



# EFL Learners' Goal Orientation, Willingness to Communicate, Listening Anxiety, and Listening Comprehension Ability: Path Analysis

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## Abstract

This study investigated the interrelationship among EFL learners' goal orientations, willingness to communicate (WTC), listening anxiety, and listening comprehension. Two-hundred participants, selected through convenience sampling procedure from private language institutes, completed the following questionnaires: Goal Orientation Questionnaire section of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich et al., 1991), WTC Questionnaire (Cao & Philip, 2006), and Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (Kim, 2000). The listening section of the IELTS exam was also utilized for measuring the participants' listening comprehension ability. First, a hypothesized model was tested through the AMOS program. The results revealed that all the variables in the study were positively correlated with L2 listening comprehension except for L2 listening anxiety and performance goal orientation, which were negatively correlated with L2 listening comprehension. Moreover, it was found that mastery goal orientation was the strongest predictor of the dependent variable. Then, the revised model for the

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interrelationship among the variables was presented. The results showed that both psychological and cognitive variables could have crucial roles in EFL learners' success in learning listening comprehension ability. The implications of the study are discussed in the text.

**Keywords:** goal orientation, listening anxiety, listening comprehension, WTC

## **Introduction**

Listening comprehension is a fundamental skill in the process of language learning. It empowers learners to comprehend the spoken discourse of the target language and contributes to the development of other language skills (Rost, 2002). However, despite the complicated nature of listening comprehension, it has remained one of the most underexplored areas of investigation (Vandergrift, 2007).

Recently, researchers in the field of second language (L2) learning have focused on understanding the factors underpinning successful L2 listening comprehension (e.g., Wallace & Lee, 2020; Zhang & Zhang, 2020). According to Rubin (1994), there are five groups of factors that subserve L2 listening comprehension: Text characteristics, interlocutor characteristics, task characteristics, and listener characteristics as well as process characteristics. Considering the significance of learners' individual differences (ID) in L2 learning (Dörnyei, 2005), this study aims to explore learners' IDs in listening comprehension. Research in this area of inquiry has remained largely underexplored compared with studies on IDs in other skills, such as reading comprehension (Andringa et al., 2012). Still another factor that motivated us to conduct the current study was the fact that improving L2 listening comprehension has been shown to be quite challenging for EFL learners.

In the process of listening comprehension, several factors, including ID factors, such as goal orientation, WTC, and listening anxiety have been found to be influential (e.g., Ballesteros Muñoz & Tutistar Jojoa, 2014; Geitza et al., 2016; Zangoei & Derakhshan, 2021). Goal orientation, in particular, has shown to be an essential factor in academic performance (Hulleman et al., 2010) that might illuminate psychological processes that generate achievement behavior. It can also encourage educators to develop proper practices in the classrooms to

promote the learning process. In fact, goal orientation in its hierarchical conceptualization has been defined by Elliot and Church (1997) as, “cognitive-dynamic manifestations of two underlying competence-relevant motives – the need for achievement and the need to avoid failure” (p. 219).

Also, WTC has been identified to be the first priority over other goals of language instruction (MacIntyre et al., 1998) because higher levels of WTC help language learners to interact more, and thus this increased interaction leads to the development of language learning (Kang, 2005; Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008). In conceptualizing WTC, McCroskey and Baer (1985) made a distinction between trait level and situational level WTC. The trait level WTC indicates individuals' stable personalities without any change in different contexts, while the situational level WTC is considered to be a situation-specific factor that is based on a specific context that fluctuates in various situations (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Among various ID factors involved in L2 listening comprehension, listening anxiety in particular seems to have been of paramount importance (Gregersen, 2005; Oxford, 1999) and the relationships between listening anxiety and listening comprehension have been of concern for decades. However, regarding the relationship between listening anxiety and listening comprehension, contradictory results have been observed (Xu & Huang, 2018; Wang & Cha, 2019; Liu & Yuan, 2021; Zhou, 2021). Zhang (2013) suggested that such discrepant findings could be attributed to the situation-specific nature of listening anxiety.

