

## **The Effect of Metacognitive Listening Instruction on EFL Young Language Learners' Acquisition of Simple Past Tense**

**Maryam Safari Kumleh**

Department of English Language and Literature, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Mazandaran, Iran

**Hamed Barjesteh \***

Department of English Language and Literature, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Mazandaran, Iran

### **Abstract**

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of metacognitive listening instruction on the young learners' acquisition of simple past tense and to probe whether incorporating metacognitive listening instruction can affect young EFL learners' beliefs about grammar learning. Thirty young elementary students, who were studying in a private language institute in Chalous, Mazandaran, Iran participated in the study. As to the data collection instruments, OPT, the pre- and post-tests, and semi-structured interview were used. Findings revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group after the intervention (i.e. teaching simple past tense through metacognitive listening), showing that the instruction was quite successful in assisting the learners to acquire simple past tense. The effective role of metacognitive listening instruction on the occurrence of change in the learners' beliefs about grammar learning was also proved in that they held positive beliefs about grammar learning and changed their simplistic and less-positive beliefs. Not only should metacognitive listening instruction be recognized as an appropriate procedure to teach listening, it can also be applied in teaching grammar, as a 'focus on form' approach in which the learners are involved in the context of meaningful interaction.

**Keywords:** Metacognitive listening instruction, grammar learning, learners' beliefs, EFL Young Language Learners, Simple Past Tense

### **INTRODUCTION**

Research on grammar learning has brought about some debates for many scholars (Williams, 1999) since they were involved with finding an effective methodology regarding efficient teaching of grammar through which the learners are the active participants in the process of learning. In fact, the purpose has been to foster meaningful interaction between the learners and teachers. This issue has been highly attended by grammar researchers, which led to the introduction of focus on form approach (Long, 1983). As Nassaji (2000) points out, focus on form aims to help

teachers teach grammar in the context of meaningful interaction made by the teacher to pave the way for his\her students to communicate in the target language, while indirectly focusing on the target linguistic form (Nassaji & Fotos, 2010). As research (Long, 1991) clearly highlighted the importance of interaction in the process of learning forms, it seems necessary to look into different methods leading to the occurrence of the so called interaction in grammar learning, which seems to fulfill both teachers and learners' satisfaction in terms of teaching and learning interactively while focusing on the target form indirectly.

Second language pedagogy has been the supporter of focus on form and suggested that attention to form should be encouraged in second language classroom (Doughty & Williams, 1998). This approach advocates the exclusive use of meaning focused activity in language classrooms (prabhu, 1987). Form-focused interactions can be defined as "any attempt to draw the learners' attention to linguistic forms in the course of meaning-focused interaction, through various forms of interactional feedback and focus on form" (Nassaji & Fotos, 2010). Although there is general agreement that focus on form is required for grammar acquisition, researcher can also benefit from in teaching language skills, such as listening.

Today, the notion of metacognition in language teaching is often attributed to John Flavell (Flavell, 1979), which refers to acquired knowledge about cognitive processes, knowledge that can be used to control cognitive process. In Flavell's words, "metacognitive knowledge consists primarily of knowledge of beliefs about what factors or variables act and interact in what ways to affect the course and outcome of cognitive enterprises" (p. 10). Anderson (2002) divided the metacognitive learning process into five components: (1) preparing and planning for learning, (2) selecting and using learning strategies, (3) monitoring strategy use, (4) orchestrating various strategies, and (5) evaluating strategy use and learning. In this regard, Vandergrift (2007) argues that metacognition can be taken into consideration while teaching listening in that learners' are involved with together working on the target task to improve their listening.

Teaching and learning about listening comprehension in the language classroom is not an easy task. Modern course books often recommend the explicit teaching of listening strategies as a way of facilitating less skilled listeners understanding. While this approach may be beneficial, it has narrow focus on strategy awareness and use alone. Wenden (1998) initially pointed to the usefulness of encouraging and guiding metacognitive behavior in L2 learning. Benefits to learners include the development of knowledge about how to actively achieve success in language learning, and greater awareness of ways to operate as more self-directed learners. However, it is only more recently that explored. There is a growing interest in implementing metacognitive instruction as it seems not all learners have an understanding of what listening in an L2 involves(Vandergreft, 2003). Metacognitive listening instruction Is the use of a task sequence that engages learners in predicting, monitoring, problem identification, and evaluating, and this task sequence is known as a 'pedagogical cycle' (Vandergrift , 2004).

Since teaching grammar through focus on form approach has been proved to successfully help the learners to experience an interactive learning environment and metacognitive listening was an approach toward listening instruction in which the learners are encouraged to have an interaction while working on the listening task, therefore, the present study aims to investigate the effect of metacognitive listening instruction, as a focus on form approach, to assist the learners to learn the simple past tense. In fact, listening is used at the service of grammar instruction. Moreover, the learners' beliefs about grammar learning were taken into account to see whether incorporating metacognitive listening could bring about changes in the learners' beliefs.

## Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Does metacognitive listening instruction result in the EFL young language learners' acquisition of simple past tense?
2. To what extent, incorporating metacognitive listening instruction affect young EFL learners' beliefs about grammar learning?

## METHOD

### Participants

As to the purpose of the study, 30 young elementary students, who are studying in a private language institute in Chalous, Mazandaran, Iran were the potential candidates of the study. Their age range is from 13 to 19. They were 15 male and 15 female EFL young language learners. It should be noted that all the participants have been studying English for one year and they are native speakers of Persian. Regarding the sampling of the participants, as Dornyei (2007) points out that "the main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn" (p.126), therefore, the present study benefits from *convenience sampling*, i.e. selecting the participants who are available and can meet the purpose of the study, to collect the desirable data. The participants were also randomly divided into one experimental (n=15) and one control group (n=15).

### Instruments

The following instruments were used in order to collect the required data:

#### *Oxford Placement Test*

Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered at the beginning of the study to select homogenous samples in terms of their proficiency levels. It is noteworthy that the participants of the study were of elementary level and OPT was applied to select the students who are all elementary learners. As to the purpose of the present study, OPT (Allen, 1992) includes 60 multiple choice items on vocabulary (30 items) and grammar (30 items). The rationale behind the application of the OPT was firstly the fact that compared to the other tests, the participants of the study were believed to be more

familiar with the structure of this test; therefore, they were expected to take the test better. Secondly, this test, as previously mentioned above, can assist the researcher to go for homogenous participants of the study.

### ***Grammar Diagnostic Test (Pre-Test)***

The English grammar diagnostic test, which was served as the pre-test of the study, was utilized to test the participants' initial knowledge of simple past tense and investigate the problematic issues they might face in dealing with understanding the simple past tense. The pre-test included 25 multiple choice questions of simple past tense from 'Grammar in Use' (2009) book (elementary level). Total score was estimated at 25.

As to the reliability measure of the pre-test, a pilot study was conducted with the participation of 30 elementary students (from another private institute with similar characteristics of the participants of the present study) to go for the test score consistency. Reliability coefficient was found to be 0.75 (using KR-21 formula), which seemed to be an acceptable value in terms of consistency of scores as highlighted in Farhady, Jafarpour, and Birjandi (1994). The reliability of the pre-test is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Reliability of grammar diagnostic test

N	Mean	SD	Variance	Reliability
30	22.88	5.86	46.12	0.75

### ***Grammar Achievement Test (Post-Test)***

In order to look into the effect of metacognitive listening instruction on the learners' acquisition of simple past tense, the post-test was administered to take the learners' post scores into account and investigate their achievement after the intervention. The same as the pre-test, it consisted of 25 multiple choice items chosen from 'Grammar in Use' (2009) book of elementary version and concentrating on the target form, i.e. simple past tense. Regarding the reliability coefficient of the post-test, the same participants, who took part in the pilot study for the pre-test, carried out the post-test to check the consistency of the post-test scores with the application of KR-21 formula. The reliability was calculated as 0.76 highlighting a logical amount of consistency measure. Reliability of the post-test is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Reliability of grammar achievement test

N	Mean	SD	Variance	Reliability
30	24.12	6.99	48.97	0.76

### ***Learners' Beliefs Semi-Structured Interview***

To examine the learners' beliefs about grammar learning, they were cordially invited to take part in a semi-structured interview session to explore their initial beliefs about grammar learning before the intervention. The interview questions the learners were to answer include:

1. What do you know about grammar?
2. How should grammar be taught?
3. Are you interested in learning to grammar?
4. How teaching and learning grammar are important to you?

After the intervention session, they were invited for the second semi-structured interview to see whether metacognitive listening instruction may lead to probable changes in their beliefs about grammar learning. In fact, semi-structured interview, which was taken by the experimental groups, was conducted almost with the same above-mentioned questions to check consistency among the learners' answers for the second interview. It should be noted that the semi-structured interview sessions were audio recorded.

