Low vs. High Proficiency Students' Attitudes Toward Academic Optimism Regarding the Use of Mobile Phones for Listening Instruction: A Mixed Methods Study[1]

Sara Afzali[2], Neda Hedayat[3], Neda Gharagozloo[4]
Department of English Language, VaP.C., Islamic Azad University, Varamin, Iran

Abstract

In recent years, academic optimism (AO) has emerged as a significant variable that can positively influence students' learning outcomes. On the other hand, mobile assisted language learning (MALL) is now considered significant to education work around world. However, little research has explored students' AO in MALL contexts. The current study explored Iranian high and low proficiency students' AO in relation to listening comprehension in the context of MALL. Data were collected using quantitative and qualitative instruments such as questionnaires and interviews. The quantitative analysis of the data revealed that first, AO and MALL-driven listening were positively correlated and second, high proficiency students had more positive attitudes toward MALL in relation to their AO. The analysis of qualitative data indicated that proficiency level played a significant role in the students' perceptions with high-proficiency students being more AO-oriented than the low proficiency students. The study concludes with implications for teachers and students in developing students' AO and listening comprehension, especially in MALL contexts.

Resumen

En los últimos años, el optimismo académico (AO) ha emergido como una variable significativa que puede influir positivamente en los resultados de aprendizaje de los estudiantes. Por otro lado, el aprendizaje de idiomas asistido por dispositivos móviles (MALL) ahora se considera importante para el trabajo educativo en todo el mundo. Sin embargo, poca investigación ha explorado el AO del estudiante en contextos MALL. El estudio actual exploró el AO del estudiante iraní de alto y bajo dominio en relación con la comprensión auditiva en el contexto de MALL. Los datos se recopilaron utilizando instrumentos cuantitativos y cualitativos como cuestionarios y entrevistas. El análisis cuantitativo de los datos reveló que, en primer lugar, el AO y la escucha impulsada por MALL estaban correlacionados positivamente y, en segundo lugar, los estudiantes de alto dominio tenían actitudes más positivas hacia MALL en relación con su AO. El análisis de los datos cualitativos indicó que el nivel de dominio jugó un papel significativo en las percepciones de los estudiantes, ya que los estudiantes de alto dominio estaban más orientados al AO que los estudiantes de bajo dominio. El estudio concluye con implicaciones para los maestros y estudiantes en el desarrollo del AO y la comprensión auditiva de los estudiantes, especialmente en contextos MALL.

Introduction

Academic Optimism (AO) is defined by Hoy et al. (2006) as a collective set of beliefs regarding the strengths, capabilities, and potential achievements of an educational community. Optimism acts as the overarching component that aligns collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust within the learning environment. Including this construct at the core of instructional processes allows learners to develop higher confidence and more goal-directed engagement, particularly in language learning contexts. These three components have been considered central to improving student learning outcomes by specifically drawing on the potentials of students, teachers, and parents even in circumstances that bear low socioeconomic statuses (e.g., Galindo & Sanders, 2021; Horner et al., 2019; Hoy et al., 2006). Central to this line of research is how collective efforts come to define students' achievement. Hoy et al. (2006) emphasized that context is a key determinant in shaping students' academic achievement, particularly across different levels of proficiency and skill development**.** Given the importance of listening in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) environments, it is essential to understand how learners perceive this skill. Moreover, examining these perceptions through the lens of proficiency levels provides deeper insight into how students experience and benefit from mobile-based listening.

One such context that has gained mounting recognition over the past decade is the rise of online learning supported by (MALL) (Lin & Lin, 2019; Xodabande et al., 2022; Xodabande & Atai, 2020; Zakian et al., 2022). MALL has redefined the mode and content of students' learning as students are provided with learning opportunities that can enable them to reformulate their personalized understandings and the skills they develop (Colpaert, 2020; Nazari & Xodabande, 2020, 2021). In this vein, a skill that has

[1] This is a refereed article. Received: 22 July, 2022. Accepted: 29 August, 2023. Published: 30 January, 2026.
[2] saraafzali.af@gmail.com
[3] nhedayatins@yahoo.com, Neda.Hedayat@iau.ac.ir, Correspondent.
[4] Neda.Gharagozloo@iau.ac.ir

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

received increased attention is listening comprehension (Elahifar et al., 2022; Ghorbanpour et al., 2021; Marashi & Khaksar, 2013; Najafi Sarem & Marashi, 2020), especially in online contexts (Faramarzi et al., 2019; Wise & Hsiao, 2019). Despite these advancements, little research has examined how students view AO in MALL contexts, especially how proficiency mediates their perceptions in regard to listening comprehension. This line of research is significant since by understanding how proficiency defines students' AO perceptions in relation to listening, teachers can employ strategies that help them increase their proficiency and enhance their achievement more effectively.