One of the merits of the present study that distinguishes it from previous studies is that while the majority of previous relevant studies are simple correlational studies in nature, the current study employed SEM, which is a more sophisticated statistical technique for data analysis. This is particularly important since advanced statistical modeling techniques can better reveal the underlying structural interrelationships among ID variables and listening comprehension ability.

Still more, only a limited number of previous studies have investigated the simultaneous correlation among the aforementioned variables with EFL

learners' listening comprehension abilities. Thus, the general purpose of this study was to fill this gap and to explore the potential association of EFL learners' goal-orientation, WTC, and listening anxiety with listening comprehension using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

## **Literature Review**

### ***Goal Orientation***

Achievement goal is an important factor in academic performance and has been taken into serious account in educational research (Hulleman et al., 2010). This concept has been defined and classified by several researchers. For instance, Hulleman et al. (2010) defined it as "a future-focused cognitive representation that guides behavior to a competence-related end state that the individual is committed to either approach or avoid" (p. 423). There are two main types of goals that individuals pursue in any learning environment: mastery goals and performance goals (Ames & Ames, 1984). A mastery goal is pertinent to the individuals' tendency to master new skills and develop their competence. However, students with performance goals try to present their competence to other individuals. Elliot and McGregor (2001) further proposed a multifaceted approach to goal orientation in which mastery goal orientation is divided into mastery approach and mastery avoidance. Similarly, Elliot and Trash (2001) suggested a  $2 \times 2$  conceptualization, i.e., mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals. Mastery-approach goal orientation refers to trying to enhance skills, abilities, and learning while mastery-avoidance goal orientation prevents a decline in skill. Likewise, performance-approach goal orientation refers to the demonstration of higher ability to others while performance-avoidance goal orientation prevents worse performance (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

Totally, it can be claimed that goal orientation is the primary lens through which teachers can observe students' progress (Meece et al., 2006). Goal orientation is also regarded as an essential factor in determining tasks for learners (Geitza et al., 2016). According to Geitza et al. (2016), when assigning

learning tasks to students, teachers should consider students' goal orientation for obtaining skill and knowledge since it is one of the crucial conditions for effective learning.

To explore the relationship between SMART goal setting (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based) and learning English regarding foreign language learners' self-efficacy belief in listening, Ballesteros Muñoz and Tutistar Jojoa (2014) studied seventh and ninth grade students of two schools in Colombia. The findings of the study illustrated that self-efficacy was highly linked to goal setting, which, in turn, improved learners' listening comprehension and motivation; therefore, it was recommended that goal setting training be incorporated into the EFL learners' syllabi.

Moreover, employing a sample of 88 university students, Pulkka and Niemivirta (2013) examined the correlation among goal orientations, course evaluations and performance. The results obtained from their study indicated that there was a positive relationship between mastery-intrinsic goal orientation and students' course evaluations. However, no significant correlation between mastery-intrinsic goal orientation and performance was revealed. It was also found that performance-approach orientation had a negative correlation with students' course evaluations. In sum, their study found that goal orientations influenced both course evaluations and performance.

More recently, Karbakhsh and Ahmadi Safa (2020) explored the association of the structural patterns of cognitive and psychological factors, such as basic psychological needs satisfaction, goal-orientation, WTC, learning strategy use and self-efficacy with L2 achievement. The findings revealed a correlation between goal orientation, learning strategy use, self-efficacy, and L2 achievement. Additionally, goal orientation was found to be the strongest predictor of L2 achievement. In another study, Fang et al. (2019) investigated the effect of performance goal orientation on competence restoration. The results revealed that performance-oriented individuals had lower autonomous motivation to fulfill the task. This finding indicates that higher performance-oriented individuals might prevent competence restoration. Moreover, Magni

et al. (2021) explored the correlation between goal orientation and performance and self-efficacy as a mediator of the reciprocal relationship. The findings revealed positive reciprocal correlations between goal orientation and performance and that self-efficacy moderated the related reciprocal relationship.

Also, Janke (2022) explored the association of basic psychological needs with the development of learning goal orientation through a longitudinal survey study. Parallel-process modeling showed stable associations between need satisfaction and students' learning goal orientations.

