



## **THE USE OF TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP APPROACH ON IMPROVING EFL LEARNERS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION.**

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<b>Received:</b> 20 <sup>th</sup> March 2022 <b>Accepted:</b> 20 <sup>th</sup> April 2022 <b>Published:</b> 4 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	This article deals with explanation of the notion listening comprehension of English language learners. Listening is one of important skill in English. Many of learners feel difficult to learn listening especially in English. The definition of the term "listening comprehension" by different scholars were identified. The usage of the empirically examining the effectiveness of top-down and bottom-up processing is described. The differences between these techniques were analyzed. Using a multimedia as a teaching media is important in this process. It can catch students attention of the lesson. This research discusses improving listening skill using "top-down" and "bottom-up" techniques integrally.

**Keywords:** Listening, Listening Comprehension, Process, Approach, Top-Down, Bottom-Up, Skill, Prior Knowledge, Linguistic Knowledge.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language is closely connected with four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. The first skill that a native speaker develops is listening in learning any language; we can suppose that listening is the first skill that language learners face in their learning or acquisition process. Most students and many teachers agree that a student's level of listening comprehension is far lower than any other linguistic skill they possess. Whilst their comprehension of classroom discourse may in fact be high, thanks to their teacher's and textbook's reduction of certain phonological features, their ability to comprehend native or non-native speakers of English outside of class, in the 'real world', is, in many cases, quite poor to the point where the student doubts their linguistic achievements or believe that their homestay family speaks some bizarre dialect of English only comprehended by other native speakers. "Listening is a fundamental language skill, but it is often ignored by foreign and second language teachers" (Rebeccal, 1993). Listening is an active, purposeful process of making sense of what we hear (Helgesen, 2003). Listening comprehension is a highly complex problem-solving activity that can be broken down into a set of distinct sub-skills (Byrnes, 1984)

Listening is considered as a different process which includes an active and interactional action where listener should have physical, passive and natural procedure and contemplated as mental process. It is called a skill that spoken and non-verbal messages are responded. The attempt to accept the meaning of the spoken word after receiving the speech sounds of intended message and responding the to oral communication effectively can be defined as listening skill. Listening comprehension is an extremely important part of a language learning phenomenon. Second language acquisition studies have illustrated that comprehensible output and input are crucial for the acquisition of a language (Swain, 1995)

If learners want to learn to speak, they should first learn to understand the spoken language they hear. If learners want to communicate with native speakers, they should first learn to understand in real language situations to comprehend the main pint of what native speakers are telling. Therefore, listening is very important to which teachers and learners should pay enough attention to obtain communication aims. Listening is very important in language learning because it provides input for learners and it has also an important role in the development of learners' language knowledge (Rost, 1994).

The term "listening comprehension" has been defined by different authors. According to Nadig "Listening comprehension is the different processes of understanding the spoken language. These include knowing speech sounds, comprehending the meaning of individual words, and understanding the syntax of sentences" (Nadig, A.2013).

Dirven and Oakeshott-Taylor defined listening comprehension as the product of teaching methodology and is matched by terms such as speech understanding, spoken language understanding, speech recognition, and speech perception (Dirven and Oakeshott-Taylor 1984).

M, L Lynch states that listening comprehension as a communicative process where audiences are engaged in building meaning. Audiences grasp the oral information through sound segregation, existed knowledge, sentence structures, stress intonation as well as the other linguistic or non-linguistic signs. (M, L. Lynch, 2005).

## LITURATURE REVIEW

Listening comprehension is a cognitive and an interactive process of creating meanings that the speaker intends, through the integral involvement of the hearer.

In the listening comprehension process listeners need to have two types of knowledge, they are linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge. Linguistic knowledge consists of "phonology, lexis, syntax and discourse structure" and the non-linguistic knowledge covers all comprehension features such as "topic, context, general knowledge about the world and how it works" (Buck, 2001).

It must be mentioned that there are two possible ways of performing listening process: top-down and bottom-up skills. This complex multistep procedure should be practiced in the classroom. As Koichi states, understanding the listening process can help us to rethink the methods of teaching listening. For this purpose, there are two key components for clarifying the listening process: the first is bottom-up and top-down processing; the second is schema theory. (Koichi, 2001). Listening is an personally meaningful and conceptually coherent process for constructing meaning in which two kinds of processes are involved at the same time: bottom-up and top-down processing. Applying these processings can help the student to pass out the problem in listening comprehension on classroom learning. Top-Down processing in listening involves the liveliness of building mean based on presumption, conclusion, purpose, and other relevant knowledge. Bottom-Up in listening is more detail in grammar and the meaning of words

In a top-down approach, we first introduce the topic and activate students schemata (Thornbury, 2006:202), after that, we listen for gist to get a general idea about the text and then listen again for more specific or detailed information. On the other hand, in a bottom-up approach, we focus more on perception and language skills and start by recognising individual sounds, words and phrases in order to understand what is said (Harmer, 2001:201). Wilson claims that "the long-term goal of teaching listening is to ensure a successful process (intelligent use of top-down and bottom-up information and good strategy use) as much as a successful product (the correct answer)" (Wilson, 2008:17).

