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The Potential of MCII to Enhance English Listening Skills Among College Students: A Feasibility Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the feasibility of using Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions (MCII) to enhance English listening comprehension among college students. MCII, a self-regulation strategy, combines contrasting desired outcomes with present obstacles, followed by forming "if-then" action plans to overcome them. One hundred students were randomly assigned to MCII, Implementation Intentions (II), and a control group. Over eight weeks, the MCII group received mental contrasting and implementation intentions training, while the II group focused only on implementation intentions. Pretest and posttest assessments of listening skills and self-regulation were conducted. The expected results suggest that the MCII group will show the most remarkable improvement in listening comprehension, highlighting the potential of MCII as a cost-effective intervention to enhance listening skills through improved self-regulation. This has practical implications for language education by offering an efficient way to improve learning outcomes.

Keywords

Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions; English Listening Skills; Feasibility Analysis.

1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of information technology, many learners are turning to the internet to acquire knowledge and improve skills. However, while the availability of online resources has surged, the challenge of effectively navigating and processing this vast information has grown significantly (Greene et al., 2014). Online learning environments, particularly those requiring extensive engagement, demand advanced self-regulation strategies to ensure learners stay focused, avoid distractions, and meet their educational goals (Goldie, 2016). In this context, effective self-regulation interventions are essential for enhancing academic performance.

Self-regulation (SR) refers to the processes individuals use to control their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve personal goals (Duckworth et al., 2011). SR involves a variety of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies, including goal setting, monitoring progress, and adjusting behaviors to overcome obstacles. Given the increasing complexity of online environments, research on SR strategies in online learning has become crucial. Previous studies have shown that SR strategies can be taught, improving academic performance and overall well-being.

Among the most promising SR interventions is Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions (MCII), which has been demonstrated to improve self-regulation and facilitate goal achievement in various domains. MCII involves two complementary processes: mental contrasting, where learners reflect on their desired future and the obstacles that stand in the way, and implementation intentions, which include planning how to overcome these obstacles

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with "if-then" strategies. Research suggests that MCII promotes automatic goal-pursuit behaviors by enhancing motivation and internalizing action plans (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2015). However, while MCII has shown promise in academic contexts such as test preparation (Duckworth et al., 2013), its application in language learning, particularly in improving English listening skills, remains underexplored.

This study explores the feasibility of using MCII to enhance college students' English listening skills. Through an in-depth analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of MCII and its potential impact on learning strategies, we seek to assess how well this intervention can be adapted to the context of language learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-Regulation and Learning Performance

Previous research has established a strong link between self-regulation strategies and academic success. Learners who employ effective SR strategies are likelier to stay focused on their tasks, overcome distractions, and achieve their learning goals (Greene et al., 2018b). In online learning, self-regulation is essential, as learners must navigate complex information environments while maintaining focus and motivation. SR processes such as self-monitoring, goal setting, and progress tracking have improved learning outcomes in various domains (Azevedo, 2005).

2.2. MCII in Educational Settings

MCII is an intervention widely studied for its effects on goal setting and self-regulation. The two-step process—mental contrasting and implementation intentions—helps learners internalize their goals by visualizing potential obstacles and planning specific actions to overcome them. Studies have shown that MCII enhances learners' persistence and goal achievement by automating goal-pursuit behaviors (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). Research in educational settings has demonstrated the efficacy of MCII in improving academic performance, attendance, and time management (Duckworth et al., 2011; Oettingen et al., 2015; Hoch et al., 2020). However, despite the growing evidence supporting MCII's Effectiveness, its application in language learning remains under-investigated, particularly in listening skills.

