute it via the following link to all participants: <https://forms.gle/YDXbhWGAUJSiTya77>
- Collecting the data and analysing them statistically.

## Results and Discussion

### Result of the First Hypothesis

To verify the first hypothesis "The postgraduate students of the University of Anbar and Jadara University have a high level of metacognitive listening strategies", mean scores, standard deviation, and T-test were used. Table 2 shows the result.

Table 2  
Mean scores, standard deviation, and T-test of metacognitive listening strategies

Variable	Number	Mean	St.D	Arithmetic Mean	T- Value		Sig. 0.05
					Calculated	Tabulated	
Metacognitive Listening Strategies	26	62.00	6.406	52.5	4.822	1.960	Sig.

Table 2 shows that the students' mean scores on the scale reached 62.00 with a standard deviation of (6.406) degrees, and the calculated t-value is 4.822, which is higher than the tabular t-value 2.21 with a degree of freedom of 25, and this means that the research sample is characterized by a high level of metacognitive listening strategies awareness. Thus the first hypothesis is accepted.

### Result of the Second Hypothesis

To verify the second hypothesis, "There are statistically significant differences in metacognitive Awareness Listening strategies among the postgraduate students of the University of Anbar and the Jadara University according to the gender variable", the researchers analyzed the responses of the research sample (26) male and female postgraduate students on the Metacognitive Listening Strategies awareness scale consists of (21) items, after processing the data statistically, the researchers extracted the average scores of the sample members on the scale according to gender (males and females). Table 3 shows the result.

Table 3  
The t-test for two independent samples, the significance of the differences in Metacognitive Listening Strategies awareness according to the gender variable

Variable	Gender	Number	Mean	St.D	Df.	T- Value		Sig. 0.05
						Calculated	Tabulated	
Metacognitive Listening Strategies	Males	9	61.666	8.732	24	-0.190	2.02	Not. Sig.
	Females	17	62.176	5.089				

Table 3 shows that the mean scores of the males are 61.66 with standard deviation 8.732 and the mean scores of the females are 62.176 with standard deviation 5.089 with degree of freedom 24, and the calculated T- value is -0.190 which is less than the tabulated T-value 2.02, this result refers that there is no statistically significance differences in the Metacognitive Listening Strategies awareness between the male and female students, thus the second hypothesis is rejected.



### Result of the Third Hypothesis

To verify the third hypothesis, "There are statistically significant differences in postgraduate students' Metacognitive Listening strategies Awareness according to the variable of the type of university", the researchers analyzed the responses of the research sample (26) of male and female postgraduate students on the Metacognitive Listening Strategies awareness scale consists of (21) items, after processing the data statistically, the researchers extracted the average scores of the sample members on the scale according to the kind of university (University of Anbar and Jadara University). Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4  
The t-test for two independent samples, the significance of the differences in Metacognitive Listening Strategies awareness according to the kind of university variable

Variable	University	Number	Mean	St.D	Df.	T- Value		Sig.
						Calculated	Tabulated	
Metacognitive Listening Strategies	Anbar	11	61.09	9.289	24	-0.591	2.02	0.05
	Jadara	15	62.66	2.244		Not. Sig.		

Table 4 shows that the mean score of the University of Anbar is 61.090 with a standard deviation of 9.289 and the mean score of Jadara University is 62.66 with a standard deviation of 2.244 with a degree of freedom of 24, and the calculated T-value is -0.591 which is less than the tabulated T- value which is 2.02 at significance 0.05. This result indicates no significant difference in the metacognitive listening strategies awareness due to the kind of university. Thus, the third hypothesis is rejected.

### Discussion of the Results

The results show that the postgraduate students at both the University of Anbar and Jadara University have a high awareness of the metacognitive listening strategies. The postgraduate students are aware of the problem-solving strategies as shown in their responses to the questionnaire items 5, 7, 9, 13, 17, and 19. Item 5 states, "I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I do not understand" this item reflects students' awareness of problem-solving strategies, one of the metacognitive listening strategies. In addition, students have a high level of metacognitive listening strategies awareness as shown in their positive responses to the items "As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I know about the topic" and "I use the general idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I do not understand".