### ***Willingness to Communicate (WTC)***

WTC has been defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). L1WTC is claimed to be a stable construct, whereas L2WTC is said to be a flexible one that constantly changes (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). L2WTC is generally under the influence of communicative competence and communicative apprehension. Communicative competence is pertinent to an individual's own self-confidence in L2 communication which has a strong positive relationship with WTC (Öz, et al., 2015). Communicative apprehension, on the other hand, is related to the level of anxiety in the process of L2 communication which is negatively correlated with WTC (Yashima, 2012).

Although WTC itself might be affected by other variables like types of feedback (Ghahari & Piruznejad, 2016), it could play a key role in the ability to communicate in L2 learning. In the field of L2 learning research, WTC has been extensively studied as an essential factor that is involved in the L2 learning process (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Bernales (2016), for instance, did a mixed-method investigation to explore a more extensive understanding of students' WTC in the classroom. He collected data through a survey questionnaire, classroom observation, and an interview with students for 15 weeks. The statistical analysis showed that the average percentages for TRC-P (thoughts related to the class that students predicted they would articulate) increased while the average percentages for TRC-A (thoughts related to the class that students reported to have articulated) decreased from classroom

meeting 1 to classroom meeting 4. The results of the qualitative analysis showed that a decrease in the articulation of classroom-related thoughts might be associated with the increase in the reported articulation of thoughts in the L2. In other words, the increase in L2 articulation during the semester was attributed to L2 speaking goals and self-confidence.

Additionally, Zangoei and Derakhshan (2021) studied the role of language proficiency, self-regulated learning in listening (SRL), and WTC in Pragmatic Listening Comprehension (PLC). In order to conduct the study, a group of 269 upper-intermediate and advanced level Iranian EFL learners were requested to answer the 40-item pragmatic multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT), as well as the valid and reliable questionnaires of SRL and WTC. The findings indicated that PLC was significantly correlated with language proficiency, SRL, and WTC. Also, these findings were confirmed in the path analysis model that indicated language proficiency, SRL, and WTC were significantly predicted PLC.

However, in another study carried out by Joe et al. (2017) to investigate the correlation among the social climate of the classroom, motivation, WTC, and L2 achievement, it was shown that L2 achievement could not be predicted by WTC. Furthermore, Zhou et al. (2020) focused on the correlation between L2 competence and WTC on the one hand, and the moderating effect of foreign language anxiety (FLA) on the relationship between L2 competence and WTC on the other hand. The results showed that there was a strong correlation between L2 competence and WTC and that FLA moderated the relationship between WTC and L2 competence. In the Iranian context, Mahmoodi and Moazam (2014) investigated the association of WTC and L2 proficiency among Iranian students learning Arabic as a foreign language and showed that there was a significant correlation between participants' Arabic proficiency levels and their WTC.

Additionally, Wang et al. (2021) investigated the structural correlation between class social climate, language mindset, academic emotions (i.e., enjoyment, pride, anxiety, and boredom), and L2WTC in and out of classroom. The findings showed that the effects of classroom social climate on L2WTC

were mediated by the four academic emotions (i.e., enjoyment, pride, anxiety, and boredom). Soyoo (2022) also explored factors that have influenced Iranian EFL learners' WTC in an extramural digital (ED) context through interview. In this study, four broad sources, including educational practices, interpersonal variables, affective variables, and social variable were all found as factors influencing students' L2WTC.

### ***Listening Anxiety***

Foreign Language Anxiety is defined as "...fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language" (Oxford, 1999, p. 59). Additionally, it is possible to define L2 anxiety with reference to the language skills, i.e. reading, writing, etc. Although listening plays a crucial role in achieving mutual understanding because one cannot sustain a conversation without understanding what s/he is being said, listening may also lead to high levels of anxiety. Krashen (1985) states that listening is often referred to as an anxiety-provoking skill, particularly when the text is incomprehensible to the listener. Accordingly, L2 listening anxiety is the listener's apprehension and uneasiness as a result of not being able to understand what has been uttered during the listening process (Tayşi, 2019).

In an attempt to detect the source of listening anxiety, Vogely (1998) conducted research and found that listening anxiety appeared to be correlated with the types of listening input, listening process (strategies and time), and instructional factors (in-class practices and test). Furthermore, the sources of listening anxiety might be attributed to the problematic nature of listening, including level of difficulty, nature of the speech, lack of visual support, lack of repetition, lack of clarity, spontaneous speech, fast speech, and unfamiliar accents (Vogely, 1998). Different factors, such as listening materials, learners' listening abilities, and teachers may also affect listening anxiety (Pan, 2016).

