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Research Paper

Predictors of Listening Anxiety in English Courses: Testing a Model based on Cultural Intelligence and Reflective Thinking

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Abstract

Listening anxiety is the feeling of apprehension that learners might experience when trying to comprehend information from others. This anxiety associated with listening comprehension has been a significant focus of academic research for the past few decades. Foreign language listening anxiety (FLLA) can be triggered by different factors, including affective pressure, cognitive load, or communication disorders. However, there is a lack of appropriate conceptual models to accurately pinpoint the sources of anxiety related to listening. This research introduces a novel model in a non-experimental correlation research design to scrutinize the efficacy of cultural intelligence (CQ) and reflective thinking (RT) in predicting the source of FLLA among EFL learners. To accomplish this, a sample of 250 EFL students was administered the three scales for the constructs under study. In terms of the statistical analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) was run to examine the fit of the conceptual model. The findings showed that both CQ and RT affect FLLA. However, RT was a stronger predictor of FLLA than CQ. Notably, critical reflection was found to be the strongest predictor of FLLA in the RT. Besides, both cognitive and behavioral dimensions equally influenced FLLA for CQ. Lastly, the results and implications for reducing FLLA are discussed.

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Keywords: Cultural intelligence, EFL, Listening anxiety, Listening skill, Reflective thinking

Listening anxiety is a form of language anxiety focused on the process of understanding spoken language. It usually arises when learners feel overwhelmed by the challenges of interpreting spoken messages. It is often a significant component of overall FLA. Plenty of second-language (L2) learners feel a certain level of FLA that arises from being involved with an L2 learning environment. MacIntyre (1994) conceives FLA as "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language" (p. 27). Such experiences are demanding because they negatively influence learners' engagement (Li & Dewaele, 2021). Along the same lines, significant studies on FLA have asserted the negative impacts of FLA on different language skills (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Heidarzadi et al., 2022). Listening is one of the most challenging skills to develop because it requires real-time comprehension without the opportunity for editing, unlike reading and writing. In particular, often called the *Cinderella* skill by Vandergrift (2002) and intertwined with its step-sister (i.e., speaking), listening is conceptualized as a demanding process that involves a highly complex, dynamic, and stressful task for L2 learners (Barjesteh & Ghasemnia, 2019). In such a complex task, learners face problems in understanding speech. They receive listening straight off and in a confined process, then they should reply directly to the questions posed (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Kim (2000) considers L2 listening as one of the most arduous skills due to its fugitive and tacit nature. Recent studies (e.g., Barjesteh & Ghaseminia, 2019; Kim, 2000; Landry-Meyer, 2023) indicate that listening comprehension is a complex, dynamic, and interactive skill that involves various mental processes of listeners. Voluminous studies (e.g., Aubrey, 2022; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Fathi et al., 2020; Goh & Vandergrift, 2021; Heidarzadi et al., 2022; Kim, 2000; Li & Dewaele, 2021; Wang et al., 2023) acknowledged factors affecting FLLA among EFL learners. They listed various factors such as unfamiliarity with the listening tasks, lack of language proficiency, speed of speech, lack of clarity, lack of visualization, text, and personal and process-related characteristics, to name but a few. Recently, researchers (e.g., Ang & Rockstuhl, 2021; Goh & Vandergrift, 2021; Landry-Meyer, 2023) have found that listening comprehension is influenced by various factors, including social, cultural,

cognitive, and affective-related variables (i.e., motivation, culture, RT, and anxiety). Moreover, Li and Dewaele (2021) explored the interplay among psychological and affective-related variables. Fathi et al. (2020) argued that learners should engage in a challenging process when listening, as they require both linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge to comprehend the information presented by the speaker. Such an arduous process causes learners to experience obstacles while listening to the target language (Ngo, 2019). Dewaele and Dewaele (2020) classified learners' anxiety into *micro-contexts* (such as a particular sentence or task), *meso-contexts* (such as anxiety about the behavior of teachers or peers in the classroom), and *macro-contexts* (such as political and historical contexts). Such context plays an influential role in predicting language skill achievement and listening skills.

As a complex and multidimensional trait, CQ is among the significant external factors in educational psychology (Ang et al., 2007). They conceive an individual's CQ as a measure of their ability to distinguish the rules of a different social environment, absorb them, and apply them effectively. CQ is learners' competence to adjust when confronted with problems experienced in communicating with people (Ang & Rockstuhl, 2021). Derakhshan (2021) suggested that a dynamic model seems to be essential for promoting EFL learners' CQ in textbooks. He found that the EFL textbook fails to promote cultural awareness for its users. Besides, previous research (e.g., Alamer, 2022; Chamdani et al., 2022) has shown that RT has a significant positive impact in predicting learning achievement. Barjesteh (2019) found that RT develops and evolves when students learn and respond to new experiences, situations, or events. Ozudogru (2021) described RT as the process of reflection on emotions, feelings, experiences, reactions, and knowledge. Chamdani et al. (2022) contend that learners who contemplate reflectively will also envisage their own problems and consciously think about and analyze what they are doing now, what they have experienced, and how they have learned it. Various studies (e.g., Alamer, 2022; Aslam et al., 2021; Giuseffi, 2021; Knight & Robinson, 2019; Ozudogru, 2021) concluded that RT is an essential predictor of L2 achievement. Proceeding from the previously mentioned significance of reflective thinking, cultural intelligence and listening anxiety, the present study sets out to probe how EFL students perceive their listening anxiety with respect to CQ and RT. Addressing

