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Rethinking Teaching Listening Skills: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study explores EAP teachers' views of underlying problems in teaching listening skills and the strategies adopted by them to overcome problems at the tertiary level in EFL contexts. The study is based on the theoretical assumption of listening perception processes and its role in language development as hypothesised by Richards (2008). In this instrumental case study, one EAP teacher was purposively interviewed to identify their understanding of the investigated issue. The generated data were analysed following the basic qualitative analysis method. The findings demonstrate that in teaching listening skills both the top-down and bottom-up approaches should be adopted to integrate process-based listening skills teaching, which promotes target language acquisition in and out of the classroom. The findings may make the EAP practitioners reconsider incorporating the bottom-up approach to improve the existing strategies of teaching listening skills at the tertiary level.

Keywords: *Teaching Listening Skills, Listening Perception, Language Acquisition, Tertiary Level*

Introduction

Teaching listening skills is a crucial area in language pedagogy as literature focuses less on the listening comprehension from language acquisition perspective whereas many works are done based on psycholinguistics, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis perspectives (Richards, 1983). Listening skill is often taught in many EFL contexts following the top-down approach concentrating on the usage of background knowledge to understand the message of the listening

text. However, there appears to be rather limited focus on the bottom-up approach known as the decoding process in which listener's lexical and grammatical competences function to reach to the meaning of the listening text (Clark & Clark, 1977). It is believed that both the bottom-up and top-down processes interact to automatise the listening comprehension by selecting and connecting the input into intake which is noticed by the listener in the learning process (Schmidt, 1990; Richards, 2008). Such perception of listening processes effectively paves the target language acquisition in the form of noticing and restructuring activities used in teaching listening skills (Richards, 2008).

The perception process is however often overlooked in teaching listening skills (Field, 2008) in favour of the idea that listening texts comprehension and information retention may occur best when recorded tapes are listened to in adequate numbers leading to the memorisation of heard phrases (Richards, 2008; Badger, 2018). Clearly, dependence on memorisation rather than on the perception process may not help the learners in decoding the target language naturally. Unfortunately, the very notion is not realised accurately by tutors in some EFL contexts. They tend to adapt western materials from *Headway* textbook series or websites like *listenaminute.com* (Graham et al., 2014) and ultimately design the listening tasks only by including listening to the audio recordings and responding to questions (Siegel, 2011). As a result, the core components of listening as part of language acquisition- decoding meaning and meaning building process- remain unnoticed and untreated in teaching listening skills at the tertiary level (Siegel, 2013).

Therefore, this study investigates a Bangladeshi EAP teacher's case in teaching listening skills at the university level to note how both the bottom-up (decoding) and top-down (meaning building) processes involved in teaching listening skills contribute to the target language development inside and outside of the classroom. The study also explores the interviewed tutor's perceived problems and his applied probable strategies to mitigate the challenges in teaching listening skills. By doing so, this study showcases the probable pedagogical examination of Richards' (2008) hypothesis on teaching listening as part of language acquisition.

Review of the Literature

To establish a theoretical background for the study, firstly, the addressed key concept of listening comprehension process will be explained, followed by a brief elucidation of Richards' (2008) ideas on listening and language acquisition. Afterwards, empirical evidence for the addressed research questions will be provided along with highlighting and reviewing the context-specific research findings.

Listening Comprehension Process

Nunan (2002) termed listening skill as the *Cinderella* among the other language skills (i.e., reading, writing, and speaking) as it is the most neglected skill in language pedagogy. The traditional assumption that listening to audio clips and answering questions afterwards develops listening comprehension automatically created the decade-old negligence in teaching listening skills in some EFL contexts (Siegel, 2018). Nevertheless, listening skill is an indispensable and stimulating element in target language acquisition process (Rost, 2002). Moreover, scholars (Richards, 2008; Conti & Smith, 2019) believe that listening skills rather should be given the top

priority in the context of language pedagogy since through listening, learners earn new lexicogrammatical knowledge of the target language, learn to proceduralise linguistic input and experience for social interaction. Realising the very fact, nowadays, the tertiary level pedagogy is incorporating listening elements adequately in its curriculum in many contexts (Richards, 2008).

