

## ANALYZING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS TO EFL STUDENTS

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the implementation of English language teaching strategies for developing listening skills in students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). A qualitative descriptive method was used in the study. In order to answer the research question, the researchers collected data from open-ended interview statements from three teachers at SMA Negeri I Paleleh. The researchers analysed the data through the process of data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion. The findings of this research indicate that the implementation of bottom-up and top-down strategies could improve students' knowledge and listening skills. The use of bottom-up and top-down strategies helped students to improve their listening skills because learners found the strategies enjoyable and were able to share their perspectives based on their prior knowledge of the topic. In addition, teachers were able to provide students with detailed knowledge about the learning topic.

**Keywords:** Bottom-up strategy, Listening skills, Top-down strategy

### INTRODUCTION

The teaching process is the most important thing to consider when teaching languages, especially English. There are several skills in English that students need to master; one of these skills is listening. The best way to teach listening is to create and use the right strategies according to what is being taught, because the aspect that supports the success of the teaching process lies in the strategies used by the teacher in the classroom. According to Richard and Rodgers (2001), strategies are an important way in the teaching and learning process. Recent studies (Fu et al., 2023; Sutrisna, 2023; Nguyen, 2020; Mukminin et al., 2021) have highlighted the importance of effective teaching strategies in developing the listening skills of students learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

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However, listening skills tend to be forgotten and ignored by teachers. Teachers spend less time on it in the classroom. Based on the preliminary research, the researchers conducted interviews with English teachers in the school where the study was conducted. The researchers asked questions and gathered information about English teaching strategies for listening. The teacher said that teachers were more concerned with teaching the three other skills apart from listening. The strategies used included reading a text and asking the pupils to listen. The teacher repeated the reading two or three times and then the students were asked to answer questions. Pupils could not answer the teacher's questions because of the method used. The strategies used by the teachers to teach listening skills were not very effective. This made the students not fully understand in the learning process. The teacher's strategy should be able to help the students in the learning process, but in reality it did not train the students' listening skills well. The methods or techniques used by the teacher were inappropriate for teaching a language skill.

The problem of this research is to investigate how the strategies are implemented in teaching listening skills to EFL students. Listening skills for EFL students require intensive practice and a good strategy because it involves listening and understanding what is heard. According to Richards (2008), effective listening instruction can be divided into two main strategies: bottom-up and top-down. Bottom-up strategies involve decoding the smallest units of sound to construct meaning, such as recognising individual words and sounds, while top-down strategies involve using background knowledge, context and expectations to understand the meaning of what is heard. Therefore, this research should be conducted to investigate English language teaching strategies in listening skills in more detail and clearly. Hopefully, the strategies used by teachers in teaching listening skills can be used as a reference by other teachers and can be improved in the future to produce well-structured teaching.

In addition, the novelty of this research lies in its focus analysing the specific strategies used by teachers in real classroom settings, providing detailed insights into their effectiveness and areas for improvement. In general, a strategy is a set of methods or plans as a whole or as procedural steps for presenting all forms of learning material. Today, teachers are expected to have and implement a plan to create an exciting learning situation and to challenge students to actively participate in the learning process. Specifically, according to Moughamian et al. (2009), teaching strategies are explicitly described that aim to help students learn how to access and retain information, use scaffolding strategies, and improve students' higher order thinking skills. It is therefore important for teachers to pay attention to the strategies used. Mutia (2020) states that in order to achieve the expected learning goals together, each teacher should pay attention to the use of multimedia, multi-methods, and multi-resources to create learning conditions that challenge students' creativity and activity and motivate them. Furthermore, Ginting, Situmorang, and Boangmanalu (2019)

emphasise that teachers' strategies for teaching listening skills should focus on organising the learning components and choosing appropriate strategies for teaching listening skills. Appropriate strategies in teaching English, especially listening, can make the learning process more effective.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research design is crucial in conducting a research study as it determines the approach to finding, developing and validating knowledge through scientific theories. In this study, a descriptive qualitative method is chosen as it is in line with the research question. According to Sugiyono (2016), qualitative research allows for the exploration of natural settings and phenomena, with the researchers as the main instrument. The method is interactive and flexible, allowing for an in-depth understanding of social phenomena from the perspective of the participants. The focus of the research is to investigate the strategies used by English teachers at SMAN 1 Paleleh in teaching listening skills to EFL students. This approach emphasises understanding the social context and participants' perspectives, using and interviewing teachers to collect data.

The study is being conducted at SMAN 1 Paleleh in Buol Regency, Sulawesi Tengah Province, Indonesia. This school was chosen because it represents the final stage of secondary education before students enter university. Known for its use of the local language, the school provides a suitable environment for investigating the strategies used by teachers to teach English, particularly listening skills, which are crucial in foreign language learning contexts. The participants in this research are three English teachers from SMAN 1 Paleleh, all of whom teach at the twelfth grade level. This choice is based on the teachers' role in deepening students' understanding of listening skills, in line with the research aim of exploring strategies in teaching listening to EFL students. Data collection involves semi-structured interviews designed to provide a comprehensive insight into the teaching strategies used in the classroom.