this gap, the present study will explicitly focus on the cognitive and capability aspects of listening comprehension, with the constructs explored being delimited to CQ, FLLA, and RT. Although a growing body of studies (Giuseffi, 2021; Knight & Robinson, 2019; Ozudogru, 2021) explored the associations between RT, CQ, cognitive, metacognitive, as well as effective listening strategies (Adair et al., 2013; Barzykowski, 2019; Fathi et al., 2020), what is not yet clear is the effect of CQ, RT, on FLLA in a single study. Since the interaction between EFL learners' CQ and FLLA is not empirically supported, the current study aims to unveil the theoretical interplay between the constructs. Particularly, this study examines whether learners' CQ directly affects their LA. The next contribution of this study is to screen the indirect role of RT on learners' listening anxiety. This study examines the extent to which RT mediates the predictive effect of CQ on the FLLA to fill the theoretical gap between the variables under study. Papi and Khajavi (2023) noted that anxiety-related learners' performance in L2 skills is commonly known as foreign or L2 anxiety. Many educational practitioners believe that such anxiety impedes language learning. Thus, knowing the latent factors underlying listening anxiety and exploring the anxiety-provoking factors in listening skills can promote listening performance. L2 professional literature listed various anxiety-provoking factors in learning language skills. Anxious learners experience thinking and cultural differences and affective factors (e.g., palpitations, distraction, and confusion) while listening to L2 (Fathi et al., 2020; MacIntyre,2017; Ozudogru, 2021). Thus, understanding the relationships among FLLA, CQ, and RT may yield interesting implications in L2 listening. Insufficient proficiency in both RT and CQ can lead to feelings of unease during listening activities. Various research (e.g., Aubrey, 2022; Kimura, 2008; Wang et al., 2023) confirmed that heightened anxiety interferes with the processing of listening comprehension. Furthermore, it was found that as anxiety levels increase among students, their listening comprehension abilities tend to decrease. The scarcity of studies examining the relationship between RT and CQ as predictors of FLLA based on the SEM approach in the EFL setting motivated us to design and carry out the present study. Accordingly, this study aims to focus on the existing gap in the literature and pursue the outlined conceptual framework through the following hypothetical model. The novelty of the study is based on applying both constructs (i.e., CQ and RT) to create a model that explains the anxiety experienced by

the learners while engaged in listening tasks. This model is also essential and additional to the existing literature as most of the research carried out on anxiety has revolved around either speech productions or general language anxiety without addressing the specific issue of listening anxiety about these variable predictors. Hereupon, the current study explores answers to four research questions:

1. How do EFL students perceive their listening anxiety on cultural intelligence and reflective thinking?
2. How does cultural intelligence predict students' English listening anxiety?
3. Does reflective thinking directly affect learners' listening anxiety?
4. How does reflective thinking mediate the predictive role of CQ on learners' English listening anxiety?

The Conceptual model

The conceptual framework of the second hypothetical model was mapped using the findings of the L2 professional literature as a hypothetical model (i.e., Ang et al., 2021; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Chamdani et al., 2022; Kember et al., 2000; Kim, 2000; Landry-Meyer, 2023). The model consists of three primary constructs (i.e., CQ, RT, and FLLA) and eleven types of variables. To check learners' RT and CQ, they were assessed by Kember et al. (2000) RTQ and Ang et al. (2007) CQS. Then, they were integrated into the SEM model. Initially, it has been proposed that RT and CQ significantly impact learners' FLLA, including lack of confidence, tension, and a fear of negative evaluation. Secondly, it was posited that each exogenous variable directly impacts students in FLLA. Accordingly, it is posited that (a) the level of learners' cognitive ability directly influences their level of listening anxiety, and (b) listening anxiety is significantly influenced by students' RT. Besides, it is posited that (c) there is no significant indirect effect of learners' CQ on listening anxiety with RT as a mediating factor. Notably, the interplay between CQ and FLLA through the mediator of RT and the relationship among the variables is illustrated in the following figure.