Given the significance of listening in MALL contexts in using different technological devices, it is helpful to see how students view this skill in MALL contexts, more importantly in light of their proficiency levels. Similarly, it has constantly been argued that AO is contingent upon contextual descriptions of education; (Hoy et al., 2006; Galindo & Sanders, 2021); thus, exploring how students view AO in relation to their listening abilities rises to mounting prominence. This exploration helps teachers and students better understand how students view the role of AO in their listening comprehension and specifically in MALL contexts, which are prevalent in different contexts these days. Against this background, the current study explored high and low proficiency Iranian EFL students' attitudes toward AO in the context of MALL and in relation to listening comprehension. The following questions were formulated for the study:

1. Is there any significant difference between high and low proficiency students' attitudes toward academic optimism in the context of listening comprehension using mobile assisted language learning ?
2. Is there any relationship between attitudes towards academic optimism and listening-related perceptions of mobile assisted language learning among Iranian EFL learners?
3. How do the students view academic optimism when using mobile assisted language learning in listening comprehension?

Review of Literature

Academic Optimism (AO)

AO has been discussed as an important factor in increasing student learning outcomes. By its focus on the three components of academic emphasis, faculty trust, and collective efficacy, AO builds primarily on Seligman's (1999) argument that optimism plays as important a role as motivation and talent in student achievement. Hoy et al. (2006) argued that AO includes the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of achievement and development, and describes the relationship among these three components as: "Collective efficacy is a group belief or expectation, it is cognitive. Faculty trust in parents and students is an affective response. Academic emphasis is the push for particular behaviors in the school" (p. 431). These three components collectively form the foundation of Academic Optimism as defined by Hoy et al. (2006). Such a perspective means that AO includes the whole range of students' educational performances by drawing on individual and collective factors that shape their achievement and development.

Since the beginning, AO has been the focus of a large number of studies in relation to students (Hamedinasab & Asgari, 2020; Marcos et al., 2021; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Smith & Hoy, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013). Hamedinasab and Asgari (2020) explored the connection between AO and achievement motivation in 2520 Iranian students with the mediating role of their self-efficacy. The study findings revealed that AO had a direct and significant role in the students' self-efficacy and achievement motivation. In another study, Smith and Hoy (2007) investigated the connection between AO and student achievement of 99 US students. Data analyses showed that AO significantly predicted the students' achievement. Moreover, Marcos et al. (2019) explored principal and teachers' views on the effectiveness of AO in student achievement. The results of the study showed that both principals and teachers placed significant emphasis on the effective role of AO in students' learning outcomes. However, there are few studies that have explored students' perspectives and attitudes toward AO, especially in MALL contexts.

MALL listening comprehension

Over the past few decades, MALL technologies have reshaped most of the learning aims, and outcomes across different contexts. Research on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL)shows that mobile devices are effective in student learning because they can help students engage in self-learning across many contexts (Colpaert, 2020). Among the many uses mobile devices provide learners, listening comprehension has gained particularly increasing attention. It has been argued that students can draw

devices like earphones, iPods, and others to enhance their listening comprehension (Abdi & Makiabadi, 2019; Liu et al., 2014; Ono et al., 2015). For example, in an action research study, Xu (2020) explored 61 Chinese students' views on the use of mobile devices for listening instruction. The findings of the study showed that after applying the action research project, the students' attitudes became more positive.

In another study, Al-Shamsi et al. (2020) explored 31 Omani students' attitudes toward the use of mobile instruments on their listening comprehension as well as the factors that impeded their effective use. The participants were divided into two control and experimental groups and received strategy-based instruction in using mobile apparatuses for listening comprehension. The results of the study showed that the experimental group's attitudes oriented toward more positive views after the instruction. These findings were also corroborated by Chang et al. (2020) and Islam and Hassan (2020) in regard to the effectiveness of these devices for developing students' listening comprehension. However, all of the studies discussed have argued that more research is needed to explore students' attitudes more.

Research has indicated that level of proficiency plays a determining role in students' listening comprehension (e.g., Humaidah, 2021; Wang & Cha, 2019). For example, Humaidah (2021) explored the learning styles of 50 high and low proficiency students in relation to their listening comprehension at the University of Islam Malang. Collecting data from a learning styles questionnaire, the researcher found that there was no significant difference between high and low proficiency students' listening comprehension skills. Moreover, Wang and Cha (2019) investigated how 30 high and low proficiency students' listening were influenced by foreign language listening anxiety. The analysis of data showed that the low proficiency students' listening comprehension was negatively influenced by anxiety in comparison to high proficiency students whose self-belief was determining in their becoming less affected by anxiety.

