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**LISTENING COMPREHENSION IN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS: A
STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF EXPLICIT STRATEGY INSTRUCTION ON
CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN LISTENING TESTS**

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ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension has been acknowledged to comprise both a difficult and a neglected language skill in the school classroom. The aim of the present research has been to investigate the improvement of the listening comprehension of EFL learners and especially, the listening comprehension of B2 level Greek candidates preparing for various language proficiency exams via the instruction of listening comprehension strategies. Therefore, the current study has set to examine the effect of explicit listening strategy instruction on EFL learners' performance in listening tests.

In order for such an investigation to be performed two listening strategy training programmes (i.e. pilot and main study) were designed and implemented with actual candidates for the most popular B2 level language proficiency exams (e.g. ECCE, FCE, PTE, KPG) available in the Greek market. The present research focused on B2 level language proficiency exams which have proven to gather the greatest bulk of candidature and any relevant findings would be of great assistance to any interested party. The investigation of listeners' strategy use and selection involved mainly the distribution of relevant questionnaires whereas, a detailed analysis of the listening tasks involved in the EFL learners' exam preparation material was performed based

on automatized programmes such as Praat, Coh-Metrix, Web Vocabprofile etc. along with specific theoretical models for question and response classification (e.g. Shohamy & Inbar, 1991; Bachman, 1990).

The current study has revealed a positive relationship between explicit strategy instruction and listening performance regardless of EFL learners' target language proficiency exams, age, proficiency etc. Moreover, the present research has highlighted the significance of task characteristics in EFL learners' strategy use by indicating that the same candidates apart from some strategies that were proven to be common regardless of the exam at hand, opted for different listening comprehension strategies in order to complete different listening tests. As a result, one of the main contributions of the study is a suggested inventory of listening comprehension strategies that has comprised the outcome of all the relevant findings of the listening strategy training programmes. This inventory which has included both general and task specific listening comprehension strategies could serve as a substantial exam preparation tool for EFL test takers and instructors who wish to improve listening comprehension. The current research has also emphasized the role of task characteristics in candidates' strategy instruction. Therefore, another contribution of the current research is the provision of a strategy instruction framework for the implementation of listening strategy training programmes. In addition, the aforementioned task analysis has revealed apart from the different requirements of the listening comprehension modules of the language proficiency exams under investigation, specific task characteristics which should be taken into serious consideration by EFL instructors along with both test designers and item writers. Finally, the present study has discussed issues such as the current practice of listening

comprehension at school and has pointed out the need for the incorporation of strategies in the instruction of listening comprehension in the future.