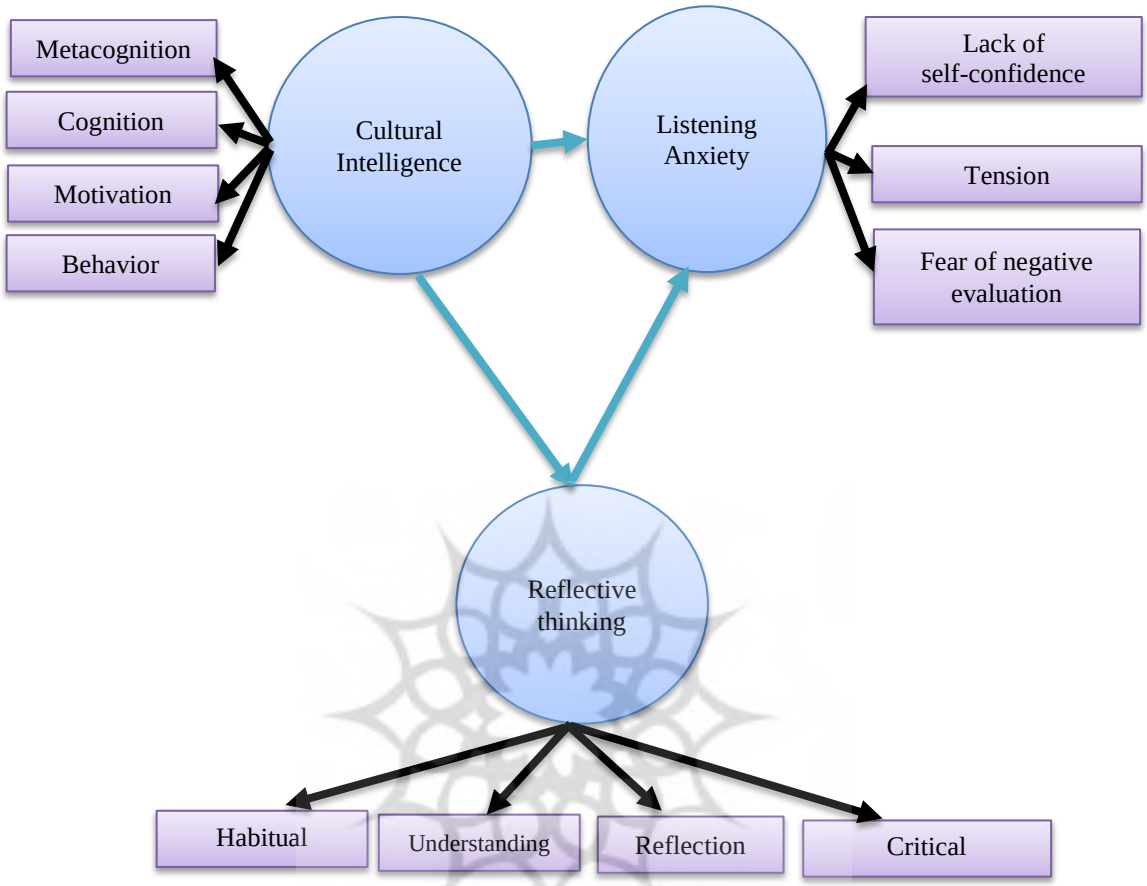

Figure x. *The Conceptual Model of the Research and the Interrelationship among the Variables*

Literature Review

Listening anxiety and RT/CQ: The relevance and rationale

For over thirty years, researchers have explored the significance of anxiety and reflective thinking in language achievement (Chamdani et al., 2022). Theoretically, the potential link between anxiety levels and RT has been discussed in the literature, which can affect learners' language achievement. This implies that students' RT can influence their self-efficacy and reduce anxiety in the learning process (Giuseffi, 2021). Besides, RT seems to link to the cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural process. An affective

factor like anxiety is believed to have the potential to either facilitate or impede a new language acquisition. Consequently, it can lead to foreign language anxiety (e.g., listening anxiety). Chamdani et al. (2022) believe that students may experience feelings of anxiety when listening to a foreign language for various reasons. These reasons could include concerns about the authenticity of the listening material, their learning style, thinking process, and differences in cultural context. Accordingly, CQ seems to be an important factor that needs to be fostered by students. It is evident that having cultural intelligence, low affective factor, and RT are essential attributes that students should cultivate in academic education, especially when it comes to enhancing their listening comprehension skills (Barzykowski et al., 2019; Chamdani et al., 2022; Gedik Bal, 2022; Giuseffi, 2021).

Listening Anxiety

The FLLA is a relatively new term in applied linguistics. Originally, Horwitz et al. 1986) proposed the scale. Later, different types of FLA, such as speaking (Aubrey, 2022), reading (Wang et al., 2023), and writing (Heidarzadi et al., 2022), have been under investigation in L2 learning. Wheeless (1975) was the earliest practitioner who proposed FLLA to describe "a receiver's apprehension, fear of misinterpretation, inadequate processing, or inability to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others" (p.263). Theoretically, some authors (e.g., Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1994; Spielberger, 1971) introduced three approaches to conceptualize FLA: *psychological*, *situation-specific*, and *social approaches*. According to the psychological approach, anxiety is characterized by pressure and apprehension, as well as increased autonomic nervous activity (Spielberger, 1971). Next, the situation-specific approach is conceived as a different perplexing form of anxiety (e.g., speaking, learning, and listening) that some learners experience in an L2 setting (Horwitz et al., 1986). Furthermore, social approaches to FLLA posit that listeners may feel incompetent and dissatisfied when they experience a negative assumption about their listening performance (e.g., False belief that they must comprehend every word), thereby negatively assessing themselves (Oxford, 1993). In terms of defining FLLA, recently, situation-specific approaches have gained popularity (Zhang, 2019). Kim (2000) defined FLLA as *tension*, *worry*, and *lack of self-confidence* over listening skill. Later, Kimura (2008) modified Kim's dimensions to

emotional and *cognitive* facets of anxiety. Kimura distinguished *anticipatory fear* as the third dimension, keeping the original format and items intact. For the objective of the current study, all three facets (i.e., *lack of self-confidence, tension, anticipatory fear, or fear of negative evaluation*) were taken into account.

Cultural Intelligence

Individuals' skills to adapt to their surroundings are considered a form of CQ in Stern's theory of general intelligence. Stern is known as the pioneer of IQ. In his theory, Stern argued that intelligence is one's ability to accommodate their surrounding environment. His theory shares many characteristics of emotional intelligence, but the difference lies in the power to differentiate culturally determined behavior from the behaviors that are the manifestation of individual personality traits. Accordingly, different authors (e.g., Ambert et al., 2023; Gedik BalL, 2022; Piwowarczyck, 2016; Starosta, 2012, as cited in Barzykowski et al., 2019) considered CQ as a power that illustrates one's ability to understand and act in a different cultural situation. Simpson (2015) believed that CQ is a skill that should be developed over time. Piwowarczyck (2016) believed that CQ helps students adapt to a new situation. Piwowarczyck argued that CQ is an inborn capability that should be assessed in education. Early and Ang (2003) proposed three subscales: motivational, cognitive, and behavioral. Later, Early and Mosakowski (2004), Ang et al. (2007), and Van Dyne et al. (2009) developed the concept. Ang et al. define CQ as "individuals' ability to function effectively in diverse settings"(p. 337). Likewise, in their conceptualization of CQ, Adair et al. (2013) conceptualized it as one's ability to integrate perception, communication, and coordination in different cultures. They distinguished CQ as a multidimensional trait. They assorted CQ into three facets: *cognitive, metacognitive, motivational,* and *behavioral*. In their view, a critical aspect of cognitive ability is the competency to expound information in a cultural context. The second perspective (i.e., metacognition) helps learners understand other cultures and their beliefs through a cultural lens. Besides, it promotes interactions, cultural awareness, and cultural differences. The last aspect concerns the skill to act due to the principles of other cultures.