It is a common belief among L2 teachers and learners that listening anxiety can also affect overall L2 performance. Regarding the impact of anxiety on foreign language learning, there are two types of anxiety, i.e., facilitative and debilitating. Facilitative anxiety can motivate learners while debilitating can disrupt language learning process (Zhang & Zhong, 2012).



Recruiting 402 Chinese EFL test-takers and using path analysis to analyze their data, Xu and Huang (2018) explored the mediating effect of listening metacognitive awareness from listening anxiety to listening test score, as well as from test anxiety to listening test score. The result of the study showed that listening metacognitive awareness mediated the structural path from listening anxiety to listening test score, as well as from test anxiety to listening test score. Also, it was found that listening metacognitive awareness mediated between listening anxiety and listening test score in the low listening proficiency group but it did not mediate the relationship between test anxiety and listening test score in both groups. Furthermore, Wang and Cha (2019) conducted a study to investigate the effects of foreign language listening anxiety (FLLA) on listening performance in both low and high-proficient EFL listeners on a sample of 39 participants. The results indicated that listening anxiety and the (lack of) self-belief were strong predictors of poor listeners. However, FLLA could not predict the high-proficient group's listening performance. In another study, Liu and Yuan (2021) investigated the effects of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and listening anxiety (FLLA) on Chinese undergraduate students' English proficiency over a semester in the COVID-19 context. The results revealed that FLCA and FLLA were positively correlated and significantly related to students' self-rated proficiency in listening and speaking English.

### ***Purpose of the Study and Research Questions***

Considering the reviewed literature, and motivated by the dearth of research investigating the simultaneous interrelationship among goal orientations, WTC, listening anxiety, and listening comprehension, the present study aimed at investigating the relationship among these variables on Iranian EFL learners, using a path analysis method. Therefore, the current study was guided by the following 4 research questions:

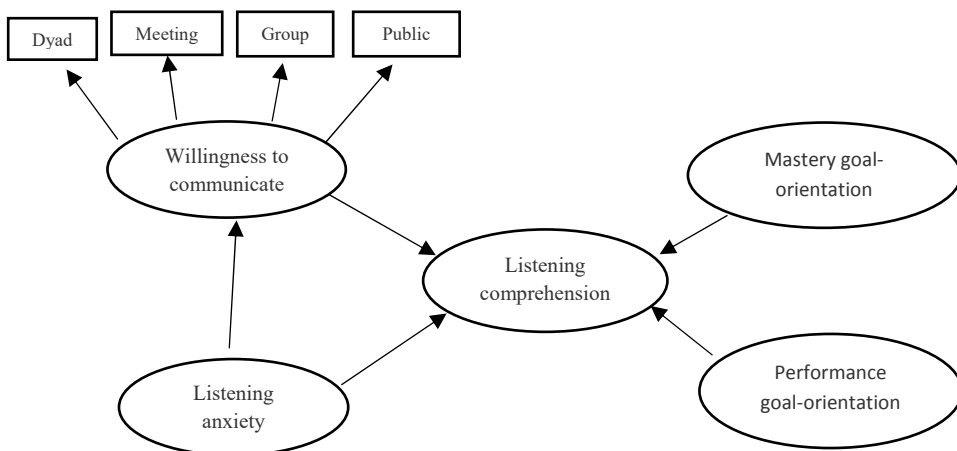
1. Do goal orientations (mastery and performance) significantly predict L2 listening comprehension ability?
2. Do WTC and its subcomponents significantly predict L2 listening comprehension ability?

3. Does level of listening anxiety significantly predict L2 listening comprehension ability?
4. What is a valid model of the interrelationship between these variables and L2 listening comprehension ability?