Method

Design

The current study used a parallel convergent mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Hashemi & Babaii, 2013), in which the researcher "concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative elements in the same phase of the research process, weighs the methods equally, analyzes the two components independently, and interprets the results together" (Demir & Pismek, 2018, p. 123). The underlying rationale for using this design was "to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic" (Morse, 1991, p. 122) which contributed to better understanding of the research problem. In this regard, the study was conducted in quantitative (using questionnaires) and qualitative (interview) phases to triangulate findings from different sources.

Participants

The participants of the study were 155 adult English language learners selected based their availability in the context of the study. More specifically, the participants were recruited from four state-run universities in Tehran, Iran. The mean age of the participants was 23, and 95% were B.A. students in non-English majors. The proficiency levels of the participants were elementary (46%) and advanced (54%) as determined by the Cambridge quick placement test (Test Your English, 2022) based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) benchmarks. With respect to previous language learning experience, 85% of the participants reported studying English for five years. Additionally, 3.2% had five to ten years of experience, and 11.6% had more than ten. Finally, regarding online language learning experience, around 76.8% reported studying English online for at least three academic semesters, and 16.2% reported studying it online for more than two years. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and the study followed ethical guidelines in educational research involving human subjects.

Instruments

To collect the quantitative data, two questionnaires were employed for assessing students' AO beliefs and their perceptions towards using mobile devices for listening instruction. The scales were adopted from earlier studies (Azli et al., 2018; Dashtestani, 2012; Hamedinasab & Asgari, 2020; Hejāzi & Amini Pour, 2014; Hoy et al., 2006; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013), and the following steps were taken to ensure their validity and reliability. First, after translating the questionnaires into Persian, in order to verify the face validity of the instruments, five applied linguistics professors with extensive experience in the field, read and commented on them. This step resulted in further modifications in the instrument in terms of

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

rewording a number of questions to enhance the clarity, and also discarding some items based on their redundancy. Second, to examine the construct validity of the instrument, the validation process was conducted through two phases of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (EFA and CFA) on a sample of 155 EFL students in the context of the study. The final instrument contained 30 items for assessing AO, and 38 items to investigate the EFL learners' attitudes towards mobile assisted listening.

To collect the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 students (15 per high and low proficiency groups) to obtain a more detailed understanding of their AO- and listening-related perceptions. The interviews were conducted in Persian (the participants' L1) through *WhatsApp.* One of the researchers asked the questions and the participants provided their responses. The interview questions were informed by the questionnaire components including the AO elements (i.e., academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust) in relation to listening comprehension. Relevant follow-up questions were also administered to obtain a clearer understanding of the details in the participants' responses. The interviews lasted on average 45 minutes per participant.Once the whole data were collected, they were transcribed for further analysis.

Procedures

To collect quantitative data, the invitation to participate in the research was sent to 320 individuals via a locally popular social media network, and after additional reminders around 155 respondents completed the questionnaires. The 48.43% rate for returned responses is acceptable in online surveys (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). The responses obtained were saved into a *Microsoft* spreadsheet document by the online survey software. For the qualitative phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 students. The questions of the interview were informed by the items in the questionnaire and each interview lasted for around 45 minutes. The sessions were audio recorded for further analysis.

Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed for both descriptive and inferential statistics using IBM SPSS software (Version 25). To this end, group statistics in terms of mean values, standard deviations, and standard errors of mean were obtained for scores on the AO and MALL perception scales for the participants in high and low-proficiency levels. In order to see if there were significant differences in the scores, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the two proficiency levels with respect to their attitudes towards AO and perceptions for mobile assisted listening comprehension.

As for qualitative data, the participants' responses to interview questions were analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using both deductive and inductive approaches (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Accordingly, in the first step, the responses were analyzed for global factors such as main components in the construct of AO (such as faculty trust), and relevant parts in the responses were highlighted and categorized. Then, the analysis continued inductively to examine the parts of responses not categorized under specific themes in the first step. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the findings in analyzing interview data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), 15% of the data were coded and analyzed by two other researchers, and inter-rater reliability was 81%. The disagreements were resolved through reviewing the codes and recoding and re-categorizing some parts of the data. Furthermore, the findings of the study and the researchers' interpretations of the respondents' perceptions were discussed by the participants in a member-checking procedure to enhance the credibility of the interpretations.