Reflective Thinking

The word *reflection* means *thinking* itself. Peltier et al. (2006) defined reflection as "a move beyond the comprehension of learning material to a more active engagement in learning which evokes previous knowledge and experience, involves a questioning of what is learned and may include a search for alternative explanations" (p.6). Thus, RT is meant to be *thinking about thinking* in logical and rational steps (Chamdani et al., 2022; Giuseffi, 2021; Knight & Robinson, 2019). Initially, Dewey (1933) theorized the term as a form of inquiry. Reflection, in his view, is a problem-solving process that involves active chaining and the linking of ideas one after another. Dewy conceptualized RT as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933, p.118). Later, Boyd and Fales (1983, p. 101) characterized RT as "…the process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience (past or present) in terms of self (self in relation to self and self in relation to the world)". Knight and Robinson (2019) considered RT to be a part of critical thinking, which is concerned with analytical, evaluative, and judgmental processes. Giuseffi (2021) conceives RT as a social enterprise in a disciplined manner of thinking. Giuseffi believes that learners use critical thinking as an intellectual maneuver to approach problem-solving and mental challenges. Mezirow (1999) was the earliest practitioner to develop a practical framework to assess RT. Kermber et al.'s scale, principally derived from Mezirow (1991), was the commonly used tool for measuring RT. They classified RT into four measurable scales: (1) habitual action (HA), (2) understanding (U), (3) reflection (R), and (4) critical reflection (CR). In order to carry out this study, Kember et al. measurable scale was employed. The scale was examined in various contexts (e.g., Iran, Turkey, England, and Estonia) to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. The simplest model of RT can be seen in Boud's (1987) triangular representation. Based on Boud's triangular representation, the model breaks reflection down into evaluation and analysis of the events. Such connection links learning to future practice. In spite of this further breakdown, it is still possible to argue that this model does not facilitate critical thinking or analysis, resulting in superficial reflection. This is further broken down into stages by Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle. Gibbs acknowledges the importance of one's personal feelings in influencing one's

reflections on the situation. As the final note, RT creates conditions for accommodating different perspectives, thus enabling the individual to criticize his or her own thoughts, leading to a broader view of reality (Pham et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2019).

Method

Participants

This study used a cluster random sampling technique. To include a comprehensive population, the participants were selected from multiple sampling stages. More precisely, different clusters (i.e., cities, districts, language schools, major, gender, and age) included the sampling multistage. To reduce the bias effect, the sampling multistage was randomly selected from 23 private English language institutes. The sampling multistage was randomly selected from 23 private English language institutes in three districts in Alborz province. Their educational background ranged from 1 to 3 years. To address the objectives, a sample of 250 Iranian EFL students were recruited as the subjects. The participants were both male (*N*=117) and female (*N*=133) EFL learners whose ages were modified from 18 to 23 (*M* = 18.26, *SD* = 6.12). Their language experience varied from 1 to 3 years (*M*=3.05, *SD*=5.16).

Instruments

Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)

Ang et al. (2007) CQS was used to check learners' CQ self-report. Essentially, it is the efficient control within diverse cultural environments. The CQS, containing 20 items, consists of four sub-scales, each of them measuring one component of CQ. Specifically, the CQS evaluates the metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral facets. The CQS is scored from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). The mean scores (i.e., 20 to 140) gained by the students were considered the basis for reporting the results of CQS. The higher mean score would indicate a higher CQ. Different versions of CQS (e.g., Chinese, Polish, Iranian) have been developed to check its reliability and validity in the EFL and ESL contexts (e.g., Barzykowski et al., 2019; Ghonsooli & Shalchy, 2013). They revalidated the scale and extracted the underlying factors using factor analysis and SEM approach. Besides, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were satisfactory in various studies,

ranging from .69 to .81. For the EFL context of Iran, the CQS was piloted by Ghonsooli and Shalchy (2013). They reported that the factor analysis was close to the postulated one. In addition, the CQS enjoys high reliability (α = .87) indices.

FLLA scale

To address the subject's anxiety level, Kim's (2000) FLLAS was utilized. Kim validated a Japanese (n 452) version of the scale. The data reduction through factor analysis revealed three main constructs. The scale measures *tension* and *worry* related to listening in English, as well as a *deficiency of self-confidence* in listening. Later, Kimura (2008) modified them to the emotional and cognitive dimensions of anxiety. Kimura distinguished *anticipatory fear* as the third dimension, keeping the original format and items intact. For the purpose of this study, a three-dimensional scale (*n*= 33 items), including (a) *lack of self-confidence*, (b) *tension*, and (c) *anticipatory fear or fear of negative evaluation*, was used. Based on the FLLAS, the possible scores ranged from 33 to 165, and an increase in scores indicates a greater level of listening anxiety. The FLLAS was reported to have an internal consistency alpha coefficient of .93 by Kim (2000). Test-retest reliability of the questionnaire was .84, and internal consistency was .93. Moreover, a pilot study was implemented among 68 EFL students to examine the reliability (α = .76). Particularly, each sub-factors had an adequate index as follows: (a) *lack of self-confidence* (α = .75), (b) *tension* (α = .77), and (c) *fear of negative evaluation* (α = .76).