To be a competent listener, a learner needs to have systematic, contextual, and schematic knowledge of the target language (Anderson & Lynch, 1988). Richards (2008) based on the hypothesis of Clark and Clark (1977) well-explicates the concept of listening perception by viewing it as a two-way process of language comprehension- bottom-up (decoding process) and top-down (meaning building process). The bottom-up process is used to get the literal meaning of a listening text through a systematic application of cognitive knowledge (Field, 2008). For example, a listener comprehends an acoustic signal of heard speech sound as different building blocks such as first as sounds, then words and phrases and finally as sentences. Richards (2008) further enlightens the segmentation process (Field, 2008) by explaining it more thoroughly. He shows that the decoding process starts working from the identification of phonemes from different vowels and consonants, then comes assimilation of the phonemes with the forms of syllables, and eventually reaches to the formation of words from the familiar syllable structures (Richards, 2008). In contrast, top-down process is a meaning building process where the listener focuses on the contextual clues and schematic knowledge to decode the complete message of a listening text (Richards, 2008).

The listening comprehension process is obviously a complex process consisting of many micro skills which takes place implicitly in our brain. Although this whole decoding process happens automatically, it is not easy for the target language learners with insufficient linguistic properties (Badger, 2018). What makes the word recognition problematic in listening is the invisible words heard as sounds unlike words visible in writing or reading texts (Field, 2008). Moreover, listening involves decoding spoken discourse which contains different features like variety of intonation, accent, pronunciations and spoken discourse markers i.e., pauses, fillers, elision etc. (Richards, 2008). So, the presence of non-standard forms of spoken discourse further complicates the process of decoding (Buck, 2001). These subtle but very significant features of listening components are not often noticed by the language tutors even though they are proficient users of the target language (Conti & Smith, 2019). So, Richards (2018) advises to pay close attention to those key features of the listening comprehension process to better help learners in developing their listening skills.

Teaching listening has been traditionally regarded as comprehending the meaning of the listening text in the form of spoken discourse (Richards, 1983). Since spoken discourse is different from written discourse in many ways, such as having instantaneous, fast, and clausal text structure with hesitations, reduced forms etc., it needs to be processed in real time with the help of the shared background knowledge of the interlocutors (Richards, 2008). This phenomenon suggests that both bottom-up and top-down processes function together to comprehend the listening text efficiently which results in having the pre-, while- and post- listening stages (Field, 2008). Such successful listening processing may occur when active listeners use strategies to approach and manage a listening task employing cognitive (storage of input for retrieval) (Buck, 2001) and meta-cognitive strategies (execution of the cognitive strategies) in the learning process (Goh, 2000).

Listening and Language Acquisition

Along with teaching listening skills as the process of comprehension, there is another crucial role of teaching listening in the target language development, which is labelled as language acquisition by Richards (2008). Based on Schmidt's (1990) argument on the role of consciousness in the language learning process, Richards (2008) claims that teaching listening skills facilitates new language acquisition by making the listener conscious in making sense of the input. This raised awareness stimulates the initial stage of integrating the target language features into listener's language competence. He further posits that the input (what the listener listens to), and the intake (what the listener notices) structure the basis of the target language acquisition. Such conscious noticing characteristics of the input later contributes to the internalisation of the new language items in one's daily oral language usage in the form of restructuring, complexification and stretching output (Richards, 2008). In other words, listeners are required to apply the noticed input acquired from active listening in the production of new language items. Richards (2008) suggests incorporating both noticing and restructuring activities in the listening lesson to proceduralise the language acquisition goals in teaching English listening skills.