In qualitative research, data analysis plays a crucial role in deriving meaningful insights from the data collected. Following the approach proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), the data analysis process begins with data collection through interviews. Data reduction involves summarising and selecting relevant information in relation to the research objectives. The next step, data presentation, involves systematically organising the data to facilitate the drawing of conclusions. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the analysed data and the findings are reviewed to ensure that they are supported by strong evidence from the data collected. This rigorous approach to data analysis aims to provide valuable insights into the strategies used by English language teachers to teach listening skills to EFL students at SMAN 1 Palaeleh, thereby contributing to the improvement of teaching practice in this context.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

There were two themes to be discussed in the interview session: top-down strategy and bottom-up strategy. The interview questions consisted of four themes

### **Teachers' Strategies for Teaching Listening Skills to EFL Students**

There were two questions in the first theme which was about the strategy's teachers used in teaching listening skills to EFL students. The first question was about the strategy's teachers used and the second question was about which strategies they used most often. All teachers responded to the first question by saying that they used a bottom-up strategy, a top-down strategy, a listening team, and a listening and drilling strategy. *"In teaching, especially in listening, I used four strategies. They were listening and drilling, bottom-up processing, top-down processing and listening teams."* In response to the second question, they indicated that the strategies they most often used in listening were top-down and bottom-up: *"In the process of teaching and learning listening, I mostly used top-down processing and bottom-up processing."*

### **How teachers use specific strategies when teaching listening to EFL students**

In the second theme, there were six questions about how teachers used specific strategies when teaching listening to EFL students. The first question was whether the teachers had several stages that they implemented with the strategy they used in teaching listening, and all the teachers answered yes, they had several stages, *"Yes, I do"*. The second question was about the steps the teachers took in implementing the strategy of teaching listening. The teachers answered that first they introduced the material to be taught to the students, then they explained the content of the material, and finally they had a discussion with the students, *"Mostly I started the learning process by giving an introduction about the topic to be taught, and then I taught the students the material, and lastly I had a discussion"*.

The third question was about how the teachers used the listening teaching strategy in each of the stages. The teachers replied that they always started the lesson by giving the students a clue about the topic they were going to learn. Then the teachers told the students the topic they were going to learn. After that, the teachers let the students give their opinion about the material based on what they knew about it: *"When the class starts, I start the learning process by telling the students the topic we are going to learn. After that I teach them the material and then I give them a chance to give their opinion on the topic I have already taught them and then we have a discussion together"*. Finally, both teachers and students discussed the material together. The fourth question was about the match between the listening teaching strategies and the listening learning materials used by the teachers. All the teachers answered that yes, they did adapt the strategy used and the material to be taught, *"Yes, I do"*.

### **How teachers use bottom-up processing and top-down processing strategies**

The third theme consisted of two questions and dealt with the way teachers used top-down processing and bottom-up processing strategies when teaching listening to EFL students. The first question was about which strategy between bottom-up processing and top-down processing the teachers used most when teaching listening to EFL students. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 answered that they mostly used top-down processing, *"I mostly use top-down processing"*. On the other hand, Teacher 3 replied that he mostly used bottom-up processing, *"Bottom-up processing is the strategy that I always use most in my class"*. The second question was about the teachers' opinion about the possibility of using both bottom-up and top-down processing in one session. In answer to the second question, all the teachers said that yes, it is very possible to combine both strategies in one session, *"Yes, it is. If we combine both strategies in one session, it can help the students to know more details about the topic and it can also make the teacher know the students' knowledge about the topic from their point of view"*.

### **Advantages and disadvantages of using bottom-up and top-down strategies**

The fourth theme discussed the advantages and disadvantages of implementing bottom-up and top-down strategies in teaching listening skills to EFL students and had two questions. The first question was about the application and use of bottom-up and top-down processing in teaching listening skills to EFL students from the teachers' point of view. To answer the first question, all the teachers replied that they thought it would have a very good effect to combine both strategies because the students could share their knowledge about the topic being studied and the teachers could also teach the students more details about the topic, *"I think the application and utilization of these two strategies is very good in teaching listening skills to EFL students. Because both the teacher and the students share information related to the topic being studied"*. The second question was about the advantages and disadvantages of using these two strategies in teaching listening skills to EFL students. The teachers replied that the advantage of using the two strategies was that both the teacher and the students could share more about the topic based on their knowledge and the disadvantage of using these two strategies was that they would spend more time discussing the topic: *"If we combine both strategies in one session, I think the only disadvantage of using these two strategies is that we will spend more time discussing the topic. And the advantage is that both the teacher and the students could share more about the topic based on their knowledge"*.