### **Procedure**

The present study benefits from elementary students who are studying in a private language institute as the main participants of the study. The study aims to look into the impact of metacognitive listening instruction on the EFL young language learners' acquisition of simple past in one hand, and explore their beliefs about grammar learning on the other. To homogenize the learners regarding their proficiency levels, they took OPT. Then, the participants were divided into experimental and control groups. Prior to the administration of pre- and post-tests, a pilot study was done to measure their reliability in order to guarantee the consistency of the scores to develop reliable instruments for diagnostic and achievement purposes. Then, both groups took the teacher-made grammar diagnostic test, as the pre-test, to examine their understanding of the simple past. It is noteworthy that the participants of the study have no familiarity with simple past tense and have not acquired it yet. They also took part in a semi-structured interview session to probe their beliefs about grammar learning. After that, they underwent four two-hour intervention sessions of metacognitive listening instruction. As far as metacognitive instruction was concerned, the experimental group underwent the intervention procedure in four sessions based on the pedagogical sequenced proposed by Vandergrift (2004), in which they received metacognitive listening instruction through the following stages for the purpose of learning the simple past tense by experiencing a meaningful interaction caused by the interactive form-focused instruction, which was achieved through metacognitive listening instruction. More specifically the following metacognitive listening instructions were conducted:

1. Planning and predicting: listeners decide what to listen for and establish the necessary conditions for successful listening, in order to pay close attention to meaning while listening.
2. Verification of their hypothesis based on their prior knowledge about the topic after the first listening: while listening to the text, listeners can monitor their comprehension in line with their predictions and make adjustments, as necessary.
3. Group or peer work to reach agreement or disagreement based on the initial hypothesis: here listeners are required to get ready to listen to the recording for the second time, and they try their best to guess whether new information can be added to the previously-mentioned opinions with group work or class discussions supported by the teacher. As to the purpose of the study, here the teacher will implicitly attract the learners' attention to the simple past tense by posing some yes/no questions as well as information questions focusing on the focused tense.
4. Class discussion for better understanding of the points of agreement and disagreement after the second listening stage: after the second listening, learners begin by revising and adding new information to their notes, as required. Further discussion between the same partners is used to make any additional revisions to the interpretation of the text. The teacher will ask more questions, all in simple past tense, and will check their performance by providing some feedback where necessary.
5. Third listening stage aiming at assisting the learners to go through the details of the recording: the final verification stage begins with a third listening to the text. This creates an atmosphere for learners to listen for information revealed during discussion that they may not have understood earlier.
6. Finally, learners reflect upon their activity in terms of their understanding of the content and determine their goals for the next listening activity: during the last step of this listening activity, the teacher encourages learners to evaluate their activity, the difficulties they faced. Setting goals for future listening efforts may also take place at this time.

During the stages mentioned above, learners experienced an interactive environment through which they benefited from the teacher's scaffolding as well as feedback on the content and the focused linguistic form. On the other hand, the control group received no metacognitive instruction for the purpose of teaching simple past tense in that they were taught traditionally by directly focusing their attention on the simple past tense.

After the intervention sessions, the participants of the study took the teacher-made grammar achievement test, as the post-test, to investigate the effectiveness of intervention sessions on the learners' grammar learning, i.e. simple past tense. They were also invited to take part in the second semi-structured interview to examine the probable changes in their beliefs about grammar learning as a result of receiving the intervention in metacognitive listening instruction. It should be noted that the first and second semi-structured interview sessions were audio recorded.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The present study benefited from quantitative and qualitative data collection methodology. As to the quantitative part, the pre-test was administered before the intervention to check the learners' knowledge of the simple past tense before the intervention. After four two-hour intervention sessions of metacognitive listening instruction to which the experimental underwent, all the participants took the post-test to investigate their achievement regarding the acquisition of simple past tense. However, the qualitative part of the study aimed to explore the learners' beliefs about grammar learning by inviting the learners to take part in semi-structured interview sessions once before the intervention, while the second one was done after the intervention to look into the probable changes in their beliefs about grammar learning. It is noteworthy that the control group received no treatment and they were taught traditionally without activating their background knowledge via metacognitive instruction.

The same as data collection procedure, data analysis was of two types, i.e. quantitative and qualitative data analysis. As to the first research question (i.e. does metacognitive listening instruction result in the EFL young language learners' acquisition of simple past tense?), the learners' pre- and post-test scores were measured both descriptively and inferentially by independent sample t-test through SPSS software (version 20). On the other hand, the second research question (i.e. what are the EFL young language learners' beliefs about grammar learning?), which is the qualitative part of the study, was analyzed by the application of grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is in favor of coding the data to find out the main categories emerged in the learners semi-structured interview transcriptions for the purpose of figuring out the main beliefs they held about grammar learning.