Noticing tasks serve the purpose of returning to the recorded text to consolidate listener's comprehension abilities whereas restructuring tasks facilitate the production of the listening text into further spoken or written discourse through tape script viewing, written sentence-completion, dialogue practice and role plays (Richards, 2008). Teaching listening skills through noticing and restructuring substantially promotes the target language acquisition by creating opportunities for the listener to notice how the accumulated new language from the listening is practiced in new communicative teaching-learning contexts.

Teaching Listening Skills: Problems and Strategies

In the pedagogy of listening, the role of schematic knowledge is a well-known phenomenon (Field, 2008; Richards, 2008). Conversely, the role of perception process which is another significant aspect in listening comprehension is still not a well-addressed issue in some EFL contexts. The reason is the failure of language tutors to understand listening as a process of teaching target language skills rather than an end product (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). The situation is aggravated with the presence of some common beliefs and practices advocated by the teachers of listening skills. These include students' self-learning by listening to only teachers, teachers' challenges of teaching listening skills, and use of teaching materials, which only focus on listening comprehension rather than the development of language competency (Mendelsohn, 1998).

For learners, depending on decoding process is more helpful than depending on schematic knowledge when they need to understand an unpredictable text (Wilson, 2003). In such cases, decoding process can be the identifier of skilled and less skilled learners as the former ones can easily comprehend a text based on their linguistic knowledge whereas the later ones fail (Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Lange & Matthews, 2021). The comprehension problem is also raised by Goh (2000) in a study which examines three problems (i.e., perception, parsing and utilisation) that learners face while comprehending a listening text. While documenting Arabian learners' perspectives on teaching listening, Hasan (2000) reports that comprehension problem lies in the listening strategies, tasks and materials used by the teachers to teach listening skills. Graham

(2006) investigates learners' views on comprehension problem, and demonstrates that due to having poor listening skills, being unaware of the listening strategies, and having difficult listening text, they seem to experience major perception problems. To avoid perception problem, it has been suggested by Graham et al. (2014) to incorporate the comprehension approach theorised by Field (2008) in case of teaching listening skills. They find a mismatch between teachers' constructed beliefs and their stated practices regarding teaching listening, which further leads to the application of mere task completion strategies in teaching listening. Renandya and Farrell (2011) suggest that learners should be provided with opportunities to proceduralise their knowledge of spoken language through listening strategy activities such as dictation, reading aloud and modelling instead of giving ambiguous instructions like "listen more and more". Such specific training on listening strategy might impact language acquisition outside of the classroom through extensive listening practice as reported by Siegel (2011).

Scholars (e.g., White, 1998; Wong et al., 2021) propose that to promote learners' acquisition of the perception stages, it is important to incorporate spoken discourse features like variety of pronunciation, ellipses, reduced forms, turn taking, assimilation etc. into the lesson plans prepared for teaching listening skills. To help learners automatise the listening perception process and familiarise with the grammar of fast speech, emphasis over inclusion and practice of such phonological features is crucial for successful teaching and learning of listening skills (Cauldwell, 2002). Richards (2008) adds that the learners can be guided creatively in developing their perception process by assigning them with real-life oriented tasks like going beyond classroom and discovering their own ways to decode texts produced in real situations.

Additionally, the language teacher may contribute significantly to teaching listening strategies effectively if they can get theoretical and practical knowledge on the listening process through professional training (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Besides teacher training, they can do self-modelling by explaining mental processes engaged in their own listening and can motivate learners to imitate them as a basis in learning listening skills in the classroom (Chou, 2021).

Siegel (2013) critically examines Japanese university students' perspectives on the efficacy of following strategy-based instruction in teaching listening. He posits that such strategy-based instruction may widen the scope of teaching listening skills in and out of the classroom by following a process approach to listening, which combines both the bottom-up and top-down approach of listening comprehension (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). To prepare the guidelines for teaching the target language listening skills, collected opinions from learners based on the learners as participants approach are mandatory to be considered by the researchers-practitioners from different contexts by employing various data generation tools (Cross & Vandergrift, 2015). It is also noteworthy that limited knowledge can be found in literature regarding the notion of teachers as research participants in teaching listening skills, which calls for urgent future research (Siegel, 2015). Future research can be carried out encompassing the topics such as teaching listening skills in the classroom, the kinds of strategies used to teach listening, types of theoretical and pedagogical problems teachers face while teaching listening, and the nature of strategies they employ to solve the problems.

