The Effectiveness of Predictive (Top-Down) and Selective (Bottom-Up) Listening Strategies on EFL Learners' Listening Performance at the University of Benghazi – Al-Abyar Branch

Mohammad saad

Mohammad.saad@uob.edu.ly

Lecturer, Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Science, University of Benghazi

-Abstract

This study examined the impact of differentiated listening instruction on the listening proficiency of third-semester EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar Branch. Specifically, it compared the effectiveness of two strategy-based approaches predictive (top-down) and selective (bottom-up) — against traditional listening instruction methods. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was employed, involving three groups of students who completed identical listening assessments before and after the intervention. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software, incorporating descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and mixed ANOVA to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. The findings indicate that both experimental groups demonstrated statistically significant improvements in listening performance, with the selective strategy group achieving the highest gains. These results support the integration of listening strategies into EFL curricula and underscore the pedagogical value of combining cognitive strategy training with authentic listening materials. The study concludes by recommending the adoption of strategy-based instruction in language teaching programmes and advocates for further research into multimodal and metacognitive approaches to listening instruction.

Keywords: listening comprehension, predictive strategies, selective strategies, bottom-up processing, top-down processing, and strategy-based instruction..

1. Introduction

Listening constitutes one of the crucial skills that can develop more rapidly than speaking, thereby influencing the advancement of reading and writing competencies necessary for acquiring a new language (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Oxford, 1993, as cited in Bidabadi & Yamat, 2011). Rost (1994, as mentioned in Fang, 2008) asserted that among the four language skills speaking, listening, reading, and writing listening is the most vital for language learning during the preliminary stages. It is indisputable that listening is fundamental, as it enables individuals to comprehend numerous utterances encountered in daily life, given that conversations can only transpire when one understands the statements made by their interlocutor. Nevertheless, the provision of input (listening and reading) alone proves inadequate for language acquisition; input remains a critical component of second language learning (Gass & Selinker, 2001, as cited in Wen-sheng, 2007). Within the Faculty of Language and Literature (FLA) at Satya Wacana Christian University (SWCU), a variety of listening classes are offered in the English Language Education Program, including Extensive, Intensive, and Academic Listening. In this context, listening classes provide students a blend of in-class and out-of-class activities, along with assessments, to enhance their listening skills.

1.2 Problem Statement

Listening comprehension continues to pose significant challenges for individuals learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Libya. Despite years of formal education, many students at the University of Benghazi's Al-Abyar Branch continue to struggle with comprehending spoken English in both academic and everyday contexts. Instructional practices in the classroom frequently attribute this concern to a deficiency in suitable listening skills. Conventional methods often prioritise the assessment of comprehension rather than equipping students with strategies to enhance their listening proficiency. Consequently, learners frequently encounter obstacles in efficiently processing spoken information or responding appropriately in authentic interactions.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which predictive and selective listening strategies affect the listening performance of EFL students in comparison to traditional instructional methods.

2. To investigate the correlation between different types of listening strategies and the degree of improvement in listening proficiency among EFL students at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar Branch.

3. To what extent do the predictive and selective listening strategies implemented in this study contribute to measurable improvements in students' listening skills based on post-test results.

1.4 Research Questions

1. To what extent do predictive and selective listening strategies influence students'   listening performance compared to traditional instruction ?

2. How are the different types of listening strategies correlated with gains in listening proficiency among EFL students at the University of Benghazi, AL-Abyar Branch?

3. To what extent does this study show the relationship between the types of strategies used and how much their listening skill improved?

2. Literature Review

Listening involves more than the passive reception of sound; it requires the integration of cognitive, affective, and metacognitive resources (Field, 2008). Adequate comprehension demands rapid decoding, attention allocation, contextual prediction, and real-time inference. Learners must make sense of speech that is often unplanned, unstructured, and full of redundancies. These challenges intensify when instructional approaches focus primarily on reading and writing, neglecting the need for structured listening development (Wilson, 2008). Inadequate exposure leads to fragile listening skills, poor retention, and reduced confidence (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

According to Rahimi and Abednia (2021), Iranian EFL students showed substantial improvement when exposed to integrated strategy training, particularly when metacognitive techniques were scaffolded across listening units. Rost and Wilson (2013) found that instructional designs incorporating interactive audio tools resulted in measurable gains in listening accuracy and learner confidence. Similarly, Wang (2020) examined online listening strategy interventions in Chinese tertiary settings and reported significant gains in both comprehension and learner autonomy. These studies reinforce the critical role of integrating technology-supported strategy instruction to enhance listening proficiency.