Results

Quantitative results

The results of descriptive statistics for the high and low proficiency EFL learners' AO and their perceptions towards MALL are represented in Table 1. With respect to AO, the low proficiency participants had a mean value of 8.78 (SD =1.23), and high proficiency participants had a mean value of 10.15 (SD=0.84). For perceptions towards MALL in listening comprehension, the low proficiency group had a mean value of 34.55 (SD =2.62), and the high proficiency had a mean value of 35.36 (SD =1.04). Overall, participants in the high proficiency level reported higher level of academic optimism and had positive perceptions towards MALL.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

Group Statistics					
	Proficiency level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Academic Optimism	elementary	72	8.7868	1.23366	.14539
	advanced	83	10.1542	.83874	.09206
MALL Perception	elementary	72	34.5477	2.62092	.30888
	advanced	83	35.3559	1.04379	.11457

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for AO and MALL perceptions

In order to analyze the obtained results for statistical differences, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the scores on AO and MALL perceptions among high and low-proficiency groups (Table 2). The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences among the two groups' attitudes towards AO (t (153) =-8.15, p=0.000, two tailed) and their perceptions with respect to MALL (t (153) =-2.58, p=0.011, two tailed). The effect size of the differences was large for AO (eta squared=0.30) and moderate for MALL perception (eta squared=0.04) based on the criteria proposed by Cohen (1988).

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Academic Optimism	Equal variances assumed	22.7	.000	-8.15	153	.000	-1.36741	.16762	-1.6985	-1.0362
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.94	122.3	.000	-1.36741	.17209	-1.7080	-1.0267
MALL Perception	Equal variances assumed	43.7	.000	-2.58	153	.011	-.80825	.31277	-1.4261	-.19035
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.45	90.3	.016	-.80825	.32944	-1.4627	-.15380

Table 2: Independent samples test

Furthermore, the relationship between AO and MALL perceptions was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Before running the test, the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of the scores were checked and no violation was observed. The results indicated that there is a significant medium, positive correlation between the two variables (r = 0.464, n = 155, p = 0.000), with high scores on AO associated with more positive perceptions towards MALL (Table 3).

Correlations		Academic Optimism	MALL Perception
Academic Optimism	Pearson Correlation	1	.464**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	155	155
MALL Perception	Pearson Correlation	.464**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	155	155

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

Table 3: Correlation between AO and MALL perceptions

Qualitative results

As mentioned before, the participants were interviewed on their AO and listening-related perceptions. The analyses of their responses indicated several themes. Below, these themes are presented and the relevant comparison between high and low proficiency students is provided.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

Listening as a goal to be achieved by all students

The first theme emerging from the students' responses was viewing listening as a necessary skill to be developed by all students. In the following excerpts, the students from both high and low proficiency groups emphasized the necessity of listening to be mastered by all students:

> *We encounter many situations in which listening is needed for better communication. So, listening could be an achievable and necessary skill for us.* (Low proficiency)
>
> *I think that listening should be considered seriously as it takes time to learn everything and because of this, it should be of specific attention.* (High proficiency)
>
> *We need to master listening to become proficiency in speaking and other skills. It is an important skill. So, it could be achieved by hard work both by us and our teacher.* (Low proficiency)
>
> *I think that all students can and have the right to benefit from good listening. Although it is mostly dependent on ourselves to listen to audios, videos, YouTube channels, and online materials, I think that it can be achieved by hard work by our teachers.* (High proficiency)

The excerpts above show that students from both high and low proficiency groups viewed listening as a skill that could be developed by hard work from themselves and teachers and that all the students can have such purposes for better interpersonal communications and academic success in different environments.

Self-efficacy as a function of academic proficiency in listening

The second theme of the students' responses to the interview questions concerned the relationship between self-efficacy and listening comprehension. Regarding this theme, there was a difference among the high- and low proficiency students. The difference was that the high proficiency students emphasized the influential role of listening in developing students' self-efficacy, whereas the low proficiency group was less inclined towards emphasizing that point. The following excerpts from both groups show these differences:

> *I think that listening is very important in students' belief in their abilities as besides the interpersonal importance of it, it has profound psychological effects on us. When my listening is strong, I believe that I can understand everything and this gives me self-confidence.* (High proficiency)
>
> *I think that listening is the mother of all skills. This mother can give birth too many children that can help us succeed in our life. For example, it can help us make our speaking stronger or have better reading skills. This way, we as academic students face fewer problems in our international relationships.* (High proficiency)
>
> *Listening is very important, but we also have other contents to do and learn as well. I think that the contents of our lessons are more important.* (Low proficiency)
>
> *I know that we should have strong skills in listening but believe me sometimes we don't have the time to work on our own content classes, and we always have little time to work on our language skills and especially listening. I love this skill, but there are many things to do, which stop me from focusing on it.* (Low proficiency)

As the above excerpts show, the high proficiency students viewed listening as a significant factor in their academic self-efficacy and emphasized its potentials in international communications and other positive effects on the other language skills. However, low proficiency students mainly raised content as the major factor that stops them from working on listening.