2.3. MCII in Language Learning

Language learning, especially developing listening skills, requires cognitive engagement and effective self-regulation strategies. Learners often struggle to maintain focus and motivation when practicing listening comprehension due to the passive nature of the activity and the challenges of processing unfamiliar sounds and vocabulary (Coiro et al., 2014). The MCII framework, emphasizing internalizing goals and automating self-regulation, presents a promising approach to overcoming these challenges. Previous research suggests that MCII can help learners stay focused on their listening goals by automating the process of addressing common barriers such as distraction and cognitive overload (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2015).

3. Feasibility Analysis Framework

3.1. Theoretical Foundation for Applying MCII to Listening Skills

The theoretical foundation of MCII suggests that this intervention could improve English listening skills among college students. By engaging learners in mental contrasts, they can visualize both the benefits of improving their listening abilities and the obstacles that might prevent them from achieving their goals. Following this, implementation intentions allow learners to create specific action plans for overcoming these obstacles. Given that listening

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requires sustained attention and cognitive engagement, MCII's ability to automate goal-pursuit behaviors could enhance learning outcomes.

3.2. Adapting MCII for English Listening Skills

To apply MCII in English listening, learners could be guided by identifying the barriers to successful listening (e.g., difficulty understanding accents or struggling with background noise). They could then create specific "if-then" plans to address these challenges. For example, a learner might formulate an implementation intention such as: "If I cannot understand a word, then I will write it down and look it up after the listening session."

3.3. Challenges and Considerations

While MCII has shown promise in various educational settings, there are potential challenges to its implementation in language learning. One challenge is ensuring that learners understand the process of mental contrasting and implementation intentions, as this requires a certain level of metacognitive awareness. Additionally, the passive nature of listening practice may make it difficult for learners to remain engaged, even with the support of MCII. To address these challenges, it may be necessary to provide learners with explicit *training on applying MCII in the context of listening tasks.*

3.4. Practical Application and Future Research

Given the growing body of research supporting MCII's Effectiveness in academic settings, it is feasible to hypothesize that this intervention could also enhance listening comprehension in language learners. Future research should focus on testing the efficacy of MCII in this context through experimental studies that measure both short-term and long-term improvements in listening skills. The impact of MCII on other language-related tasks, such as speaking or reading comprehension, could also be explored.

4. Methods

4.1. Participants

The study will recruit 100 college students from English basic-level courses at a university. Participants will be randomly assigned to three groups: the MCII group (mental contrasting with implementation intentions), the II group (implementation intentions only), and the control group. Each group will consist of *approximately 33 students. All participants will provide informed consent before the study begins.*

4.2. Study Design

The study will employ a pretest-posttest experimental design with three groups. The intervention will last for eight weeks, during which participants will attend two 30-minute training sessions per week. These sessions will involve listening comprehension exercises, with the MCII group receiving specific training in mental contrasting and implementation intentions, while the II group will focus solely on implementation intentions. The control group will follow traditional listening comprehension training without specific self-regulation strategies. The flowchart of the experimental procedure is shown in Figure 1.

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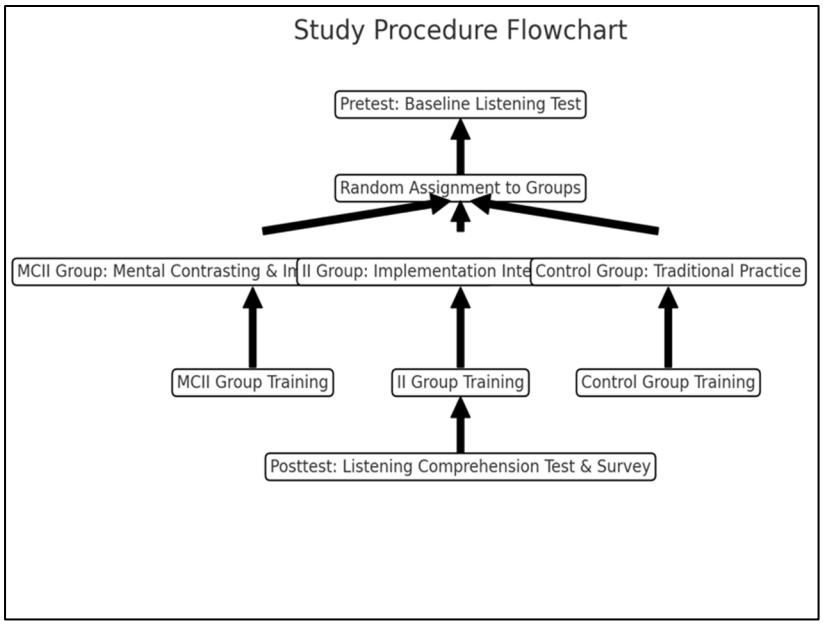