Namaziandost et al. (2022) conducted a study with intermediate-level Iranian learners, showing that strategy-based instruction significantly enhanced both comprehension

and motivation. Moreover, their results revealed that repeated exposure to authentic materials led to a higher level of engagement with input and improved learners' inferencing ability. Similarly, Metruk (2018) studied Slovak university students and concluded that learners who engaged in active listening strategies performed better on comprehension tasks than those taught through traditional methods. His work also emphasised the importance of reflective listening logs as tools to support metacognitive awareness.

Al-Busaidi (2018) demonstrated that contextualised listening activities, such as task-based listening supported by peer discussion, improved comprehension and promoted deeper engagement with input. The study recommended that curriculum planners align listening activities with real-life contexts and learner needs. Pan and Zhang (2019) explored the impact of task repetition and found that students exposed to iterative listening with strategy feedback outperformed those who engaged in single-exposure tasks. Their findings suggest that structured repetition combined with targeted strategy use strengthens long-term listening performance.

Despite its importance, listening is often treated as a secondary skill, overshadowed by the more tangible aspects of language learning. Classroom silence is misread as disengagement rather than as the deep cognitive engagement required for decoding and understanding input (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). Without structured support, learners struggle to apply effective listening strategies. There is a need to shift instruction towards more intentional training in listening skills, making it an explicit component of curriculum design (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

2.1 Listening Strategies

2.1.1 Predictive (Top-Down) Strategies

Predictive strategies involve anticipating language input based on available context, topic knowledge, or textual clues (Goh, 2000). These strategies support cognitive readiness and reduce processing load during listening tasks. Learners who employ predictive strategies tend to perform better in fast-paced or unfamiliar listening environments (Graham & Macaro, 2008).

Chen (2005) found that Chinese EFL students trained in predictive strategies showed marked improvements in discourse comprehension, primarily when they engaged in schema-based tasks such as inferring topics, predicting vocabulary, and guessing speaker intent. The benefits extended to long-term recall and listening fluency.

Graham (2017) emphasized that prediction fosters a proactive, rather than reactive, orientation to listening. Activation of expectations regarding specific ideas or linguistic structures increases the likelihood of comprehending rapid or reduced speech. This anticipatory processing leads to improved efficiency in decoding spoken language and enhances overall listening comprehension.

2.1.2 Selective (Bottom-Up) Strategies

Selective strategies require listeners to focus on specific information while ignoring irrelevant details. These strategies sharpen attention and increase

efficiency by targeting specific elements, such as names, dates, keywords, or transitional phrases (Rost, 2011).

Oxford (1990) classified selective strategies under cognitive learning techniques, advocating for their use in high-stakes or time-constrained environments. Erinta and Listyani (2022) found that learners who practised selective listening achieved higher test scores and experienced lower anxiety

Anderson (2005) linked selective strategies to reduced listening fatigue. Learners trained to prioritise key input experienced lower cognitive strain, allowing for better task performance. His research suggested that teaching selective listening enhances both comprehension and learner well-being.

Siegel (2013) found that Japanese EFL students using selective listening techniques developed stronger note-taking and summarization skills. Core content was prioritised, and repetitive or filler language was filtered out, leading to improved listening accuracy under time constraints.

Wilson (2008) recommended pairing selective listening tasks with cloze and multiple-choice exercises. These formats help learners practise focusing on essential input and reduce dependency on full-text comprehension. Practical assessment formats must align with strategy instruction.

Cross (2010) argued for integrating selective tasks within scaffolded lesson plans. Guided transcripts were proposed, where learners highlight or annotate specific words as they listen, reinforcing the cognitive targeting of key information.

Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) confirmed that selective listening improved performance in the IELTS and TOEFL listening sections. Learners who practised identifying speaker intent and key points scored higher in both accuracy and speed.