## RESULTS

### First Research Question

#### *Descriptive Analysis of the Data*

The descriptive analysis of the data for different groups of the study has been summarized below. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive analysis of the data of experimental group of the study.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics for the experimental group

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	11.1667	30	1.84066	.31780
Posttest	15.1167	30	1.30833	.22061

As Table 3 indicates, the mean value of listening practice for the experimental group before receiving the intervention is 11.1667 (SD= .31780), while the mean for the experimental group after listening practice is 15.1167 (SD=.22061). It is obvious that

the experimental group performance on the post-test of simple past tense improved greatly after the intervention. It can be inferred that the metacognitive listening instruction was effective in helping the learners to acquire the simple past tense. Table 4 summarizes the descriptive analysis of the data of the control group before and after intervention.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics for the control group

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	11.7667	30	2.01015	.36901
Posttest	12.8833	30	1.82196	.35273

As Table 4 shows, the mean for the control group before listening practice is 11.7667 (SD=.36901), while the mean of the control group after the intervention is 12.8833 (SD=.35273). With regard to the learner' performance on the post-test, the control group showed a small degree of improvement. Table 5 indicates the descriptive analysis of the experimental and control groups for the post-test scores of grammar through metacognitive listening instruction as in the following:

**Table 5.** Descriptive analysis of the experimental and control groups for the post-test

Text	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Grammar				
Control Group	30	12.8833	2.02115	.36901
Experimental Group	30	15.1167	1.20833	.22061

As to the Table 5, it was found that the mean value of the experimental group on the post-test scores of grammar is 15.1167 with a standard deviation of 1.20833. However, the mean value of the control group of the study in the posttest is far lower than that of the experimental group (Mean=12.8833, SD=2.02115). Thus, it can be concluded that although two groups had almost the same mean value on the pretest, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test of grammar highlighting the significant effect of the listening practice on the learners' knowledge of simple past tense. Yet, in order to investigate whether the difference between groups is significant, the results of t-tests should be presented and discussed.

### ***The Inferential Analysis of the Data***

The inferential analyses of the data for answering the first research question have been summarized in the tables below. Table 6 summarizes the inferential analysis of the data before and after intervention for the experimental group of the study.

**Table 6.** Paired-samples test for the experimental group

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Paired1 Experimental Group						
Pretest-Posttest	-3.9500	1.0284	.18777	-21.036	29	.000



A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on students' scores on the grammar tests. There was a statistically significant increase in grammar scores from the pre-test ( $M = 11.1667$ ,  $SD = .31780$ ) to the post-test ( $M = 15.1167$ ,  $SD = 1.0284$ ),  $t(29) = 21.036$ ,  $p < .0005$  (two-tailed). The mean increase in grammar test scores was 3.95 with a 95% confidence interval. Table 7 summarizes the inferential analysis of the data before and after intervention for the control group of the study.

**Table 7.** Paired-samples test for the control group

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Paired1 Control Group						
Pretest-Posttest	-1.116	.970	.17728	-6.299	29	.000

A paired-samples t-test was calculated to investigate whether the traditional method of grammar instruction improved students' scores on the tests of grammar or not. There was not a statistically significant increase in grammar scores from the pre-test ( $M = 11.7667$ ,  $SD = .3690$ ) to posttest ( $M = 12.8833$ ,  $SD = .35273$ ),  $t(29) = 6.299$ ,  $p < .0005$  (two-tailed). The mean increase in grammar scores was 1.116 with a 95% confidence interval. Table 8 summarizes the inferential analysis of the post-test scores for the control and experimental groups.

**Table 8.** Independent-samples t-test for the post-test of both groups

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means			
F	Sig.	t	F	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
							Upper Lower
Equal variances assumed		-	58		-3.23333	-	
		7.662	.000			3.23333	.41603
	6.17	.015				-4.06612	-2.40055
Equal variances not assumed		-			-3.23333	-	
		7.662	48.677	.000		-	.41603
						3.23333	4.06953
							2.39714

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the effect of two kinds of instructions (listening practice and traditional method of teaching grammar) on the learners' knowledge of simple past tense. The Sig. value for Levene's test is not larger than .05 (.015), then the second line in the table should be used, which refers to Equal

variances not assumed. There was significant difference in scores for the control group ( $M = 34.02$ ,  $SD = 4.91$ ) and experimental group ( $M=12.8833$ ,  $SD=.35273$ );  $t(48) = 7.662$ ,  $p = .000$ , two-tailed).

Overall, it was revealed that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in the post-test measures of grammar tests which indicates the great effectiveness of listening practice for the improvement of students' knowledge of the simple past tense.

## Second Research Question

The second research question includes 'To what extent, incorporating metacognitive listening instruction affect young EFL learners' beliefs about grammar learning?. In order to answer the question, learners' responses to the interview were categorized with respect to the coding of data, and then partial transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews were provided to be in line with the categories. Before going through the categories, it is of value to review the interview questions:

1. What do you know about grammar?
2. How should grammar be taught?
3. Are you interested in learning to grammar?
4. How teaching and learning grammar are important to you?