Figure 1. Flowchart of the experimental procedure

Pretest: All participants will complete an English listening comprehension test to determine their baseline listening abilities. Intervention: The MCII group will receive mental contrasting and implementation intentions training. Participants will contrast their ideal future listening comprehension abilities with their current skills and then form specific "if-then" plans (e.g., "If I miss a keyword, then I will replay the audio"). The II group will focus solely on forming implementation intentions without the mental contrasting process. The control group will engage in regular listening practice using traditional methods. Posttest: After four weeks and eight weeks, all participants will complete the same listening comprehension test to measure progress. They will also complete a questionnaire to evaluate their learning experience and perceptions of the intervention.

4.3. Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using SPSS software. The primary analysis will involve repeated measures ANOVA to compare changes in listening comprehension scores across the three groups over time. In addition, regression analysis will be used to explore the relationship between the intervention and improvements in listening skills. Qualitative data from the questionnaires will be analyzed to identify themes related to student perceptions of the intervention.

5. Results

While this is a feasibility analysis, based on the study design and the literature review, we would hypothesize the following outcomes:

5.1. Improvement in Listening Skills

We expect that participants in the MCII group will show the most remarkable improvement in listening comprehension scores compared to the II and control groups. The II group is expected to improve more than the control group but less than the MCII group.

5.2. Self-Regulation Improvement

Qualitative responses from the questionnaires are expected to show that the MCII group participants report higher self-regulation and goal-achievement levels than the other groups.

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5.3. MCI I's Effectiveness

The analysis is anticipated to support the Effectiveness of the MCII intervention in enhancing listening skills by facilitating better self-regulation through both mental contrasting and implementation intentions.

6. Discussion

The expected findings suggest that MCII is a viable intervention for improving listening comprehension among university students. The combination of mental contrasting and implementation intentions is likely more effective than implementation intentions alone, as it helps students internalize their goals and overcome obstacles in listening comprehension.

The Effectiveness of MCII can be attributed to its dual approach: mental contrasting helps students visualize the gap between their current abilities and desired outcomes. At the same time, implementation intentions provide concrete steps to overcome listening challenges. This aligns with previous research (e.g., Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2015) demonstrating MCII's ability to promote goal attainment through improved self-regulation.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on self-regulation in education, particularly in language learning. It also extends the application of MCII from domains such as health and productivity into second language acquisition, specifically for listening skills.

The study provides a practical framework for incorporating MCII into language education, offering teachers a low-cost, efficient method to enhance students' listening comprehension. The intervention is relatively easy to implement, requires minimal resources, and can be adapted for various educational contexts.

The main limitation of this study is the lack of long-term follow-up, which would provide more insight into the sustainability of the improvements. Additionally, the sample size, while sufficient for initial exploration, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could involve more extensive, diverse populations and measure long-term effects.

7. Conclusion

The present study demonstrates the feasibility and potential of MCII to improve college students' English listening comprehension. The combination of mental contrasting and implementation intentions offers a promising approach to enhancing self-regulation and achieving language learning goals. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of self-regulation in language learning and provides practical insights for educators seeking effective interventions to improve student outcomes. Further research should explore the long-term effects of MCII and investigate its applicability to other areas of language acquisition.

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