Current Trends in Teaching Listening Skills in Bangladesh

In late 90s, teaching listening skills was initiated at the secondary and higher secondary level curriculum of English language education with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in Bangladesh. However, there was no significant outcome observed among the learners due to a number of contextual shortcomings. As a result, it was seen that the students at tertiary level were facing difficulty with interacting in English and understanding English lectures (Alam & Sinha, 2009; Kabir, 2020). Considering the situation, teaching listening skills has been implemented at the university level in Bangladesh.

In present days, English listening skills in Bangladeshi universities tend to be taught either by following an international textbook (i.e., *New Headway*) which has the recorded tapes, or by adapting any online graded materials. However, such abrupt usage of decontextualised text in teaching English listening skills appears to be problematic as it completely neglects listening perception process and nurtures only schematic knowledge (Alam & Sinha, 2009). Akter (2019) advocates that to make the Bangladeshi tertiary level learners proficient in listening skills, both the decoding (bottom-up) and meaning building (top-down) processes should be equally emphasised in teaching. It is advised that the teachers are required to delve into more exploratory research about their own practices associated with teaching listening skills.

It is evidential that research on teachers' perceptions of teaching listening skills to target learners is rather limited. Therefore, this qualitative case study intends to fill this gap in literature by exploring Bangladeshi EAP teachers' perceptions of the encountered problems in teaching English listening skills and their employed strategies to overcome the problems they faced in teaching listening skills at the university level. Through discussion of the findings, this study also aims to demonstrate how Richards' (2008) theoretical perception of listening process functions in Bangladeshi university context as well as in other EFL contexts where English listening skills are taught. The following research questions were postulated in the study:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of problems in teaching listening skills at the university level in Bangladesh?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions of strategies that they use to overcome the problems in teaching listening skills?

Method

Research Design

This study adopts an instrumental case study approach (Dörnyei, 2007). Instrumental case study offers "insight into a wider issue" by means of understanding a particular phenomenon (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 152). This approach allows us to examine the targeted issues in depth and come up with "rich and in-depth insights" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 155). Through deploying one intensive interview with an English language teacher, we aimed to establish a broad understanding of teachers' perceptions of problems in teaching listening skills and the strategies used to overcome the problems in the target context.

Setting and Participants

This research was conducted in the context of a language institute of a public university in Bangladesh. The institute consists of several departments, one of which is the English language department where ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programme is taught. The ESOL programme is offered as an honour's degree to the regular undergraduate students at the institute. In the first semester of the ESOL programme, EAP is taught as a four-credit course which covers English speaking and listening skills. *New Headway* is the textbook used to teach the course. The undergraduate students get admitted at the institute after passing a very competitive admission test. The 17 to 19 years old students, native speakers of Bangla, have the pre-intermediate level of English language proficiency.

We aimed to recruit an interviewee who had an adequate experience of teaching listening skills and could comment on the sought issues elaborately. Therefore, purposive sampling method was suitable for sample selection in this study, which allowed us to recruit the participant purposefully considering the required qualities (Merriam, 2002). Keeping the purpose in mind, one English language teacher was selected from the abovementioned context (a language institute of a public university in Bangladesh). He has been teaching listening and speaking skills in the ESOL undergraduate EAP course for nearly six years.

Procedures

For case study, interview is an instrumental tool for data generation as it helps to focus on the "Particular One" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 152). To collect data for this study, one open-ended semi-structured interview, designed to facilitate an informal environment to obtain rich and authentic data, was conducted (Longhurst, 2016). Moreover, the semi-structured interview was useful for the study as it helped to explore not only the target information from the interviewee by asking some pre-planned questions but also go beyond the expected answers by following them with prompts, probing and follow-up questions (Drever, 2003). As the interviewee did not feel comfortable with recording the interview session, notes were taken manually on the important issues that emerged from the discussion.