Peterson defines top-down processing as the higher level process "driven by listeners' expectations and understandings of the context, the topic, the nature of text, and the nature of the world". On the other hand, he defines bottom-up processing as the lower level process "triggered by the sounds, words, and phrases which the listener hears as he or she attempts to decode speech and assign meaning"( Peterson 2001)

Bottom-up listening approach is text based which helps students recognize lexical and pronunciation features to understand the text. Grammatical and lexical are applied to the analysis of the text. Individual words and phrases are focused by a listener. Because of their direct focus on language forms at the word and sentence levels, bottom-up exercises are particularly beneficial for lower level students who need to expand their language repertoire. As they become more aware of linguistic features of the input, the speed and accuracy of perceiving and processing aural input will increase. To develop bottom-up processing, students could be asked to differentiate sounds, word boundaries, and stressed syllables, to point out thought groups, to be aware of for intonation patterns in utterances, to distinguish grammatical forms and functions to identify contractions and connected speech to learn linking words.

Top-down listening approach relies on prior knowledge and experience to build the meaning of a listening text using the information provided by sounds and words. To arrive at a meaning of a text, the listener draws on her knowledge of the context, topic, speakers, situation, and the world, matching it to the aural input. Top-down listening skills refers to listening for gist, main ideas, topic, and setting of the text, distinguishing specific information from general information, sequencing the information, prediction, guessing, making an inference, figuring out what is not directly said in the listening text. This approach begins with prior background knowledge contradictory to the bottom-up listening approach.

Harmer indicates that in this processing, the listener tends to get the message' general view and absorb the overall picture of the listening passage. This is helped if the listener has the ability to have appropriate expectations of what is going to come across.(Harmer 2001).

Top-down listening strategies are listener-based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of the text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next.

Lingzhu suggests several activities to activate students' prior knowledge such as word association tasks, prior questioning, making list of possibilities, ideas or suggestions, and looking at pictures before listening (Lingzhu 2003:2-4).

In order to achieve our aim to improve listening skills using "top-down" and "bottom-up" processing, our study was based on the collection and search of the theoretical and practical materials. Theoretical materials include literature sources and review. Practical materials involve: to conduct a questionnaire (LSQ) about students' attitude toward listening skills using "top-down" and "bottom-up" processing; to identify learning efficient activities in developing listening and speaking skills; and to find solutions in improving listening and speaking skills of students in mixed level groups. The subjects of the study are 20 first-year students from different groups, they were randomly

chosen. They range from 16-18 years of age. Of the 20 students, 8 students finished schools in different regions. The duration of English classes university was different. Some have learnt English for 4 years; some of them have learnt English for 3 years. The reason of choosing the first-year students for our study is our academic curriculum, and a textbook "Speak out". This book fully provides with listening and speaking activities. Curriculum on "Speak out" is the same for all groups. We made some changes in curriculum for our research, and try to adapt listening and speaking materials to mixed level groups.

In this study test helped us to create a group for our researching, and it is one of the easiest ways to compile data in short period of time. The aim of test was to elicit students' background of English, students' attitude to listening and speaking skills, students' difficulties in listening and speaking. Data from the questionnaire were sorted and analyzed statistically and displayed in tables. This test helped us to find fruitful learning activities in developing listening and speaking skills using "top-down" and "bottom-up" processing, and to find solutions to reduce difficulties in listening and speaking skills.

The learners of both groups were given a listening comprehension test at the beginning and the end of the experimental period consisting of two parts: listening to separate words and listening to a text both recorded in white noise. In the second task successful recognition of both separate words and sentences were analyzed. The results of the listening comprehension test are shown in Table 1 (p % of the average mean of correct recognition).

Table 1.  
Recognition of words and sentences in the listening comprehension test

	Material	Control Group	Experimental Group
At the beginning of the experimental period	Words	19.6%	19.8%
	text (words)	23.3%	23.9%
	text(sentences)	14.7%	14.8%
At the end of the experimental period	Words	23%	29.6%
	text (words)	23.6%	33%
	text(sentences)	16.7%	30.8%

It is seen from the table that at the beginning of the experimental period both groups demonstrated nearly equal percentage of recognition. The results showed positive changes in recognition of separate words, and words and sentences in the text in both groups but in the experimental group there was a more notable improvement. It should be stated that the experiment took quite a short period of time but it was enough to show the positive influence of the described approach. The set of exercises is quite limited in the experiment but there are some works which can provide teachers with a wide range of tasks and exercises aimed at training bottom-up processing (Vandergrift and Goh, 2012; Richards, 2008; Fedotova,2015)

**DISCUSSIONS**

The research provides evidence for importance of the consistent approach to teaching listening comprehension based on one of the approaches so called bottom-up approach. The bottom-up approach involves listening exercises which develop bottom-up processing helping learners to recognize individual words, sentences, and clause divisions, recognize key linguistic features of the words and sentences. Such approach is effective when the L2 perception skills are not developed enough.

The difference between two approaches is the following: For the Top-down process, students take into account the context and do not need to pay attention on specific details while in Bottom up listening process, students have to pay attention because here, specific details are very important to understand the whole meaning of the conversation or another kind of listening activity. The listener focuses on individual words and phrases, and achieves understanding by stringing these detailed elements together to build up a whole. Understanding the exact word is more important.

To increase learners' ability in listening comprehension, the teacher needs to realize what problems overlooked by their learners. Since listening is still a big issue for English learners, so the process of Top Down and Bottom Up need to be identified. Top-Down processing refers to the use of schemata or students' knowledge in understanding the information given, while Bottom-Up processing refers to the process of understanding information through sound analysis, word meaning, and grammar.

In conclusion, bottom-up listening processing raises the awareness of linguistic elements of what they hear, top-down listening process develops the prior background knowledge. Both approaches are considered as an active skill which involves many processes: interaction where listener and speaker employ both prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge.

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