2.4 Previous Studies

Recent empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of listening strategy instruction across varied EFL contexts. Goh and Taib (2016) conducted a study in Malaysian secondary schools. They found that learners who were taught metacognitive listening strategies over eight weeks showed statistically significant improvements in both comprehension and self-regulated learning skills.

A study by Liu and Goh (2020), Chinese undergraduate students exposed to strategy-based listening instruction outperformed their peers on post-listening assessments. The research emphasised the importance of reflection, goal setting, and strategy selection in enhancing academic listening.

Al-Alwan, Asassfeh, and Smadi (2014) examined Jordanian EFL learners and observed that strategy training led to significant gains in understanding long, complex academic texts. The study advocated for integrating selective and predictive strategies into national curricula to better prepare students for tertiary-level English demands.

Saadi and Saidi (2022), in a Tunisian context, utilised a quasi-experimental approach to explore the influence of top-down listening strategies among secondary-level learners. Findings indicated that engaging learners in prediction and schema-based activities prior to listening markedly enhanced their ability to interpret meaning from accelerated spoken input.

3. Research Methodology

The study presents a detailed description of the research methodology employed in this study, which thoroughly investigates the various listening strategies, including Predictive listening strategies, selective listening strategies, and traditional teaching utilised by third-semester university students.

3.1 Design of the Study

A quasi-experimental design of the study incorporated both a pre-test and a post-test, utilising three distinct groups: a control group and two experimental groups, each comprising twenty pupils. Instruction for Group A (the Control Group) was

conducted using a traditional method devoid of explicit strategy instruction, which focused on comprehension and vocabulary. Group B (Experimental Group 1) received guidance in employing top-down predictive listening strategies. In contrast, Group C (Experimental Group 2) was instructed in selective listening strategies that adopted a bottom-up approach.

To evaluate the students' overall listening and comprehension abilities, the researcher administered a pretest at the beginning of the course. This assessment established a

baseline for evaluating performance prior to the educational program. Subsequently, the study presented twelve lectures to enhance various listening skills, followed by two review sessions. The study conducted a post-test to assess the students' progress following the instructional period. Using both pre- and post-tests provides precise data regarding the effectiveness of the instructional strategies employed.

3.2 Participation

This research was conducted at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar Branch, which was selected due to its diverse student population and strong English Department. The participants, aged from 19 to 22 years, were randomly chosen without bias. None of the mixed-gender students had received formal training in listening skills, ensuring consistency in their prior exposure to strategy-based teaching and enhancing the objectivity of the study. This research randomly assigned twenty students to three equal groups, comprising a total of sixty participants. Group A received traditional teaching and functioned as the control group. Group B participated in predictive listening, employing top-down strategies. Meanwhile, Group C engaged in selective listening, utilising bottom-up techniques; all instruction was delivered in English to replicate authentic language environments.

3.3 Research Context

The research was conducted at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar Branch, during the autumn semester of 2024. The study involving the All Group took place in a room outfitted with audiovisual technology to enhance video-based instruction, thereby accurately reflecting real-world language learning environments. The research was conducted over 15 face-to-face sessions in designated classrooms equipped with essential teaching tools, thereby rendering the findings applicable to practical teaching contexts.

The study conducted a comprehensive examination of Listening, which constitutes a mandatory component of the English language curriculum for third-semester students. Utilising the same core textbook, Real Listening & Speaking 2 (Cambridge University Press), all participants provided authentic listening resources suitable for intermediate learners. The researcher, who additionally served as the instructor for the course, facilitated each two-hour lesson entirely in English

Each group participated in a pre-test and a post-test, designed to evaluate their listening capabilities before and after the intervention. Both assessments were derived from the listening exercises found in the Real Listening & Speaking 2 textbook. These evaluations concentrated on essential listening skills, namely comprehending the main idea, identifying specific information, making inferences, and recognising vocabulary. The assessments comprised multiple-choice questions, true/false statements, and short-answer questions, all based on concise conversations, interviews, and auditory prompts.