Interview responses produced qualitative data, and to analyse qualitative data for case studies, the appropriate approach is basic qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2008). Following the basic qualitative approach of data analysis, findings were generated in the form of themes. So, the procedure of coming up with the themes involved organising the notes taken from the interview by typing them up, reading them closely to get an overall understanding about the information collected, and coding the data (by marking recurring phrases in the notes) to categorise different themes (Creswell, 2008). Several themes emerged from the data analysis which have been interpreted descriptively in the light of the literature used in the study along with reference to the interviewee's comments. For ethical reasons, the interviewee was given a pseudonym- Sam while reporting and analysing the data.

Results and Discussion

We analysed the results of this study based on the following three major themes in relation to the postulated research questions mentioned earlier. The themes have been summarised as follows-

- Teachers' perceptions of teaching English listening skills
- Contribution of listening skills to the target language acquisition
- Adopted strategies to mitigate the problems in teaching listening

The findings are discussed in relation to the literature on teaching listening skills and its role in developing English language competence inside and outside of the classroom as hypothesised by Richards (2008).

Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching English Listening Skills

Reflecting on the nature of listening, the interviewee- Sam commented that reading, writing, and speaking can be sometimes taught without the assistance of any technological support unlike listening which requires the mandatory presence of the audio-visual support. He mentioned that listening is traditionally viewed as an integrated skill which is to be developed as the by-product of teaching the other three skills (Kabir, 2020). Such orthodox listening teaching practices have been implemented in the language education curriculum in Bangladesh at the tertiary level without assessing the practices' validity and reliability, as pointed out by the respondent. Consequently, teachers show lack of interest to receive training on how to teach listening skills effectively inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, the situation is worsened by having big size language classes (consisting of approximately 100 students) at the university, which makes it "impractical to teach listening skills fruitfully in and out of the classroom in Bangladesh" as remarked by Sam. His utterance demonstrates that teaching listening skills is generally considered as a difficult and different skill compared to the other three skills taught at the tertiary level in Bangladesh (Akter, 2019).

Regarding the perceptions of the common teaching practices and methodology implemented by the Bangladeshi EAP teachers at the university level, Sam interestingly comments that Bangladeshi EAP teachers usually teach English to students just by focusing on the reading and writing skills, whereas the missing listening and speaking skills have been taught by them at the university in recent times by following the new English language syllabus which includes all four skills of language (Kabir, 2020). Inclusion of listening skills in the curriculum for meeting the pedagogical needs seems to help to diagnose the current teaching practices in teaching listening. The respondent pointed out that he uses mostly the product-oriented approach to teaching listening skills in line with other EAP teachers in Bangladesh (Alam & Sinha, 2009).

Sam mentioned that EAP teachers usually teach listening skills in a way which assists learners just to understand the meaning of the recorded text so that they can answer the comprehension questions accurately to achieve the pass marks in the examination (Siegel, 2018). He added that such action of correcting answers in listening comprehension test functions as the only criterion to determine student's mastery over the listening skill. Consequently, teaching students how to make sense of the meaning of the provided listening text has been less prioritised in teaching listening skill, as emphasised by Sam.

It can be assumed from the interviewee's responses that the top-down approach is typically employed in teaching listening skills at the tertiary level in Bangladesh and there is rather a limited opportunity to make a learner an efficient listener (Alam & Sinha, 2009). It tends to happen since

most of the students develop a sense of negligence to the complex perception processes involved in teaching listening skill.

Contribution of Listening Skills to the Target Language Acquisition

The interviewee was asked to express his opinion regarding his applied teaching methodology and the existing teaching-learning opportunities which promote the target language acquisition in teaching English listening skills at the tertiary level in Bangladesh.