In order to investigate the relationship between the above-mentioned variables, first, a model was proposed based on the previous research findings. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that mastery and performance goal orientations would predict EFL learners' listening comprehension (Karbakhsh & Ahmadi Safa, 2020; Magni et al., 2021). It was also hypothesized that individuals with higher WTC would have higher levels of listening comprehension ability. Additionally, on the basis of the findings of Elkhafaifi (2005) and Karakus' (2019), listening anxiety was predicted to be closely related to listening comprehension. The hypothesized model and the causal paths among the variables under investigation are depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure.1**

*The Hypothesized Model for the Relationship between Goal Orientation, WTC, Anxiety, and Listening Comprehension*



## Methodology

### *Participants*

Two hundred intermediate EFL learners studying English at different private language institutes in Kerman and Hamadan provinces participated in

the study. The participants included both females ( $N=135$ ) and males ( $N=65$ ) and their ages ranged from 14 to 22 ( $M=18.6$ ). The participants were selected through convenience sampling procedure. The majority of the participants spoke Persian as their first language and had a mean of 2.5 years of experience in studying English as a foreign language in private language institutes. Prior to their participation, all the participants signed an informed consent form to participate in the study.

### ***Instruments***

**The Goal Orientation Scale.** The Goal Orientations Scale was adopted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) developed by Pintrich et al. (1991). This scale consists of 4 items for Intrinsic (corresponding to mastery type) and 4 items for Extrinsic (corresponding to performance type) Goal Orientations (Pintrich et al., 1991). All the responses are on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (very true of me). The total score for each type of goal orientation scale is calculated by adding up the score of each individual item. As for the reliability of the questionnaire, Pintrich et al., (1991) estimated the Cronbach alpha reliability which turned out to be .90. Regarding the validity of the questionnaire, an  $X^2/df$  ratio of less than 5 indicated a good fit and acceptable validity. Kwan and Wong (2015) also estimated Cronbach alpha coefficients for each of the intrinsic and extrinsic goal orientations which turned out to be .80 and .76, respectively, showing a high level of internal consistency.

**The WTC Scale.** The participants' WTC was measured by a questionnaire consisting of 25 items developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1991). Based on the communication context, WTC has four subcomponents: WTC in public, meeting, group or dyad situations. The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire, as computed by Cronbach's Alpha, was .91. As for its validity, the questionnaire was validated by McCroskey (1992) who reported an acceptable content and construct validity.

**The Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS).** The FLLAS, developed by Kim (2000), consists of 33 items to be answered on a five-point Likert-scale. The scores in the FLLAS ranged from 33 to 165, with higher scores

indicating higher levels of listening anxiety. The internal consistency reliability of the scale, as calculated by Cronbach's Alpha, was .93. The scale also enjoys a high level of validity as measured by some previous studies (e.g., Wang, 2010; Wu, 2011).

**The Listening Comprehension Test.** To measure the participants' listening comprehension ability, the listening section of the IELTS exam by Cambridge ESOL was employed. This test, comprising of 40 items, measures learners' listening comprehension level in English. It is a well-reputed test whose validity has already been established.

### ***Procedure***

First, the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were requested to sign a written consent form. Then, the questionnaires and the listening test were administered to the participants in two class sessions. In the first session, the participants took the goal orientation, WTC, and the listening anxiety questionnaires. After the distribution of the questionnaires, the procedures for completing the questionnaires were spelled out in detail to the participants. In the second session, the participants sat only for the listening test. After the data collection procedure, the hypothesized model was tested by the AMOS 24 statistical package program.

## **Results**

### ***Descriptive Statistics***

As for the preliminary analyses, descriptive statistics and the correlations between the variables were calculated, the results of which are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Data*

	Mastery goal	Performance goal	WTC	public	Group	Meeting	dyad	Listening anxiety	Listening comprehension
N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Mean	25.49	6.9	75.93	88.26	70.33	90.01	55.12	71.88	20.16
Std. Deviation	5.21	1.31	22.32	18.7	15.73	28.65	4.82	7.56	6.26

Table 1 displays the number of the participants, the mean score, and the standard deviation for all of the variables and their subcomponents.