Trust between parents and students as a significant factor in developing listening

The final theme in the responses was related to the role of trust in parents and students in developing students' listening. In this regard, there was a difference between the high and low proficiency groups. The high proficiency group argued that while parents should be involved in developing students' listening, it was mainly up to the students to develop their skills. However, the low proficiency students argued that parents have an equal role in developing students' listening as the students themselves. The excerpts below show these differences:

> *I think that it is good that both parents and students be involved in education and especially listening development and the teachers trust both of us. But I think that it is mainly the responsibility of students to become autonomous in listening as many parents don't have access to what we can see and understand.* (High proficiency)
>
> *I think that parents can support students to become more effective students, but it is the student who should be immersed in the process of listening to videos, audios, YouTube, and different websites to develop their listening. This way, we can become students who take control of our learning and can teach this to others.* (High proficiency)
>
> *In my opinion, teachers can't trust the students and parents to help each other to develop their listening skills and education in general. This is because there are many problems that many parents can devote their time to*

> *students' listening and education. But I think that parents should become more involved by providing certain facilities.* (Low proficiency)
>
> *I think that parents have a significant role in students' education. They should provide a suitable condition so that we don't face many problems. But we also know that they have their own problems. I think that if our education and listening in particular have many problems, it is partly the fault of students and partly parents, besides others.* (Low proficiency)

As the extracts above indicate, the high proficiency students focused more on the personal side of developing listening and highlighted autonomy as a significant factor in such a skill development. However, the low proficiency students referred to the importance of facilities and the guilty role of parents in students' low quality of education.

Discussion

The first research question related to the difference between high and low proficiency students' attitudes toward academic optimism in the context of MALL-oriented listening comprehension. The results indicated that highly proficient learners had higher levels of AO and perceived MALL more positively. Since AO involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of achievement and development, the results provide empirical evidence for the effectiveness of MALL for advanced level language learners more than for those in lower proficiency stages. There might be a number of reasons for this. First, as highlighted by Hoy et al. (2006), AO is closely related to perceived self-efficacy in learning. Accordingly, as more proficient learners are generally more self-efficacious in doing language learning-related activities (Fathi et al., 2018), they hold positive attitudes towards themselves and their teachers in MALL-oriented listening lessons. Second, given the importance of affective factors in mobile assisted language learning (Cho & Castañeda, 2019), high proficiency learners experience more positive emotions in using mobile devices for language learning which significantly contributes to their enhanced AO. On the other hand, since low proficiency learners mostly struggle with language-related problems, they can feel a range of negative emotions (Pengnate, 2018) which impacts their AO.

Moreover, research on listening comprehension in EFL/ESL contexts has shown that learners of different proficiency levels demonstrate different levels of listening comprehension skills (e.g., Ghorbanpour et al., 2020; Marashi & Khaksar, 2013; Najafi Sarem & Marashi, 2020). From this perspective, as AO has, as its principles, claims for learner competence as arising from institutional work (e.g., Galindo & Sanders, 2021; Horner et al., 2019; Hoy et al., 2008), it seems that the high proficiency learners of this study have already developed the listening comprehension capital necessary for educational work, and specifically in relation to listening. This finding contributes to the literature by suggesting that learners' listening development may be influenced by the historical-educational context in which they study."

The second research question had to do with the relationships between the students' perceptions towards MALL and their AO. The findings indicated that the two constructs were positively correlated. In this respect, regardless of the proficiency level in English, it seems that having positive attitudes in MALL is associated with enhanced AO, and higher levels of AO also positively influence the students' perceptions towards MALL. A number of reasons might explain this relationship. First, the implementation of MALL-oriented listening comprehension for the participants of the current study was associated with increased interaction among the teachers and the students through online platforms (Xodabande & Atai, 2020). This condition might have promoted trust between students and teachers (in terms of availability of the teachers for answering students' questions) which is a key factor in AO. Accordingly, teachers' personalized feedback on students' performances contributed to their sense of progress and achievement. This is different from listening instruction in traditional classes where teachers do not have enough time to provide feedback to all students. As a result, in both high and low proficiency learners, AO was associated with positive attitudes towards MALL. Second, the use of educational technology generally promotes learner motivation (Potvin & Hasni, 2014; Stockwell, 2013). In this regard, both high and low proficiency learners experienced enhanced motivation in MALL-oriented listening instruction program that might have resulted in improving AO.

Furthermore, as AO ultimately aims to contribute to learners' own progress in educational work (Galindo & Sanders, 2021; Horner et al., 2019), it seems that the learners attempt to personalize the learning process for their own purposes. Of related note here is that similar arguments with regard to the personalized aspects of education have been abundantly made for MALL (e.g., Colpaert, 2020; Nazari & Xodabande, 2020). Thus, AO and MALL seem to be both conceptually interrelated and embodied in learners' belief systems as well. This finding, however, needs more rigorous research to explore how these

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

two constructs or levels of them are related to each other so that a better picture of their connection can be made.