Concerning the learners' responses, coding of the answers were conducted to find out the categories emerged according to the initial coding of the answers. Based on the initial coding of the answers, the next step is axial coding of data carried out to discover the main categories of data for the purpose of selective coding at the final stage. These categories involved 1) learners' beliefs about grammar learning at the beginning of the term; and 2) learners' beliefs about grammar learning at the end of the term. Each of these two main categories has sub categories to appropriately analyze the data. Regarding the first category, the following classifications can be made as to the coding procedure:

- a) Grammar is difficult to learn
- b) Lack of interest in grammar learning

As to the learners' beliefs about grammar learning at the end of the term, the following codes emerged:

- c) Grammar can be taught interactively at the service of speaking
- d) Grammar is more important than the other skills

Additionally, it is noteworthy that 15 participants of the experimental group were selected to take part in interview. As the responses of the experimental group are of importance based on the purpose of the study, their belief change was thoroughly analyzed. Here, each of these sub-categories is discussed and interview extracts are provided as well.

### ***Learners' Beliefs about Grammar Learning at the Beginning of the Term***

As to the learners' beliefs about grammar learning, their responses to interview indicated that their beliefs seemed to be raw and to a large extent simplistic, which clearly highlights their unfamiliarity with this important skill. In the following, learners' sub-categories and interview extracts are provided to acknowledge the learners' lack of awareness about grammar learning at the beginning of the term.

*Grammar is Difficult to Learn.* Regarding the difficulty of grammar learning, almost all the participants (n=14) believed that grammar learning was not as easy as the other skills such as speaking. In fact, the learners seemed to have not sufficient understanding of grammar and how it can be taught as effectively as possible to make it seem less difficult for them. Here, it was found that learners' were afraid of grammar exercises and they always face difficulty in understanding grammar as well as structure of the sentence. As an example, one of the participants' extracts is as follows:

#### *Extract 1.*

*"I believe that grammar is the most difficult sub-skill since it does not have any variety and therefore less energetic and full of hard vocabularies."*

It seems that the learner is not satisfied with grammar tasks done in the class and explains it as less energetic and without any possible interaction that can be occurred while teaching grammar. Teaching and learning grammar did not satisfy their expectations although the participants were not aware of what exactly grammar is since most of them held the belief that grammar means only direct instruction and structure of the sentence. Learners' beliefs appear to be simplistic and this may be due to their teachers' teaching methodology in teaching grammar less communicatively leading to keeping such beliefs. Of course, this issue is discussed in the discussion section completely. The thing to be attended is the participants' lack of understanding of what exactly grammar is and what purpose they follow when a grammar task is concerned.

*Lack of Interest in Grammar Learning.* This category shows that the participants' responses to the interview revealed their reluctance to learn grammar skill. It seems that learners' lack of interest in grammar might lie in the difficulty of the skill they may face as it was highlighted in the previous section. Regarding the lack of interest in grammar learning, the majority of the participants (n=11) believed that when they are working on grammar exercises, there are no further activities to make the grammar task less boring, and make the learners more interested in doing the grammar exercises of the textbook. This belief is shown in the following extract:

#### *Extract 2.*

*"When we want to do grammar activities, we are asked to do the required tasks of the book individually or with our classmates. It is boring just to answer the questions of the book without having any interaction with the friends or very little interaction with the teacher. This makes it boring for us."*

The above extract indicates that participants seek more interaction in grammar instruction and they are not satisfied with the current method of teaching grammar adopted in their classes. Another important point highlighted in their responses was their probable indifference to grammar. More than half of the learners agreed that a grammar activity is just to do the exercise and jump to a reading or speaking task. It seems that some of the participants appear to be lazy or they wish to pass the time as fast as possible when they are to work on grammar exercise. In fact, these types of learners may need more justification to be more aware of the purpose of grammar instruction to make them conscious of what exactly grammar is and what they are expected to do during grammar class. On the other hand, there are some who like more interactive classes while grammar exercises start in the classroom and they suffer from less energetic and boring atmosphere.

### ***Learners' Beliefs about Grammar Learning at the End of the Term***

As to the learners' beliefs at the end of the term, their responses to the interview highlighted this point that they were satisfied with the intervention in metacognitive listening instruction to pave the way for grammar learning, and they held positive beliefs about grammar learning. It seemed that teaching grammar through metacognitive listening instruction, to a large extent, brought about some sort of changes in the participants' beliefs about grammar learning. In order to completely analyze the data, it is of value to start with sub-categories of the learners' beliefs about grammar learning at the end of term.