Sam stated that he basically follows the top-down (meaning building) approach in teaching listening since the main goal of the listening curriculum is to make the learner capable of answering questions in the examination (Kabir, 2020). He added that since the common tendency of teaching and learning listening skills in Bangladesh is likely to seek the final product, he also applied the top-down approach in his own teaching instead of the bottom-up approach. He further explained how his gathered knowledge on listening process stands “intact” as there seem to be limited opportunities to practice them in a large classroom where listening skills are “not always welcomed”.

After discussing his teaching focus and some existing teaching-learning opportunities in teaching listening skills at the university level in Bangladesh, Sam indicated that Bangladeshi students like to be taught listening skills in the classroom following the top-down (meaning building) approach (Akter, 2019; Alam & Sinha, 2009). He explained that learners just want to understand the recorded text somehow with the help of their background knowledge “avoiding the complex steps” to be taught in the bottom-up (decoding) approach such as “recognising sounds, connecting them to literal meaning and getting the message of the text”. He emphasised that such tendency of eschewing to follow the decoding or the perception process in teaching listening skills hinders learner’s target language development and acquisition in the long run (Field, 2008). He then illustrated how the bottom-up and the top-down processes function together in teaching listening skills and contribute to the target language acquisition.

Sam pointed out that the intricated listening comprehension processes are carried out by learners either by converting the received speech signal into comprehensible lexical forms (decoding phase) or comprehending the meaning of the listening text with the assistance of the produced words and their schematic knowledge (meaning building phase) (Richards, 2008).

Furthermore, Sam elucidated the difficulty that learners of different proficiency levels might encounter while making sense of the listening text (Lange & Matthews, 2021). He established that highly proficient learners could make sense of the listening text quite quickly and skilfully compared to less proficient learners who often face tremendous difficulty in understanding the listening text for having “fewer linguistic knowledge, limited memory capacity, and fast speech anxiety”. The interviewee assumed that this ultimately hinders the automatising of the listening skills acquisition (Graham, 2006).

Sam further added that listening processes function by following an integrating approach, which carries the identification and construction of the meaning of input and its amalgamation with the background knowledge for the holistic comprehension of the listening text (Richards, 1983). Thus, listening plays a vital role in language acquisition fostering the processing of the “comprehensible input” which is to be interacted with the interlocutors to understand the meaning of the listening

text. He asserted by saying that such action advantage learners to get themselves acquainted with the new features of morpho-syntactic and discoursal aspects of the target language. It can be assumed that teaching listening skills may substantially promote the target language development in the classroom with the automatization of the perception and comprehension processes tangled in deciphering the meaning of a listening text (Richards, 2008).

Additionally, Sam claimed that the issue of avoiding listening skill in the classroom is out of question since the language teacher must teach listening skill keeping decoding and meaning building phases side by side (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Siegel, 2013). He pointed out that in Bangladesh, the EAP teachers being expert listeners sometimes remain “unconscious to the problem of listening that learners possess”, especially in the decoding stage. The instructors teach in a way which does not equip learners with the ability to automatise the meaning of the listening text. Instead, such teaching practices only help learners to guess the meaning of the recorded text by using the schematic knowledge (Siegel, 2015).

Sam also asserted that the excessive use of the top-down approach of teaching listening skills in Bangladeshi classroom has been a common teaching practice which seeks immediate and urgent contribution of the bottom-up approach in teaching listening skills in the classroom. Such a combination of the approaches will usher the acquisition of the decoding phase in teaching listening skills in the classroom (Richards, 2008; Badger, 2018).

Strategies to Mitigate the Problems in Teaching Listening

To mitigate the problems in teaching listening skills at the tertiary level in Bangladesh, the interviewee pointed out some probable teaching strategies which he believes to have affected his teaching practices substantially while teaching listening skills. First, Sam opined that he taught his students the features of spoken grammar (Richards, 2008). He emphasised that “the inclusion of spoken grammar” in the lesson plan noticeably helped his students to familiarise themselves with “the problematic features of the real-life spoken language”. Such usage of spoken grammar in the listening classroom facilitates “the successful acquisition of the perception stages” in teaching listening skills in the classroom.