The third question aimed to qualitatively examine the students' perceptions about the connection between AO and MALL. In this sense, three themes emerged from the analyses. The first theme was related to the point that both high and low proficiency students perceived mastery of listening as an achievable purpose. This finding corroborates the findings of earlier studies regarding the positive attitude of students toward AO and its significant role in learning (e.g., Hamedinasab & Asgari, 2020; Marcos et al., 2021; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006), which was here related to listening comprehension. However, the learners argued that teachers and learners should work collaboratively to achieve the interpersonal purposes of listening. This finding suggests that the learners view listening as beyond its institutional purposes and relate it interpersonal purposes, which marks their awareness of the significance of listening for such purposes. And the mediating factor in developing such competency is the facilitative role of AO in bringing about a condition that helps learners develop their listening comprehension with help from others (Hoy et al., 2006).

The second theme, however, marked differences between high and low proficiency students in that the higher group viewed listening as central to enhanced self-efficacy, while the lower found content to be their major obstacle. This finding may be because high proficiency learners have, over time, come to develop their listening abilities, which have now influenced their self-efficacy (see Smith & Hoy, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013). Moreover, this finding is in line with earlier studies in relation to the facilitative role of listening in learners' competencies and skills over time (e.g., Humaidah, 2021; Wang & Cha, 2019). In this sense, it appears that differences between the high and low proficiency students may be due to the goals they set for themselves and their educational career, which is central to AO (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013). Moreover, the low proficiency students' objections to content as impeding their self-efficacy needs careful attention from educational stakeholders as it may become a source of various emotional-educational problems for these students. From this perspective, using the affordances of MALL could be a helpful alternative to compensate for the deficiencies in the students' flaws.

Finally, the third theme was related to the role of trust in parents and students in developing students' listening. In this regard, the low proficiency students believed that external factors were more central to problems in listening comprehension. However, the high proficiency students argued that autonomy was the key to developing listening. Research has indicated that students who are more oriented toward self-regulated perceptions are more likely to accelerate the process of developing L2 proficiency across various skills and specifically listening comprehension (e.g., Abdi & Makiabadi, 2019; Chang et al., 2020; Islam & Hassan, 2020; Wang & Cha, 2019). There could be two reasons for this. First, the low proficiency students may not have been able to take more control over their learning, which may have influenced the way they viewed the role of external factors in their language competency (Fathi et al., 2018). This gap could specifically be filled by drawing on the affordances of MALL in that these learners could be equipped and familiarized with MALL-related technologies to develop their listening skills. The second reason could be the more positive attitude of high proficiency students toward their listening abilities , which has been documented in previous research (Ghorbanpour et al., 2021). That is, these learners have been able to develop their listening skills over time and thus view their effort and investment as central to their present competence. However, these findings need to be explored in further research to view whether more differences emerge from such attitudes.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore Iranian EFL high and low proficiency students' academic optimism (AO) and mobile assisted language learning (MALL) experiences in listening comprehension. The results of the study showed that firstly, high proficiency learners had higher levels of AO and perceived MALL more positively than lower proficiency learners. Secondly, it was found that AO and MALL were positively correlated. Thirdly, the learners viewed AO as both similar and different in its contributions to their listening comprehension. These findings indicate that proficiency level may play a significant role in Iranian EFL students' AO and listening comprehension. The findings add to the literature by showing a dimension of listening comprehension (i.e., AO) that has little been explored and is gaining more attention among educational researchers.

These findings offer implications to teachers and students. First, teachers need to pay more attention to the role AO plays in students' performance and especially in relation to listening comprehension. In this regard, they could integrate MALL-related technologies into their instruction to help learners develop more

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

positive attitudes toward language learning in general and listening comprehension in particular. Moreover, students (especially low proficiency students) should become more engaged in the listening comprehension process to take a more central role in their language development. In this sense, they could draw on help from their high proficiency peers to learn strategies that help them become stronger. Moreover, these learners should participate more in MALL and listening-developing communities to hone their skills. This way, they are likely to develop their AO and gain a set of strategies that equip them with the ability to become more autonomous learners.

This study had limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was done using a cross-sectional design. More longitudinal research is needed to show how the students' AO and listening develop over time. Moreover, future research should explore how teaching students in AO can contribute to their abilities to hone their listening skills. Second, only thirty students participated in the interviews. Further research that explores the connection between AO and listening comprehension using more sophisticated analyses (e.g., structural equation modeling) could better show the connection between AO and listening comprehension. These perspectives need more research to explore the less-studied connection between AO and listening, especially in MALL contexts, to develop the knowledge base of learners' interlanguage development, especially in EFL contexts.