### **Correlational Analyses**

Eight Pearson Product Moment Correlations were run to test the correlations among the variables of the study, the results of which are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*The Relationship among EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension and Other Variables*

		Listening comprehension
Mastery goal orientation	Pearson Correlation	.34**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	200
Performance goal orientation	Pearson Correlation	-.13*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.02
	N	200
WTC	Pearson Correlation	.32**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	200
WTC in public	Pearson Correlation	.29**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	200
WTC in group	Pearson Correlation	.13*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.02
	N	200
WTC in a meeting	Pearson Correlation	.20**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	200
WTC with peers	Pearson Correlation	.12*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.04
	N	200
Listening anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.37**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	200

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 2, the results of Pearson correlation indicated that the participants' mastery goal orientation was found to be associated with their listening comprehension ability ( $r=.34, p<.05$ ). On the other hand, performance goal orientation and listening comprehension ability were negatively correlated ( $r=-.13, p<.05$ ). The pattern of correlation between WTC and listening comprehension was also in the expected direction ( $r=.32, p<.05$ ). Moreover, the results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicated that subcategories of WTC correlated positively with listening comprehension ( $r=.29, r=.13, r=.20, r=.12, p<.05$ ). Additionally, the correlation between listening anxiety and listening comprehension was found to be negative ( $r=-.37, p<.05$ ). As noted below Table 3, all of the correlation indices were statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Moreover, to examine the relationship between listening anxiety and WTC, Pearson Correlation was used (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*The Correlation between Listening Anxiety and WTC*

		WTC
Listening anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.08
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.11
	N	200

As is evident in Table 3, the correlation between Listening Anxiety and WTC was not significant at 0.05 level ( $r=-0.08$ ).

In order to test the proposed model, and to evaluate the fitness of the data in path analysis, AMOS Program was run and a range of goodness-of-fit indices were calculated. To do so, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Normed Fit Index (NNFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the  $\chi^2$  test statistic, and an evaluation of parameter estimates were employed, the results of which are displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Goodness of Fit Indices*

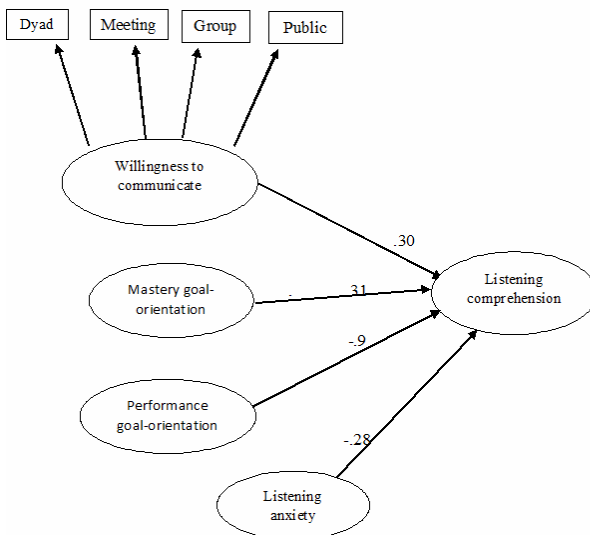
	X2/df	IFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable fit	<3	>.90	>.90	>.90	<.08
Model	8.37	.90	.88	.92	.19

As Table 4 indicates, the results revealed that Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.92, Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.88, Bollen’s Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.90, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .19, and  $\chi^2/df = 8.37$ . According to Schreiber, et al. (2006), Chi-square/*df* ratio must be lower than 3, the Normed Fit Index (NFI), the Good Fit Index (GFI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) must be greater than .90, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) must be below .08.

As can be seen from Table 4, some of the fit indices of the hypothesized model are beyond the appropriate range. Therefore, the model needs some revision (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Results of Testing the Hypothesized Model*



As represented in Figure 2, all the variables under investigation were associated with listening comprehension (mastery goal orientation= .31, performance goal orientation= -.09, WTC= .30, and listening anxiety = -.28, respectively), with the mastery goal orientation being the strongest predictor ( $r^2=.31$ ) of listening comprehension. However, the model still needs improvement.