Sam mentioned that his lesson plan for teaching listening skills included the phonological elements of spoken discourse such as intonation, assimilation, turn taking, reduced forms, elision etc. (White, 1998). He added that he introduced word segmentation as one of the remedial exercises for mitigating students’ problem of comprehending listening input (Field, 2003; Richards, 2008).

In addition to applying spoken discourse features in the listening lesson plan, Sam clarified that he used authentic and simulated materials to practice listening skills. He believed that instead of using the formal recorded tapes found in the decontextualised international textbook (Alam & Sinha, 2009) in which the real speech is often compromised, the usage of authentic teaching materials assists to train his students on how to recognise the fast speech features observed in the natural speech (White, 2006). Sam also asserted the fact by saying that the use of authentic materials in listening class develop students “perception of the features of the fast speech and further improve their listening ability”.

Sam’s idea advocates for initiating self-training among the EAP teachers which may work as a catalyst to raise awareness of the features of fast speech. Thus, they will be able to create

opportunities for learners to refine their listening abilities by recognizing the linguistic features of the fast speech and enhancing their schematic knowledge related to the target language (Siegel, 2011). Such usage of authentic listening materials while teaching listening skills to the undergraduate students focusing the features of the spoken discourse will skilfully make learners highly motivated to acquire the target language (Cauldwell, 2002; Field, 2008; Richards, 2008; Renandya & Farrell, 2011).

Willingness to improvise his current approach of teaching listening skills has been noticed in Sam's expression. He articulated that it will be more effective for his students' listening skills development if he can facilitate the perception process, where more emphasis will be put on the automatization of decoding stage rather than on the final outcome. It echoes with Richards' (2008) idea that the process approach of teaching listening is more effective than the product approach.

Furthermore, the interviewee asserted that the proceduralisation of the target language is possible by applying the decoding focused activities practiced through three different stages (i.e., pre, while and post) in the lesson plan (Field, 2008; Richards, 2008). Certain teaching activities, such as discussions, guessing games about new vocabulary items, etc. were applied by Sam in the pre-listening stage. He believed that such decoding-based activities stimulated learners' active role in the learning process, which fosters the acquisition of the linguistic knowledge of the listening text. Sam continued using a few perception-based activities in the while-listening stage in the form of identifying the fast speech features of the text, repetitive resuming of the tapes and presenting the tape script, etc., which contribute to the solidification of the morpho-syntactic knowledge of the listening text (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). To accelerate the acquisition of the pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure of the target language, Sam tried the dictogloss technique in the classroom as suggested by Hasan (2000). When he faced any unavailability of the logistic support in the classroom, he dictated the recorded speech by himself in the classroom.

Sam emphasised the need to establish links between the bottom-up and the top-down processes in teaching listening skills through different noticing and restructuring tasks to be practiced in the pre, while and post-stages mentioned in the lesson plan (Richards, 2008). He also believed that such process-based tasks which produce other language skills (i.e., writing or speaking or reading) will sufficiently encourage learners to develop their target language in and out of the classroom (Richards, 2008).

Sam argued that language acquisition is likely to happen if the learner autonomy is promoted in the listening classroom (Richards, 2008). Sam exemplified this by saying that likewise teaching reading and speaking skills, we can give learners access "to operate the teaching materials" for example, the recording, the transcript, etc. The audio recordings can be played repeatedly as required for the learners (Field, 2008). To lessen the difficulties in decoding speech sounds, students can also be allowed to be in charge of the listening content selection with the guidance of their teachers (Cauldwell, 2002; Badger, 2018).

He added that this might produce a congenial relationship between the recorded text and the learner, which may ultimately promote student-centred learning in and out of the classroom. Doing assignments or project work on listening could have been practised as an outside of the class activity. For this to happen, they are required to get actively engaged in discovering and using

different strategies to decode a real-life speech to produce new and tangible tasks in the real world by making the meaning automatic (White, 1998).