*Grammar can be Taught Interactively at the Service of Speaking.* Regarding the learners' belief change about grammar learning, all the participants (n=15) who participated in semi-structured interview concurred that the new intervention they had received was so effective in that they felt improvement in grammar skill since they were able to do the grammar tasks and simultaneously interact with their peers and the teacher and improve their speaking as well. The extract below shows one learners' positive belief about grammar after receiving the intervention:

#### *Extract 3.*

*"With the new method of teaching the teacher had, we could listen and do the grammar exercise and speak about that, and talk to our friends. It was very good and interesting."*

It seems that the above learner had a positive impression in terms of teacher's intervention sessions. An interesting point is that she mentioned 'new method of teaching' signaling this fact that it might be for the first time that they had such an interactive class while practicing a grammar task through listening. It can also be found that the participants paid a special attention to the role of speaking during the language learning process, and they held positive beliefs about the new approach in teaching grammar through metacognitive listening paving the way for them to freely speak with their friends and teachers about the grammar subject and enjoy the context of interaction taken place as a result of this listening instruction.

*Grammar is more Important than the Other Skills.* In line with the learners' belief change about grammar at the end of the term, it seems that teaching grammar through metacognitive listening instruction caused the majority of the participants (n=13) to put much more weight on grammar learning in their responses to the interviews. They appeared to understand the role grammar may play in their success in language learning as it helped them to improve their speaking skill highlighted in the previous section. That grammar was considered as an important skill, which was held by the participants, values the role of metacognitive listening instruction in teaching grammar and the teacher's abilities to successfully implement this methodological listening intervention in the classroom, paving the way for the learners to interactively do the grammar tasks. As a vivid example, the following extract presents the importance of grammar skill:

*Extract 4.*

*"I think that grammar is more important than speaking and ..... In my opinion, grammar can be very important for teaching and learning other skills too."*

The fact that they could speak while the focus was on grammar created a positive feeling in the learners' mind leading to keep this belief that grammar can be more important than other skills of language. With the two sub-categories explained above, it can be easily found that teaching grammar through metacognitive listening instruction created a fruitful educational environment for the participants to learn the grammar skill in a communicative context resulting in raising a relative awareness in their beliefs about grammar at the end of the term.

To sum up, the second research question aimed to find out whether teaching grammar through metacognitive listening instruction could change learners' simplistic beliefs about grammar, and it was found that almost all the students seemed to have simplistic beliefs about grammar and were not interested in learning grammar since it was boring for them. After receiving the intervention, nearly all the participants in the experimental group changed their beliefs about grammar and they put much more emphasis on the role of grammar since it assisted them in their speaking practice and made the classroom more interactive creating an enjoyable environment for grammar learning, which was the final aim of the instruction. The findings demand the implementation of metacognitive listening instruction in teaching grammar in language classroom paving the way for both teachers and learners to benefit from a communicative context.

## DISCUSSION

This section focuses on the discussion regarding the main findings of the study, which is in line with looking into the effectiveness of metacognitive listening instruction on the young learners' acquisition of simple past tense and whether incorporating metacognitive listening instruction can affect young EFL learners' beliefs about grammar learning. In fact, the purpose is to challenge the results of the research and

find possible alignment between the findings of the present study with other studies conducted with respect to listening practice as well as grammar learning within form-focused instruction and the occurrence of change in the learners' beliefs about grammar learning. It also discusses whether the findings of the present study can be justified under the frameworks of sociocultural theory as well as metacognitive approach in teaching grammar which are in favor of applying tools in the language classroom in order to create an interactive environment that enables the learners to enjoy the peer interaction as well as teacher-learner communication, leading to their ultimate success in learning language skills.

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of metacognitive listening instruction on Iranian elementary EFL learners' knowledge of simple past tense. Based on the quantitative results of the pre- and post- test scores of the learners in the experimental and control group, it was revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group after the treatment (i.e. teaching simple past tense through metacognitive listening), indicating that the instruction was quite successful in helping the learners to acquire simple past tense. Although it was concluded that the participants of both groups performed better on the post-test measures of grammar tests, the experimental group, which was taught through metacognitive listening instruction, outperformed the control group, which underwent the traditional method of grammar instruction. Hence, the study, to a large extent, demonstrated that listening can be taken into account at the service of teaching grammar in the context of meaningful interaction and implicitly attract the learners' attention toward target form. The results support the fact that if learners undergo such processes underlying the listening activity, they can surely benefit from this strategy, and metacognitive listening instruction does have merits in this regard. The present study found empirical support to those of Goh (2002), Goh and Taib (2006), Vandergrift (2004), and Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), which concluded that metacognitive listening instruction as a pedagogical cycle can improve learners' second and foreign language listening skills if it is employed in a systematic way resulting in its appropriate application in the classroom environment based on the pedagogic needs.

To add more value concerning the effectiveness of listening instruction in a metacognitively-based procedure, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) assert that learning to listen seems to be an individual attempt while they cannot benefit from their classmates or teachers as well. They also add that:

Many language programs still lack curricular support for overall listening development during and beyond the formal classroom. Learner-oriented listening instruction, therefore, needs to take advantage of the whole gamut of learning processes that learners experience in order to develop different aspects of their listening competence (p. 78).