Reflective Thinking Questionnaire (RTQ)

To measure students' RT, Kember et al. (2000) RTQ was employed. The questionnaire contained 16 self-report items in four scales, including (1) HA, (2) U, (3) R, and (4) CR. Notably, HA (items 1, 5, 9, 13) is an activity that has been learned previously without conscious attention (e.g., I don't have to think about handout materials for exams as long as I remember them). In U (items 2,6,10,14), existing knowledge is used without appraisal (e.g., As part of this course, we are required to figure out the ideas that the lecturer teaches). In the R process (items 3,7,11,15), a concern is internally examined and explored (e.g., Reflecting on my actions and considering alternative solutions is important to me). In CR (items 4,8,12,16), we are able to gain a greater

understanding of why we perceive, contemplate, feel, and perform in the manner in which we do (e.g., As a result of taking this course, my view of myself has changed significantly). To test the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha values were calculated (α = .66). Kember et al. tested the final version of the RTQ among 303 students. Acceptable Cronbach alpha values established the reliability of the questionnaire. Besides, the CFA indicated a good fit for the model. The psychometric properties of the RTQ were tested by different practitioners (Kablan & Gunen, 2021; Zhang & Dempsey, 2019). The results supported the reliability and the construct validity of the scale. Moreover, Azimi and Taghizadeh (2019) piloted the RTQ test (α =. 76; n= 636) to suit the context of Iran. Furthermore, RTQ was piloted with 68 EFL learners. The results of KMO revealed that RTQ enjoyed an adequate KMO and reliability (KMO= .73; α =.79

Procedure

This study investigates how EFL students perceive their listening anxiety concerning CQ and RT.

It also seeks to determine how RT as a mediator can predict students' English listening anxiety. Three measurable scales of the primary constructs (i.e., CQ, RT, and FLLA) were administered as part of the data collection procedure. The researchers collected the data over about three months. To undertake the study, 810 scales were distributed to the participants. Because of the convenience of data collection and online instruction courses during COVID-19 throughout the country, researchers distributed the scales through the Porsline survey platform. The teachers and directors were asked to allow the respondents to complete the questionnaires at their expected class time to collect a valid response. Besides, students are assured of the confidentiality of data. All individuals were invited to participate in the survey willingly. Initially, the goal of the study was explained to all the participants, and their consent to take part in the research was secured. Notably, they were notified that their response to the scales implied their consent and eagerness to take part in the study. Each scale took approximately 10 -15 minutes to answer. Of all questionnaires, 765 questionnaires met a valid response of 94% was considered for the data analysis. From the initial analysis, 45 cases were found invalid due to some factors like a late response, incomplete response, failure to reply, and careless

answer. Following the collection of valid responses, the SEM approach was used for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

This study was designed as a correlational study, descriptive in nature. It employs a non-experimental correlation research design to predict the sources of FLLA using the SPSS and AMOS 21. The analysis was conducted in three stages to model the structural interplay. First, the model was tested using a Mahalanobis test to remove the outlier data in the extension of a linear regression model. Then, the normality of the data was checked with the descriptive statistics, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test, and the expectation–maximization (EM) algorithm. Such statistical analyses are the preliminary step to identify the missing data and the outlier values. Next, CR and Pearson correlation were used. These analyses were employed to confirm the model and probe the practicality of the hypothesized model. Afterwards, a SEM analysis was used to assess the predictive role of the constructs. As part of this study, two types of metrics were used: $\chi 2/df$ (chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio) and goodness-of-fit index (GFI).

Results

To analyze the data, some preliminary steps were run to test the normality assumptions. Then, to unveil the way target participants perceive their FLLA, Pearson product-moment correlation was employed (See Table 1).

Table 1.

Correlation matrix of CQ, RT, and FLLA

C	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
ME	1													
C	**69.	1												
M	**77.	**72.	1											
B	**66.	**60.	**75.	1										
CQ	**81.	**79.	**78.	**80.	1									
HA	**20.	**19.	**22.	**21.	**24.	1								
U	**17.	**15.	**21.	*14.	**21.	**64.	1							
R	**22.	**18.	**17.	**19.	**23.	**68.	**62.	1						
CR	**19.	**17.	**18.	**18.	**25.	**70.	**72.	**63.	1					
RT	**24.	**21.	**22.	**25.	**29.	**75.	**84.	**72.	**77.	1				
LSC	**18.-	**17.-	**19.-	**22.-	**24.-	**19.-	**20.-	**18.-	**19.-	**24.-	1			
T	**22.-	**19.-	**22.-	**18.-	**28.-	**21.-	**15.-	**21.-	**23.-	**29.-	**65.	1		
FNE	**17.-	**20.-	**17.-	**22.-	**26.-	**18.-	**19.-	**17.-	**21.-	**26.-	**68.	**66.	1	
FLLA	**21.-	**24.-	**20.-	**24.-	**35.-	**22.-	**20.-	**23.-	**25.-	**30.-	**81.	**74.	**86.	1

**Significance level 0.01, *significance level 0.05 RT and FLLA (r=-.30); CQ and FLLA (r=-.35)

Table 1 indicates that there is a negative interplay between CQ and LA (r =-.35, n =250, p <.01). Besides, there is a significant relationship between RT and FLLA (r =-.30, n =250, p <.01). Specifically, TRT indicated higher coefficient index than CQ. To determine if such variables significantly contribute to FLLA, the initial model was revised in terms of the indicators to determine the appropriate level (See Table 2).

Table 2.

The Fit Indices after Correction

Indicator	Indicators	Optimal values	Values obtained before modification	Conclusion
Absolute	χ^2	Nil	622.566	-
	GFI	≥.90	.999	The fit is acceptable
	AGFI	≥.90	.991	acceptable
Comparative	NFI	≥.90	.994	acceptable
	CFI	≥.90	.999	acceptable
	TLI	≥.90	.993	acceptable

Indicator	Indicators	Optimal values	Values obtained before modification	Conclusion
	RFI	≥.90	.992	acceptable
Thrifty	PNFI	≤. .5	.511	acceptable
	RMSEA	.08≥	.042	acceptable
	(χ^2/df)	3≥	2.562	acceptable
	Df	0≤	243	acceptable
	p-value	.05≥	.001	acceptable

The results show that the obtained model after modification has acceptable fits. Therefore, weighted regression statistics and critical ratios of variables were run to determine the values of the effect (B). Table 3 reveals the values of the significant effect of the subscales on the exogenous variable (i.e., CQ, RT), endogenous variable (i.e., FLLA), and the direction

Table 3.
Weighted Regression Statistics and Critical Ratios of Variables

Exogenous variable	Direction	Endogenous variable	Unstandardized coefficients Beta	Standardized coefficients Beta	R^2	t	P
CQ	➔	FLLA	-.452	-.337	-.337	4.54	.001
RT	➔	FLLA	-.377	-.274	-.274	3.77	.001

Table 3 indicates the standardized and unstandardized values of the prediction paths of CQ, RT, on FLLA. Precisely, the coefficient for exogenous variables (i.e., CQ: t = 4.546; RT: t = 3.77) is statistically significant. Moreover, a bootstrapping analysis was run to test the indirect effects of CQ (see Table 4).