Sam accepted that there is “huge pressure” on him to implement such process based listening lesson in his teaching, which actualises the target language acquisition. He feared that his efforts might not be seen as fruitful to some EAP teachers in other similar contexts since he views teaching listening skills as a means of language acquisition in contrast with the traditional view of teaching listening as a mere comprehension ability development which is favoured by many EAP teachers (Graham et al., 2014).

Implications and Suggestions

This study offers an example of the implementation of Richards’ (2008) theorisation of teaching listening skills in connection with the target language acquisition in an EFL context- so it adds empirical evidence in that field. Moreover, the EAP teachers may get some robust conceptual and pedagogical understanding of teaching listening skills at the tertiary level and further get encouraged to apply the suggestions accumulated from the findings in their teaching practices. The case study has been conducted based on one single participant’s opinion only. The increase of sample size from different higher education institutions could have added diversified data to show the efficacy of the hypothesised ideas on teaching listening skills and language acquisition. Moreover, mixed method research paradigm could have been adopted to triangulate the findings and suggest more consolidated results on teaching listening skills. Further studies can be carried out by addressing those limitations in future research initiated in this field.

Conclusions

This case study explores the problems and the applied solutions of the problems in teaching English listening skills in an EFL context at the tertiary level. With this aim, an experienced Bangladeshi EAP tutor was interviewed which generated in-depth and rich qualitative data. The descriptive analysis of the data helped to generalise the findings analytically with the hypothesised concepts on listening and language acquisition put forwarded by Richards (2008). The major findings indicate that EAP teachers tend to adopt the top-down (meaning building) approach in teaching listening skills focusing the product approach of teaching listening (Field, 2008). The findings also disclose that EAP teachers are not fully aware of this issue, and due to having some contextually rooted problems, they are provoked to teach listening skills following the traditional top-down approach in the classroom (Graham et al., 2014).

The findings of our study imply that the bottom-up approach should be applied in teaching listening skills at the tertiary level in the concerned EFL contexts. This will help students to perceive the linguistic knowledge required to comprehend the listening text with the help of the meaning building process (Siegel, 2013). Thus, they will be able to develop their listening perception consciously, which may significantly accelerate their target language acquisition inside and outside of the classroom. Building upon the findings of this study, we recommend incorporating both the bottom-up (decoding) and top-down (meaning building) approaches in

teaching listening skills by following the ideas advocated by Richards (2008), which will quicken the way of target language acquisition among the learners in the long run.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Do you view teaching listening skills as easy or difficult compared to teaching other skills (reading, writing, and speaking)? Why?
2. Why do you think teaching listening skills is different than teaching other three language skills?
3. Which approach of teaching listening (product or process-oriented approach) do you follow in teaching listening to the ESOL undergraduate students at your university? Why?
4. What is your expectation from the students while teaching the listening skills in the classroom?
5. Do you focus on teaching both the decoding (bottom-up) and meaning building (top-down) processes while teaching listening skills? Why or why not? Please elaborate your answer.
6. What is your view regarding the teaching- learning opportunities of listening skills in Bangladeshi universities?
7. Do your students like the decoding or meaning building stages?
8. Do you think that both stages contribute to the language development in the classroom?
9. What kind of problems do your students face in both the stages?
10. How do you mitigate the problems faced by the students?
11. Do you think the presence of spoken language features make the listening text incomprehensible to students?
12. Are the materials used in your class appropriate to teach listening skills? Explain please.

13. Do you use the international materials or contextualised materials? Why?
14. What kind of strategies do you take to solve the comprehension problem of the students?
15. Are they instructional strategies or teaching strategies? Explain.
16. Do they reflect the process or product approach of teaching listening skills?
17. How do you make your students active in the learning process by applying those strategies?
18. How do you keep yourself motivated to do the laborious task of teaching listening skills?

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