The study employed a consistent assessment mechanism for both pre- and post-evaluative measures to guarantee uniformity and comparability among groups. The validity of the test was upheld through the utilisation of authentic audio materials derived from the textbook, and the application of a standardised rubric for scoring all assessments contributed to maintaining reliability. Each examination lasted approximately 40 minutes for each group.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

This study utilised two primary instruments: a pre-test and a post-test. Both were adapted from *Real Listening & Speaking 2*, with only minor modifications. Each test carried a total of thirty marks. The items were designed to assess listening comprehension without requiring interpretation; each question targeted a distinct subskill. Some items assessed understanding of meaning, while others focused on detail, contextual cues, or concluding information. The objective was not to measure fluency but rather to evaluate listening accuracy. All tests followed a uniform structure, and administration time was consistent across groups. Group sizes remained balanced to ensure fairness. Scripts were marked manually, without the use of automated scoring tools. One point was awarded for each correct response, with no partial credit given and no post-test discussion allowed. The results for Groups A, B, and C were entered separately into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to allow for structured comparison. Data tables were constructed to facilitate analysis across groups, with the primary objective of identifying which group demonstrated measurable improvement and to what extent. Following data entry, patterns and trends were examined to determine the effectiveness of each instructional approach.

4. Findings

The study presents the quantitative findings of the study, examining the impact of various listening strategies on students' listening proficiency at the institution. Statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS software to ensure a thorough and methodologically sound evaluation of the collected data

The results were presented in five principal sections: (1) descriptive statistics, encompassing average scores and standard deviations; (2) paired t-tests, examining improvements within groups; (3) fixed effects derived from a Linear Mixed Effects Model for the comparison of groups and intra-group assessments; (4) graphical representations that elucidate the numerical data;

 4.2 Descriptive Statistics and T-Test Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Listening Scores

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD
Control Group A	4.20	1.20	5.90	0.72
Experimental Group B (Predictive)	4.45	1.15	13.75	2.17
Experimental Group C (Selective)	3.75	0.97	16.25	1.77

The experimental groups significantly improved, particularly Group C (selective listening strategy). The considerable increase in mean scores in Group C demonstrates that bottom-up listening teaching may improve listening proficiency. This supports the pedagogical literature, which indicates that strategy-based instruction improves receptive language skills. The low standard deviation in Group C's post-test findings may indicate a widespread advantage.

Table 1 illustrates the numerical distribution of mean scores and standard deviations related to pre-test and post-test performance among the three groups. Group A achieved a pre-test mean of 4.20, with a subsequent post-test mean of 5.90, suggesting a modest enhancement. In contrast, Group B increased from a pre-test mean of 4.45 to a post-test mean of 13.75. Furthermore, Group C's performance improved considerably from 3.75 to 16.25, indicating the highest gain level among all groups.

4.3 Paired T-Test Results

Table 2: Paired T-Test Results

Group	T-Statistic	P-Value
Group A	-6.24	0.0000
Group B	-14.23	0.0000
Group C	-29.33	0.0000

From an academic perspective, the results support the hypothesis that explicit listening strategies have a particularly positive impact on student results. The statistically significant p-value observed in Group C highlights the point of selective (bottom-up) listening, whereas Group B also reaped benefits from the