To show a valid model of listening comprehension, the non-significant paths were deleted and the fit indices were checked again. The results are represented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

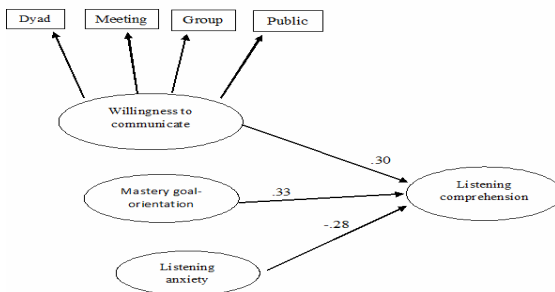
*Modification Process of the Structural Model*

Fit index	$\chi^2/df$	IFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Base Model	8.415	.90	.89	.93	.21
Revised model	2.67	.95	.92	.94	.09
Acceptable range	<3	>.90	>.90	>.90	<0.08

As illustrated in Table 5, the final model illustrates a very good fit. The modified model and the fit indices provided a better model than the initial model (the comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.94, Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .0.92, Bollen's Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.95, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .09, and  $\chi^2/df = 2.67$ ). Therefore, the model represented in Figure 3 is our final standardized model.

**Figure 3**

*The Final Standardized Model.*





## Discussion

The first research question in the present study investigated whether listening comprehension could be predicted by the mastery and performance goal orientations. Consistent with our predictions, SEM analysis revealed a significant correlation between mastery goal orientation and listening comprehension. A possible explanation for this result could best be provided by VandeWalle (1997) who stated that individuals with mastery goal orientation try to progress by developing new skills, mastering new situations, and increasing their competence. As already mentioned, a review of the previous literature indicated that mastery goal orientation was one of the most important factors that could positively influence students' listening comprehension (Karbakhsh & Ahmadi Safa, 2020; Magni et al., 2021; Pulkka & Niemivirta, 2013; Roebken, 2007). Similarly, consistent with the findings of the previous studies, the results of the present study also showed that mastery goal orientation was the best predictor of listening comprehension ability.

As for second research question which concerned whether listening comprehension could be predicted by WTC and its components, the results revealed a significant path from WTC to listening comprehension. Similarly, among the components of WTC, WTC in public and WTC in group were found to be stronger predictors of listening comprehension. These findings are compatible with the findings of MacIntyre and Doucette (2010) who found a negative correlation between action control theory and WTC. The findings of the present study are also consistent with Mahmoodi and Moazam (2014) and Zhou et al. (2020), which showed that L2 achievement could be predicted by WTC. However, the results of the study are not consistent with the findings of Joe et al. (2017) and Karbakhsh and Ahmadi Safa (2020) who found no correlation between WTC and language learning.

The third research question investigated whether listening comprehension could be predicted by listening anxiety. As SEM analysis revealed, listening comprehension was negatively correlated with listening anxiety. Therefore, as predicted, high levels of anxiety might be considered an impediment to students' listening comprehension ability. This finding is

consistent with the previous findings in the literature which, almost unanimously, have shown an inverse relationship between L2 anxiety and L2 learning. This finding also resonates with Zhang (2013), who showed that listening anxiety could influence FL listening performance but FL listening performance did not seem to systematically affect FL listening anxiety. Similarly, the result of the study is compatible with the findings of Wang and Cha (2019) who found that listening anxiety was associated with listening comprehension, especially for less proficient learners.

The final model of the study showed that among the variables (mastery and performance goal orientations, WTC, listening anxiety, and listening comprehension) and the subcomponents of WTC, all the variables, including the subcomponents were positively and significantly associated with L2 listening comprehension except for L2 listening anxiety and performance goal orientation, which were negatively correlated with L2 listening comprehension. Regarding the direct influence of the mastery goal orientation and WTC on listening comprehension, the findings are compatible with a number of studies that support our findings (e.g., Janke, 2022; Karbakhsh & Ahmadi Safa, 2020; Kilmen, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Also, regarding the indirect influence of performance goal orientation on listening comprehension, the findings are supported by a number previous studies such as Fang et al. (2019), Pulkka and Niemivirta (2013), and Roebken (2007). With respect to the role of listening anxiety which was negatively associated with listening comprehension, a number of previous studies confirm our findings. Furthermore, the results are in harmony with the findings of Wang and Cha (2019) who found that listening anxiety and the (lack of) self-belief significantly predicted listening comprehension. Moreover, Zhou (2021) reported a significant correlation between listening anxiety and listening strategy use. Additionally, Xu and Huang (2018) found the mediating role of listening metacognitive awareness from listening anxiety to listening test score as well as from test anxiety to listening test score.