Concerning the planning and evaluation strategy, the postgraduate students are aware of this strategy, as shown in their high-level responses to the questionnaire items 1, 10, 14, 20, and 21. The students are aware of planning and evaluation strategy as shown in their high positive responses to the first item, which reflects students' planning "Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen ", also they evaluate their listening as shown in item 20 "As I listen,

I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension". The planning and evaluation strategy results show that the postgraduate students have a high level of metacognitive listening strategies awareness. Concerning the mental translation strategy, the postgraduate students are aware of this strategy, as shown in their high-level responses to the questionnaire items number 4, 11, and 18. The students are aware of their mental translation strategy, as shown in their high-level responses to the item entitled "I translate in my head as I listen" and also the item entitled "I translate keywords as I listen ". These results show that the students have a high metacognitive listening strategies awareness.

Concerning the person knowledge strategy, the postgraduate students are aware of this strategy, as shown in their high-level responses to the questionnaire items number 3, 8, and 15. The results show that the postgraduate students in both universities have a high awareness level of their knowledge listening strategy, as shown in their responses to the item entitled "I find that listening in English is more difficult than reading, speaking, or writing in English" and also the item entitled "I do not feel nervous when I listen to English". As the person knowledge strategy is one of the metacognitive listening strategies awareness, thus students' positive and high responses to this strategy mean that they have a high level of metacognitive listening strategies awareness. Finally, the postgraduate students show a high level of awareness of this strategy concerning the directed attention strategy. The postgraduate students' positive responses to the items number 2, 6, 12, and 16 show that they are aware of the listening strategy, as shown in the items entitled "I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding" and the item entitled "I try to get back on track when I lose concentration ". As the directed attention strategy is one of the metacognitive listening strategies awareness, thus students' high responses to the items of this strategy mean that they have a high level of metacognitive listening strategies awareness.

The results of postgraduate students' high-level metacognitive listening strategies awareness are consistent with the results of the studies of Moftoon and Alamdari (2020), Ivanorska (2019), Zarrabi (2017), and Rahimirad and Shams (2014) found that the participants had a high level of metacognitive listening strategies awareness. The results that revealed no statistically significant difference in students' metacognitive listening strategies awareness between the male and female students may vary due to the student's language level and competence. As the participants are enrolled in the master's program in English Literature and English language and Literature, their language levels are equal. In addition, as the participants were from two different countries, the result of no existing differences between male and female postgraduate students can be attributed to the students' efforts in understanding the master's program materials, so it is clear that they did their best to gain information being received in the English language.

These results are consistent with the results of the studies of Jameel (2022), Moftoon and Alamdari (2020), Anber and Jameel (2020), Manasrah (2019), Azizinia et al. (2017), Rahimirad and Shams (2014), and Vandergrift et al. (2006), who found that there are no significant differences of the metacognitive listening strategies on the variable of gender. The results revealed no statistically significant difference in students' metacognitive listening strategies awareness

attributed to the university type, which means the type of master's programmes (Postgraduate students in the University of Anbar are specialized in the English Literature, while the postgraduate students in the Jadara University are specialized in English language and Literature), may due to the nature of listening skills. From this result, it can be inferred that the students have positive attitudes toward listening to materials in the English language. The positive attitudes pave the way for acceptance of practising the metacognitive listening strategies, which require a high level of attention and awareness. This justification may enhance the result that there is no difference between the postgraduate students who study English Literature and those who study English language and Literature.

### **Conclusion**

The study aims at revealing the postgraduate students' metacognitive listening strategies awareness who are specialized in English language and enrolled in the master's program in English literature (in Iraq) and English language and literature (in Jordan), and the general results revealed that the students have a high level of awareness of the metacognitive listening strategies. It is worth mentioning that the findings of this study fill the literature gap concerning the lack of survey studies that investigate the postgraduate and even undergraduate students' awareness of the metacognitive listening strategies. Reviewing the literature in most popular Scholarly search engines and scientific journals, and to the researchers' best knowledge, there is a lack of revealing students' use of metacognitive listening strategies in detail, which means the five included listening strategies, namely: planning and evaluation strategy, directed attention strategy, mental translation strategy, problem-solving strategy, and person knowledge strategy. The researchers suggest that university EFL professors expose the postgraduate students to metacognitive listening strategies and encourage them to evaluate their listening abilities. Also, university professors need to be aware of metacognitive listening strategies to use them reasonably inside the classroom to create an atmosphere of collaboration and successful information exchange between the sender and the receiver; it is a two-way exchange method.

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### **Data Availability**

The dataset for the current study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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