Table 4.
Estimate of Indirect Effect from the Bootstrap Analysis

Variable	B	R^2	lower limit	upper limit	Sig.
The effect of CQ on FLLA	-.534	.361	-.597	-.412	.001

Table 4 indicates the indirect effect with respect to the standardized values (β= -.534). This value was followed by the lower (-.641) and the upper limit (-.453). The results indicated that CQ with the mediating role of RT is significant. The following figures illustrate (un)standardized models for indirect paths of listening anxiety.

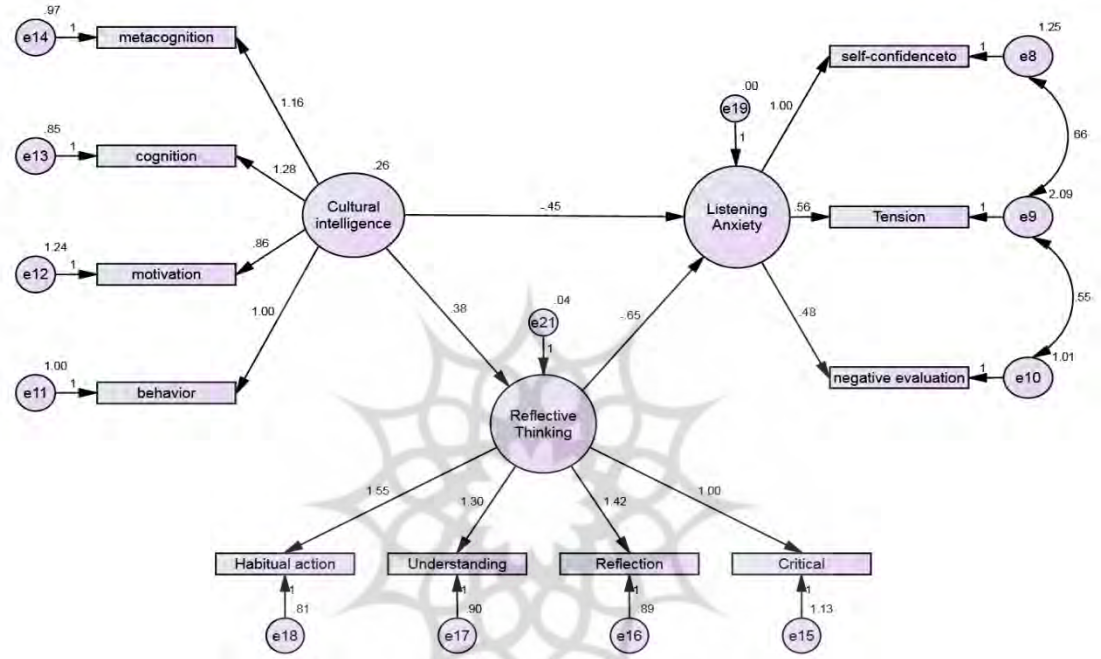

Figure 1. *Unstandardized Model Tested for Indirect Paths of Listening Anxiety*

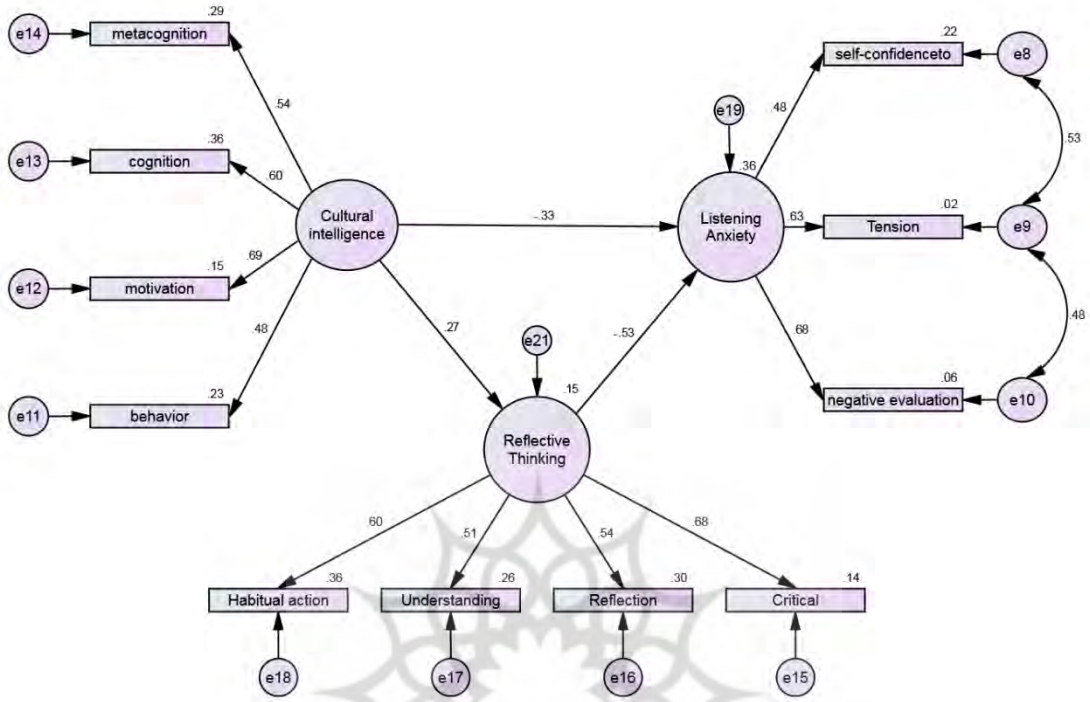

Figure 2. *Standardized Model for Predicting Listening Anxiety*

Discussion

This study examined a conceptual model based on CQ and RT among EFL students. An important component of the current study is the theoretical-conceptual model that aims to predict FLLA. More precisely, it was set to determine how CQ and RT can influence listening anxiety. The results showed that independent variables (i.e., CQ & RT) affected FLLA significantly. Both CI and RT had direct and indirect effects on FLLA. The findings indicated there were significant negative correlations among the constructs. CQ and RT, for the purpose of this study, included four dimensions.

Based on the results, the subscales of RT were the strongest predictors of FLLA. Notably, the results indicated a negative interplay between RT and FLLA. This indicates that a high level of RT subsides FLLA in listening comprehension. For the first construct (i.e., RT), the findings showed that the interplay between RT and FLLA was greater than

that of CQ and FLLA. The findings indicate that certain dimensions of RT had a stronger impact. More specifically, the findings revealed that critical reflection, reflection, habitual action, and understanding were the strongest predictors of FLLA, respectively. Of all subscales, students' level of CR seemed to have more explanatory power in subsiding anxiety among language learners. One reason why critical reflection and reflection stand the highest point in predicting anxiety is that point raised in the literature (e.g., Knight and Robinson, 2019) that RT is considered to be a part of critical thinking, which deals with various issues such as judgment, evaluation, and the analysis. The findings support Giuseffi (2019), who believes that learners can apply critical thinking as a cognitive strategy to tackle problem-solving and mental challenges. Likewise, Chamdani et al. (2022) argue that learners who engage in reflective thinking will also consider their own problems and consciously evaluate what they are doing, what they have experienced, and how they have learned from it. This claim justifies the reason why some dimensions of RT, such as reflectivity and critical reflection, had a stronger impact than others because learners thoughtfully reflect on their own problems and deliberately assess their actions. To state the matter differently, it seems that as L2 listeners employed CR, their critical responsibility in learning, accustomed activities, understanding, and reflection of obtained information are promoted accordingly. Therefore, such learners can listen attentively. The findings denote that a focus on the improvement of RT would be constructive to learners' listening performance. This justification echoes Renner's (1996) study, which posited that learners' higher-order learning and reflective skills are essential to the development of language proficiency (i.e., RT). Similar to the current finding, Dewaele and Thirtle (2009) believed that high levels of FLA are interlocked with weak performance in various language skills. The findings supported some practitioners (e.g., Boyd & Fales, 1983; Dewey, 1933; Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Kember et al., 2000) who claimed that RT is central in promoting L2 achievement. In line with the theoretical aspect of such studies, the findings of this study indicated that students' ability to comprehend listening tasks increases when their anxiety declines. This study aligns with Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis. Krashen believes that anxiety causes an effective filter that would hinder L2 learning. In line with Krashen's theoretical assumption, the current study revealed that reflective practice can act as an effective filter for reducing listening anxiety.

Such a learning environment can promote RT mode (Barjesteh, 2019). The findings support the point that RT, in general, and critical reflection, in particular, can promote the learning environment (i.e., listening anxiety). Considering the fact that listening "takes place within the mind of the listener, and the context of interpretation is the cognitive environment of the listener" (Buck, 2001, p.29), it can, therefore, be claimed that incorporating listening in the school curricula can develop RT mode. The findings also support Song et al. (2005), who concluded that language achievement is best achieved in a reflective learning environment. They pinpointed that reflective learning environments, reflective teaching, and scaffolding tools can enhance students' ability to reflect. The findings also echo some researchers (e.g., Chen et al., 2019; Pham et al.,2020), who found that RT is important for learners to decide on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor activities. Recently, some practitioners (Barjesteh, 2019; Shavit & Moshe, 2019; Kablan & Gunen, 2021; Knight & Robinson, 2019; Qasrawi & Beni Abdelrahman, 2020; Zare & Barjesteh, 2021) predicted the role of RT in outperforming academic tasks. Shavit and Moshe (2019) considered RT an important skill for learning when solving complex problems. Qasrawi and Beni Abdelrahman (2020) posited that RT skills can foster different cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Kablan and Gunen (2021) found that reflective learners can outperform in remembering, decision-making, understanding, and interpreting while reading and listening to a text. Similarly, Ozudogru (2021) enumerated the merits of reflective learners. Ozudogru determined that such learners can likely perform some activities such as judging themselves, solving problems, and developing self-improvement. Likewise, Zare et al. (2021) revealed that critical thinking-oriented dynamic assessment can significantly promote students' (e.g., listening) potential scores. The findings also supported some studies (e.g., Barjesteh & Ghaseminia, 2019; Goh & Vandergrift, 2021; Landry-Meyer, 2023), which stated the ability to listen is complex, dynamic, and integrative. The finding supported the idea that listeners' active mental activities are involved in listening comprehension. Such mental activities (e.g., RT) can influence listening tasks.