### **Discussion**

From the research findings, it was found that the implementation of top-down and bottom-up strategies in teaching listening to EFL students was an effective approach. The interview results showed that the teachers used different strategies in

teaching listening skills to EFL students, such as listening and drilling, bottom-up processing, top-down processing and listening teams. In addition, Brown, H. D. (2000) in his book "Principles of Language Learning and Teaching" discussed the importance of listening comprehension in language learning and provided strategies for effective listening instruction, emphasizing the need for teachers to provide appropriate input, engage students in meaningful practice, and integrate listening with other language skills.

The interview results regarding how teachers used specific strategies when teaching listening to EFL students revealed that there were several steps that teachers typically followed. They started the lesson by introducing the topic they were going to study, giving the students a clue about the topic. They then taught the listening material to the students and concluded by allowing the students to share their opinions about the material based on their prior knowledge and to engage in a discussion.

The interview results on how teachers used top-down and bottom-up processing strategies when teaching listening skills to EFL students showed that two out of three teachers mostly used the top-down strategy in their classes. However, all teachers agreed that a combination of both top-down and bottom-up processing was possible and beneficial because it could help students to understand the topic in more detail and allow teachers to learn about students' prior knowledge of the topic. This finding is supported by Richards' (2008) theory that both bottom-up and top-down processing strategies tend to occur simultaneously in the process of foreign language learning, especially in real-life listening. Brown, H. (2007), in *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, further elaborated on the role of bottom-up and top-down processing in listening comprehension, explaining that bottom-up processing involves decoding sounds, words and syntax, while top-down processing involves using background knowledge and contextual cues to understand meaning.

The interview results on the advantages and disadvantages of implementing bottom-up and top-down processing in teaching listening skills to EFL students revealed that using these strategies would have a positive effect on the listening classroom. It would allow students to share their knowledge about the topic and enable teachers to provide more in-depth instruction on the topic. Furthermore, the combination of these strategies facilitated the exchange of knowledge between teachers and students, which was an advantage. However, the disadvantage was that it required additional discussion time.

Listening is one of the English language skills that should be mastered. People who learn English should master listening skills. To improve listening skills, people can practice by listening to English songs because listening to English songs has the advantage of improving listening skills. According to Saraswaty (2018), listening plays an important role in everyday life. Every day, people listen for different purposes or to get necessary information. It is essential for language learning as it enables them to gain

insights and information, and to be successful in communicating with others. Furthermore, Putri (2022) stated that listening skills encourage us to understand other people and promote attitudes of respect and acceptance. However, some cases show that listening skills are considered difficult. Adi, M., et al. (2022) investigated EFL students' listening comprehension problems and causes, stating that "listening comprehension is a complex process that requires learners to process auditory input and construct meaning from it". They identified various factors that contribute to listening comprehension difficulties, such as lack of vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliarity with accents, and poor concentration.

Based on the data in the findings and the detailed descriptions, supported by theories related to the research title above, it was found that this research conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Paleleh, specifically with English teachers, revealed that all three teachers used top-down and bottom-up strategies in their listening classes. Both strategies had a significant positive impact on their listening classes because students were able to talk more in class and discuss the topic, and teachers were able to provide more detailed information about the topic, allowing them to share their knowledge about the topic. Teachers had no difficulties in teaching listening material using both top-down and bottom-up strategies because using these strategies in listening class made it easier for students and teachers to understand the material being taught. As Richards (2008) mentioned, teaching listening strategies can help learners to become more effective listeners, proving that teaching strategies have a significant impact on the effectiveness of students' learning process. In his book, Richards introduced a theory of teaching listening skills, which he divided into two types of strategies: bottom-up processing and top-down processing. Kasim, N. A. (2019), in *An Analysis of Teachers' Strategy in Teaching Listening*, examined the strategies used by teachers in teaching listening skills. The study found that teachers used different strategies such as pre-listening activities, while-listening activities, and post-listening activities to facilitate students' listening comprehension.

## **CONCLUSION**

After conducting the research on the first-grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Paleleh and analyzing the data, the researchers came to an important conclusion. There were three stages in the top-down and bottom-up strategies: before listening, during listening and after listening. In this research, the top-down strategy refers to the use of schemas or learners' prior knowledge to understand the information received. Meanwhile, the bottom-up strategy refers to the process of understanding information through sound analysis, word meaning and grammar.

The implementation of bottom-up and top-down strategies could improve students' knowledge and skills performance. The use of bottom-up and top-down strategies helped the students to improve their listening skills because the learners

could enjoy the process and share their perspectives based on their existing knowledge about the topic. In addition, the teachers were able to provide the learners with detailed knowledge about the topic they were learning. Therefore, the implementation of the bottom-up and top-down strategies as strategies for learning the topic of listening had a very positive impact on both the students and the teachers. This research is practically expected to help teachers, students and future researchers to improve, develop and even provide better research about the strategies in teaching listening skills, especially for top-down and bottom-up strategies. The researchers hope that this research can be a reference for anyone who needs information about the top-down and bottom-up strategies based on what the researchers has done.

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