Due to the complex interplay between ID factors, it should be mentioned that establishing any links between the factors investigated in this

study and L2 listening comprehension is immature at this point. This means that these factors should be interpreted in light of other key ID factors such as motivation and other personality factors, which might interfere while learning an L2. This is especially true for establishing any relationship between L2WTC and L2 listening since WTC itself might be affected by other factors, such as topic, context, motivation, personality factors, etc. For example, according to Dörnyei (2005), the interlocutor's motivation was found to be closely linked to the speaking interaction created by the individuals. This underscores the significance of the interlocutors in shaping the level of motivation and WTC in individuals, especially in classroom pair works in which an individual's level of WTC might be affected by the composition of the groups or pairs in which they are a member. Or, for example, motivation itself might be affected by individuals' level of anxiety which might, in turn, be affected by other factors such as the level of language course, language skills, and proficiency (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991; Young, 1990). Therefore, the identification of other factors that affect WTC, anxiety, and goal orientations, both in positive and negative ways, will help us to present more developed models of not only L2 production but also L2 comprehension. Knowing the relationship between these ID factors can also help us to disentangle the relative effect of each ID factor on L2 listening comprehension. Therefore, the model that we have presented for L2 listening comprehension is open to revision and can be developed if other ID factors underlying the model are discovered and added to the model.

## **Conclusion**

The present study investigated the predictive power of several individual factors on the listening comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. The findings revealed significant correlation between mastery goal orientation, WTC, WTC in public, WTC in group, listening anxiety and listening comprehension. Moreover, mastery goal orientation was found to be the strongest predictor of the participants' listening comprehension. It seems reasonable, therefore, to claim that the type of goal orientation, especially mastery goal orientation, is a crucial factor in success in the process of L2

listening comprehension. It can also be concluded that one of the effective factors in L2 learning is L2 learners' willingness to participate in communication in the foreign language and consequently, one of the challenges facing EFL teachers is implementing WTC in EFL classrooms. Since the advent of the Communicative Language Teaching, WTC has been regarded as one of the major goals of L2 pedagogy because it positively affects L2 learners' communicative competence. Nevertheless, although the significance of WTC is evident, some additional variables that might underlie the enhancement of this yet-to-be known construct need to be investigated more. The inclusion of WTC to L2 literature is increasingly gaining momentum as the importance of authentic communication is recognized as an integral part of L2 instruction. Furthermore, this study revealed that L2 listening anxiety, as another ID factor, has a significant role to play in L2 listening comprehension.

The first implication of the study is for EFL teachers. One way that teachers can benefit from the findings of the present study is to encourage mastery goal orientation in L2 learners, cultivate their goal-directed teaching, create a low anxiety atmosphere in EFL classrooms, and try to enhance learners' WTC. Syllabus designers are also suggested to design an appropriate syllabus based on learners' goals and the factors that have an impact on learners' anxiety and motivation. The most important implication of the present study for EFL learners is that they are strongly suggested to set goals, especially mastery goals in contrast to performance goals, for their learning since goal-setting has a strong relationship with their L2 attainment, at least as far as the findings of the present study are concerned. Moreover, EFL learners are suggested to try to control their anxiety level by adopting some communication strategies like getting engaged in online communication. This can also be a step toward enhancing their WTC. In sum, this study suggests that in cases where the major goal of foreign language learning is developing communicative competence, the recognition of factors that both improve (i.e. WTC) and impede (i.e. listening anxiety) the development of this complicated competence is of paramount importance. Finally, it should be acknowledged that there are several limitations in this study that adversely affect its findings.

The first limitation was the fact that the study was conducted with 200 participants from private language institutes. Therefore, the sample is not representative of all EFL learners and thus the findings need to be treated cautiously as far as generalizability is concerned. The second limitation was that since the study does not have an experimental design and cannot claim causality, establishing any causal link among the variables under investigation must be interpreted with caution.

Since, in the present study, the data were collected only by self-report questionnaires, prospective researchers are strongly suggested to use qualitative methods of investigation such as observation and interview to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Furthermore, to claim any generalizability, it is suggested that future researchers replicate the present study in a wider range of EFL contexts with participants from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds.

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