References

Abdi, S., & Makiabadi, H. (2019). Learning English listening and speaking through BBC VOA podcasts: An app review. *Teaching English with Technology, 19*(2), 101-108. https://tewtjournal.org/download/8-learning-english-listening-and-speaking-through-bbc-voa-podcasts-an-app-review-by-samaneh-abdi-and-hossein-makiabadi/#

Al-Shamsi, A., Al-Mekhlafi, A. M., Al Busaidi, S., & Hilal, M. M. (2020). The effects of mobile learning on listening comprehension skills and attitudes of Omani EFL adult learners. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 19*(8), 16-39. https://ijlter.myres.net/index.php/ijlter/article/view/260/261

Azli, W. U. A. W., Shah, P. M., & Mohamad, M. (2018). Perception on the usage of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in English as a second language (ESL) learning among vocational college students. *Creative Education, 9*(1), 84-98. https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2018.91008

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Cho, M.-H., & Castañeda, D. A. (2019). Motivational and affective engagement in learning Spanish with a mobile application. *System, 81*, 90-99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.01.008

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Routledge.

Chang, C.-K., Chen, G.-D., & Li, M.-N. (2020). A mobile-based English vocabulary learning approach with self-regulated learning theory. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 33*(8), 833-864. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1594919

Colpaert, J. (2020). Editorial position paper: How virtual is your research? *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 33*(7), 653-664. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2020.1824059

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.

Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Dashtestani, R. (2012). Barriers to the implementation of CALL in EFL courses: Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes and perspectives. *The JALT CALL Journal, 8*(2), 55-70. https://doi.org/10.29140/jaltcall.v8n2.134

Demir, S. B., & Pismek, N. (2018). A convergent parallel mixed-methods study of controversial issues in social studies classes: A clash of ideologies. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice, 18*(1), 119-149. https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2018.1.0298

Dörnyei, Z., & Taguchi, T. (2009). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Elahifar, M., Ebrahimi, F., & Azizi, Z. (2022). The effect of using dicto-gloss as a while-listening activity for listening comprehension development of EFL learners. *Education Research International, 2022(1)*. https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3016643

Faramarzi, S., Tabrizi, H. H., & Chalak, A. (2019). The effect of vodcasting tasks on EFL listening comprehension progress in an online program. *International Journal of Instruction, 12*(1), 1263-1280. https://www.e-iji.net/dosyalar/iji_2019_1_81.pdf

Fathi, J., Alipour, F., & Saeedian, A. (2018). Enhancing vocabulary learning and self-regulation via a mobile application: An investigation of the Memrise app. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies, 5*(1), 27-46. https://doi.org/10.30479/jmrels.2019.10311.1282

Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(1), 80-92. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

Galindo, C. L., & Sanders, M. G. (2021). Teachers' academic optimism and professional practice in an urban full-service community high school. *Journal of Educational Change, 23,* 521-548. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09430-6

Ghorbanpour, E., Abbasian, G.-R., & Mohseni, A. (2021). Incorporating purposeful assessment scenarios in L2 listening class: A learner-oriented approach. *Journal of Language and Translation, 11*(2), 89-115. https://doi.org/10.30495/ttlt.2021.682810

Hamedinasab, S., & Asgari, A. (2020). Investigate the relationship between academic optimism and achievement motivation with the mediating roles of high school students' academic self-efficacy. *Teaching and Learning Research, 15*(2), 49-61. https://doi.org/10.22070/tlr.2020.2528

Hashemi, M. R., & Babaii, E. (2013). Mixed methods research: Toward new research designs in applied linguistics. *The Modern Language Journal, 97*(4), 828-852. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2013.12049.x

Humaidah, M. Z. (2021). Students' engagement and confidence in mobile-assisted language learning: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 12(4), 612–621.

Hejāzi, E., & Amini Pour, S. (2014). The relationship between academic optimism and self-management strategies of teachers with high school students' academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Innovations, 13*(4), 30-44.

Horner, M. V., Jordan, D. D., & Brown, K. M. (2019). Academic optimism. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of education.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.645

Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Hoy, A. W. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*(3), 425-446. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043003425

Humaidah, M. Z. (2021). Comparative study of learning styles between high and low achievers in English listening skill. *Jurnal Penelitian, Pendidikan, dan Pembelajaran, 16*(5), 1-10.

Islam, A. B. M. S., & Hassan, M. (2020). The effectiveness of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) on ESL listening skill. *Nobel: Journal of Literature and Language Teaching, 11*(2), 188-202. https://doi.org/10.15642/NOBEL.2020.11.2.188-202

Lin, J.-J., & Lin, H. (2019). Mobile-assisted ESL/EFL vocabulary learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 32*(8), 878-919. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2018.1541359

Liu, M., Navarrete, C. C., & Wivagg, J. (2014). Potentials of mobile technology for K-12 education: An investigation of iPod Touch use for English language learners in the United States. *Educational Technology & Society, 17*(2), 115-126.