In order to discuss the findings regarding sociocultural framework (Vygostky, 1978), teachers can provide educational support for their students during metacognitive treatment and create an opportunity for them to be able to track their own process of

listening. This movement from other-regulation to self-regulation was highlighted in the learners' grammar learning, which can acknowledge the significance of sociocultural theory in justifying the sort of development in the learners' acquisition of simple past tense, which is line with form-focused instruction in teaching grammar and its high effectiveness in paving the way for the learners to experience an interactive environment by participating in the classroom discussion made by the use of language tasks for the purpose of fostering communication and encouraging peer or teacher-learner interaction (Long, 1983; Doughty & Williams, 1998). In this regard, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) pointed out that "teachers need to nurture self-regulated learning and promote peer dialogue so that learners can learn to listen in a holistic manner" (p. 78), which is in alignment with other experimental studies in the related field (Goh, 1997, 2008; Vandergrift, 2004, 2007).

As to the two applied theories of the study, i.e. sociocultural theory and metacognitive theory of listening, it seems that these theories can be utilized as the suitable frameworks for the justification of the application of listening instruction to assist the learners improve their grammar learning within the context of meaningful interaction. Regarding the incorporation of metacognitive listening instruction to have possible effect on young EFL learners' beliefs about grammar learning, findings highlighted the effective role metacognitive listening instruction on the occurrence of change in the learners' beliefs about grammar learning. In fact, almost all the participants in the experimental group were satisfied with the metacognitive intervention to help them acquire simple past tense and held positive beliefs about listening and changed their simplistic and less-positive beliefs about grammar learning.

Regarding the theoretical framework applied in belief studies, the present study used sociocultural theory to justify change in the learners' beliefs about grammar learning during the term. To apply sociocultural terms in the study, experimental group underwent mediational procedures to change their simplistic beliefs about grammar learning. It seems that the mediational role of metacognitive listening instruction in teaching grammar has been effective leading to change in the learners' beliefs about grammar. The factors causing mediation could be the interactional context in which learners were involved in the communicative atmosphere and had a meaningful interaction with their peers and the teacher leading to a successful mediation resulting change in the learners' simplistic beliefs, which shows that sociocultural theory can appropriately justify the findings.

In order to challenge the findings within the dimension of regulation – another important term in sociocultural theory mentioned above – it can be found that learners initially adhered to the teachers' role when they were to do a listening task, while after receiving the treatment in metacognitive listening instruction, they could do the grammar exercises alone and enjoyed carrying out the related tasks with their peers and individually. This reveals that the participants of the experimental group were armed with teacher's support at the beginning of the term highlighting the role of other-regulation and jumped to self-regulation after the metacognitive listening instruction.

Therefore, the movement from other-regulation to self-regulation as a result of the metacognitive listening instruction is justified within sociocultural theory.

Findings of the study are in alignment with Alanen (2006) and Yang and Kim's (2011) studies in which the role of beliefs as mediational means was proved. Their research confirmed the suitability of sociocultural theory to explore learners' beliefs in the process of time. In fact, the above studies demonstrated the application of sociocultural theory to account for beliefs in the context of interaction as proposed by Barcelos (2006).

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study was conducted to look into the impact of metacognitive listening instruction on the EFL young language learners' acquisition of simple past in one hand, and to explore their beliefs about grammar learning on the other. The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. Based on the quantitative results of the pre- and post- test scores of the learners in the experimental and control group, it was revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group after the treatment (i.e. teaching simple past tense through metacognitive listening), indicating that the instruction was quite successful in helping the learners to acquire simple past tense.
2. The study, to a large extent, demonstrated that listening can be taken into account at the service of teaching grammar in the context of meaningful interaction and implicitly attract the learners' attention toward target form.
3. Sociocultural theory and metacognitive theory of listening can be utilized as the suitable frameworks for the justification of the application of listening instruction to assist the learners improve their grammar learning.
4. Framed in sociocultural theory, findings concluded that metacognitive listening instruction was considered as mediational activity leading to acquisition of simple past tense and change in the learners' beliefs about grammar learning. In fact, learners applied the sort of mediation in their learning process to jump from other-regulation – learners' dependence on their teacher at the beginning of the term – to self-regulation – learners' reliance on their own listening abilities and be able to solve the grammar tasks individually.
5. It was also found that almost all the students seemed to initially have simplistic beliefs about grammar and were not interested in learning grammar since it was boring for them. After receiving the metacognitive listening intervention, nearly all the participants in the experimental group changed their beliefs about grammar learning.
6. Metacognition also played an important role in terms of activating learners' prior and background knowledge while doing a listening activity, which may result in their awareness raising of learning other language skills, and finally learners can reach



improvement in their grammar learning when they receive metacognitive listening instruction.