Another aspect of this paper was to probe if the level of learners' CQ predicts listening anxiety. As far as the findings were concerned, CQ had a significant negative linear relationship with FLLA. Specifically, the results revealed that the cognitive,

behavioral, metacognitive, and motivational dimensions were the predictors of FLLA. Specifically, the results indicated that the level of students' CQ can facilitate listening comprehension. Theoretically, the idea supports Stern's theory of general intelligence, as CQ is a person's ability to adjust to their environment. The findings of this study are in line with Stern's theoretical assumption, which suggests that intelligence is an individual capacity to adapt to their surrounding environment. This study shows that all dimensions had a stronger impact in reducing learners' anxiety because they could adjust all their subscales. It shows that students who enjoy higher levels of CQ may perform better in terms of listening anxiety. Interestingly, the cognitive and behavioral dimensions were the strongest predictors in reducing FLLA in the analysis. The findings support Simpson (2015), who proposed CQ as a skill that should be developed over a long period of time because it helps students adapt to new situations. The study indicates that cognitive and behavioral dimensions of CQ had a stronger impact than others due to the fact that learners could coordinate in various situations. Metacognitive and motivational dimensions were also the subsequent predictors of decreasing FLLA. It is interesting to note that both cognitive and behavioral dimensions equally influenced FLLA. The results demonstrated that when learners' cognitive and behavioral dimensions in the CQ increase, their FLLA will decrease accordingly. By and large, the results support the point that students' CQ was directly related to their level of listening anxiety. Accordingly, it is claimed that the higher the level of learners' CQ, the more L2 listening achievement. The results echo some studies (e.g., Gedik BalL, 2022; Ghonsooli & Shalchy, 2013) that illustrated the effect of CQ on the learning environment. The findings also confirmed the findings of Ang et al. (2007), who found that CQ would influence different affective and cognitive factors such as creativity and better language achievement, proper functioning, and interaction within individuals. Of all the sub-factors in CQ, this study showed that the cognitive dimension can promote L2 listening achievement. The findings differ from those of Ghonsooli and Shalchy (2013) in that cognitive, behavioral, metacognitive, and motivational factors were the strongest predictors for promoting listening achievement. The findings also echo Al-Khresheh (2020), who found that cultural background significantly influences the comprehension of tasks among EFL students. The findings are in congruent with some authors (e.g., Ambert et al., 2023; Ang et al., 2021; Gedik

Bal, 2022) who claimed that anxiety and CQ significantly influence L2 skills. As discussed, understanding the latent factors underlying listening anxiety, as well as exploring the anxiety-provoking factors, are essential in listening skills (Papi & Khajavi, 2023). Thus, this point has been added to the professional literature in L2 regarding the importance of recognizing the association between CQ and FLL.

Given the positive outcomes and educational implications, further research is needed to examine the factors influencing FLLA. Building on the insights of the findings, recommendations for future research have been proposed on how teachers can integrate CQ and RT into their instruction. Future studies could explore the predictors of FLLA on a national level, covering various English language institutions and schools. These studies should be carefully conducted, considering variables like students' educational levels, age, gender, and social and cultural backgrounds. As this study primarily focused on testing a model, it is acknowledged that the explanatory nature of the findings does not establish causal relationships. Therefore, to obtain more reliable findings on the same constructs, future research should consider using experimental and control groups to identify cause-and-effect relationships. The generalizability of these findings can be improved if researchers employ qualitative or mixed-methods designs with different validated scales, which could provide a deeper understanding of FLLA predictors in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Future studies might also explore relationships with other variables, such as speaking, reading, and writing anxiety. Another area for future research could involve examining EFL learners' RT levels, motivation, language enjoyment, and critical thinking strategies and how CQ and RT contribute to cognitive and affective variables.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the role of CQ and RT in EFL classrooms, hoping to shed further light on the process of predicting FLLA. RT could facilitate the negative association between CQ and three sub-FLLAs. The findings revealed that both CQ and RT affect FLLA. However, FLLA was found to be more strongly predicted by RT. This suggests that a high level of RT raises EFL learners’ listening understanding. Therefore, teachers may consider enhancing their RT to foster their students' listening performance

when teaching EFL. The findings showed that a high level of CQ reduces anxiety in listening skills. Thus, teachers should be aware of the sources of the CQ that generate anxiety in listening comprehension. Importantly, this research has some pedagogical implications for educators, policymakers, material developers, and curriculum designers in teaching L2 listening skill. Reducing listening anxiety can have a profound impact on curriculum design and pedagogy, especially in language learning. Precisely, it can improve listening comprehension, increase engagement, enhance confidence, lead to more accurate assessment, and generate motivation. Educators may consider enhancing learners' RT to foster listening skill. Besides, a high level of CQ can help decrease anxiety in listening skills. Accordingly, language policymakers should train teachers and students to promote their RT skills and CQ strategies. In so doing, curriculum developers are suggested to include various strategies to promote such constructs among language learners. Designing curricula with anxiety-reducing strategies can thus make listening practice more effective, encouraging better performance and overall language acquisition. More precisely, if teachers plan to reduce learners' anxiety for the listening courses, they should consider CQ and RT as two crucial elements. Accordingly, they may uphold various metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral strategies to raise their learners' CQ or different habitual action, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection strategies to enhance learners' RT with the hope of reducing FLLA.

Besides, the current study considered the roles of CQ in FLLA with the mediating role of RT. Considering the main approaches of FLLA, this study proposed a model using the situation-specific approach. The same study can be replicated to test the social and psychological factors with different sources of anxiety or learners' characteristics. Besides, other constructs can be included to test a model among adult language learners. A future model can be proposed to seek language grit, language learning strategy, and learners' language achievement as the mediators of decreasing or increasing FLLA. Furthermore, a similar model can be proposed to probe the effect of FLLA on EFL learners' test performance. Despite the revealing findings, this study is not without limitations. The first limitation concerns the participants. Other factors such as age range (e.g., adult language learners), gender, major, language proficiency, and educational background may influence listening anxiety. Second, learners' level of RT and cultural

factors reflect their conceptualization of such terms, and the way they conceptualize their own feelings may affect the generalizability of the findings. While learners were given operational definitions of the RT and CQ, their understanding of the terms should be considered with some caution.

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