Marashi, H., & Khaksar, M. (2013). Dictogloss or dicto-phrase: Which works better for listening comprehension? *Journal on English Language Teaching, 3*(1), 22-29. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1068862.pdf

Marcos, T., Wise, D., Loose, W., Belenardo, S., & Padover, W. (2021). How California school principals and teachers engage academic optimism to maximize equity in student learning within low socio-economic status (SES) schools. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development, 33*, 1-17. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1318521.pdf

McGuigan, L., & Hoy, W. K. (2006). Principal leadership: Creating a culture of academic optimism to improve achievement for all students. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 5*(3), 203-229. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760600805816

Morse, J. M. (1991). Approaches to qualitative-quantitative methodological triangulation. *Nursing Research, 40*(2), 120-123. https://doi.org/10.1097/00006199-199103000-00014

Nazari, M., & Xodabande, I. (2020). L2 teachers' mobile-related beliefs and practices: Contributions of a professional development initiative. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 35*(7), pp. 1354-1383. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2020.1799825

Nazari, M., & Xodabande, I. (2021). Discursive change in second language teachers' online interactions: A microgenetic analysis. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research, 9*(3 (Special Issue)), 63-76. https://doi.org/10.30466/ijltr.2021.121076

Ono, Y., Ishihara, M., & Yamashiro, M. (2015). Blended instruction utilizing mobile tools in English teaching at colleges of technology. *Electrical Engineering in Japan, 192*(2), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1002/eej.22717

Pengnate, W. (2018). Students' attitudes and problems towards the use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). *2018 5th International Conference on Business and Industrial Research (ICBIR)*, *17-18 May, 2018, Bangkok, Thailand,* 590-593. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICBIR.2018.8391266

Potvin, P., & Hasni, A. (2014). Interest, motivation and attitude towards science and technology at K-12 levels: A systematic review of 12 years of educational research. *Studies in Science Education, 50*(1), 85-129. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057267.2014.881626

Sarem, S. N., & Marashi, H. (2020). The impact of input modality and sensory mode on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension. *Journal of Language and Translation, 10*(1), 133-153. https://doi.org/10.30495/ttlt.2020.673820

Seligman, M. E. P. (1999). Positive social science. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 1*(3), 181-182. https://doi.org/10.1177/109830079900100306

Smith, P. A., & Hoy, W. K. (2007). Academic optimism and student achievement in urban elementary schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 45*(5), 556-568. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230710778196

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

Stockwell, G. (2013). Technology and motivation in English-language teaching and learning. In E. Ushioda (Ed.), *International perspectives on motivation: Language learning and professional challenges* (pp. 156-175). Palgrave Macmillan.

Test your English. (2022). *General English.* Cambridge University Press & Assessment. https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/test-your-english/general-english

Tschannen-Moran, M., Bankole, R. A., Mitchell, R. M., & Moore Jr., D. M. (2013). Student academic optimism: A confirmatory factor analysis. *Journal of Educational Administration, 51*(2), 150-175. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231311304689

Wang, S.-Y., & Cha, K.-W. (2019). Foreign language listening anxiety factors affecting listening performance of Chinese EFL learners. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 16*(1), 121-134. https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2019.16.1.8.121

Wise, A. F., & Hsiao, Y.-T. (2019). Self-regulation in online discussions: Aligning data streams to investigate relationships between speaking, listening, and task conditions. *Computers in Human Behavior, 96*, 273-284. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.01.034

Xodabande, I., & Atai, M. R. (2020). Using mobile applications for self-directed learning of academic vocabulary among university students. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and E-learning, 37*(4), 330-347. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2020.1847061

Xodabande, I., Pourhassan, A. (A.), & Valizadeh, M. (2022). Self-directed learning of core vocabulary in English by EFL learners: Comparing the outcomes from paper and mobile application flashcards. *Journal of Computers in Education, 9*, 93-111. https://doi.org/10.1007/S40692-021-00197-6

Xu, Q. (2020). Applying MALL to an EFL listening and speaking course: An action research approach. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 19*(4), 24-34. https://www.tojet.net/articles/v19i4/1942.pdf

Xu, W., & Zammit, K. (2020). Applying thematic analysis to education: A hybrid approach to interpreting data in practitioner research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920918810

Zakian, M., Xodabande, I., Valizadeh, M., & Yousefvand, M. (2022). Out-of-the-classroom learning of English vocabulary by EFL learners: Investigating the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning with digital flashcards. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 7*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-022-00143-8

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.