## **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of the study also suggest some productive and practical implications in terms of teaching and learning grammar through metacognitive listening instruction. The main practical implications include:

1. Metacognitive listening instruction should be recognized as an appropriate procedure to teach listening in private language institutes, which seems to be beneficial for both learners and teachers. Moreover, it can be applied at the service of teaching grammar, as a 'focus on form' approach in which the learners are involved in the context of meaningful interaction.
2. Findings suggest that metacognitive listening instruction can raise the learners' awareness regarding their simplistic beliefs at the beginning of the term and change them to more realistic beliefs about grammar learning over time.
3. In order to teach grammar efficiently, it would be better for teachers to be aware of the learners' beliefs about grammar learning at the beginning of the term, and make their best attempt to change those unrealistic beliefs on the way of grammar learning, and this goal seems to be achieved by metacognitive listening instruction.
4. Teachers are the first beneficiaries of the findings of the study. As teachers are always seeking new ways to foster communication, particularly in teaching grammar, metacognitive listening instruction can assist them to achieve their goals by directing the learners' attention to the target form while implicitly teaching listening, which makes the class more enjoyable for the learners.
5. Learners can also acquire linguistic forms in a rather different atmosphere through listening instruction. Since learners have always been complaining about teachers' methods of teaching grammar, and they would like to learn the rules interactively, metacognitive listening instruction seems to meet their needs by providing an interactive environment for the learners to learn the target form.
6. Finally, institutes, which are always concerned with teachers' awareness and understanding of new teaching methodologies, can hold some special teacher education programs to raise the teachers' awareness of metacognitive listening instruction and attract them toward its application in teaching grammar, which is another concern for both teachers and institutes and can be solved, to a large extent, by metacognitive listening instruction.

## REFERENCES

- Alanen, R. (2006). A sociocultural approach to young language learners' beliefs about language learning. In P. Kalaja and A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp. 55-86). Netherlands: Kluwer.
- Anderson, N. J. (2002). Using telescopes, microscopes, and kaleidoscopes to put metacognition into perspective. *TESOL Matters*, 12(4), 1-2.
- Barcelos, A. M. F. (2006) Researching beliefs about SLA: A critical review. In P. Kalaja and A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp. 7-33). Netherlands: Kluwer.
- Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford university press.
- Doughty, C, & Williams, J. (1998). Pedagogical choices in focus on form. In C. Doughty. & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 197-261). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental inquiry. *American Psychologist*, 34(10), 906-911.
- Goh, C. (1997). Metacognitive awareness and second language listeners. *ELT Journal*, 51(4), 361-369.
- Goh, C. (2002) Exploring listening comprehension tactics and their interaction patterns. *System*, 30, 185-206.
- Goh, C. (2008). Metacognitive instruction for second language listening development: Theory, practice and research implications. *RELC Journal*, 39(2), 188-213.
- Goh, C., & Taib, Y. (2006). Metacognitive instruction in listening for young learners. *ELT Journal*, 60(3), 222- 232.
- Long, M. (1983). Native speaker/non-native speaker conversation and the negotiation of comprehensible input. *Applied Linguistics*, 4, 126-141.
- Long, M. (1991). Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In K.de Bot, R. Ginsberg, & C. Kramsch (Eds.), *Foreign language research in cross-cultural perspective* (pp.39-52). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Nassaji, H. (2000). Towards integrating form-focused instruction and communicative interaction in the second language classroom: Some pedagogical possibilities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 84, 241-250.
- Nassaji, H., & Fotos, S. (2010). *Teaching grammar in second language classrooms: Integrating form-focused instruction in communicative context*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Prabhu, N. S. (1987). *Second language pedagogy*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Vandergrift, L. (2003). Orchestrating strategy use: Toward a model of the skilled second language listener. *Language Learning*, 53, 463-496.
- Vandergrift, L. (2004). Learning to listen or listening to learn? *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 3 - 25.
- Vandergrift, L. (2007). Recent developments in second and foreign language listening comprehension research. *Language Teaching*, 40, 191 - 210.

- Vandergrift, L., & Goh, C. (2012). *Teaching and learning second language listening: Metacognition in action*. New York: Rutledge.
- Vandergrift, L., & Tafaghodtari, M. H. (2010). Teaching students how to listen does make a difference: An empirical study. *Language Learning*, 60(2), 470 - 97.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society. The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Wenden, A. (1988). Metacognitive knowledge and language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(4), 515-537.
- Williams, J. (1999). Learner-generated attention to form. *Language Learning*, 49, 583-625.
- Yang, J-S. & Kim, T-Y. (2011). Sociocultural analysis of second language learner beliefs: A qualitative case study of two study-abroad ESL learners. *System*, 39(3), 325-334.