top-down process. The absence of statistical significance within the control group suggests that conventional teaching methods may be insufficient for substantially improving listening proficiency, thereby corroborating recent trends in communicative and strategy-based instruction. This approach aligns with findings from research in second language acquisition.
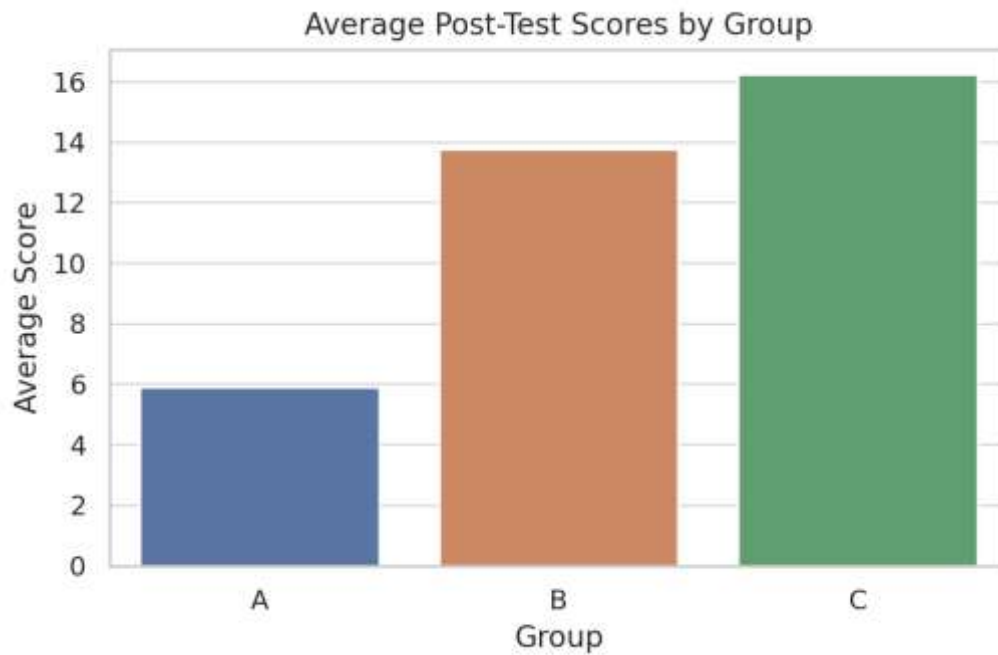
4.4 Mixed ANOVA Analysis

Table 3: Fixed Effects from Linear Mixed Effects Model

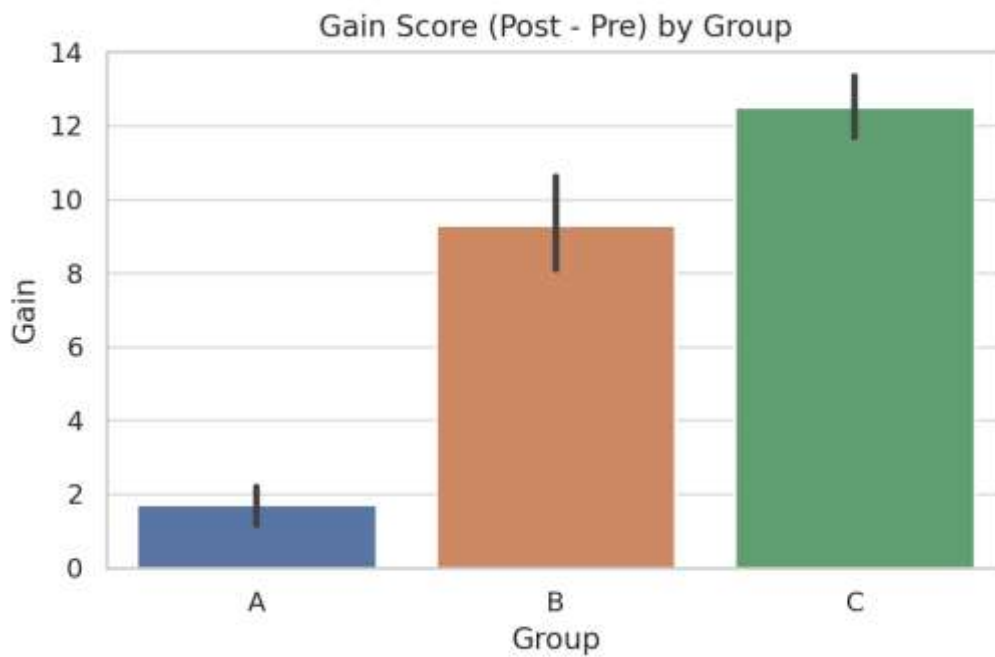| Effect	Coefficient	P-Value
Intercept	4.2	0.0
Group B	0.25	0.5772
Group C	-0.45	0.3156
Time	1.7	0.0001
Time × Group B	7.6	0.0
Time × Group C	10.8	0.0

A linear mixed effects model (LMEM) was employed in this study to analyse the repeated-measures data structure, as participants were assessed at multiple time points (pre-test and post-test). This model is particularly suited for evaluating longitudinal data where both fixed effects (e.g., time, group) and random effects (e.g., individual differences) may influence the outcome. The LMEM accommodates within-subject variability, allowing for more precise estimation of the effects of instructional strategies on listening performance.

Graph 1: Average Post-Test Scores by Group
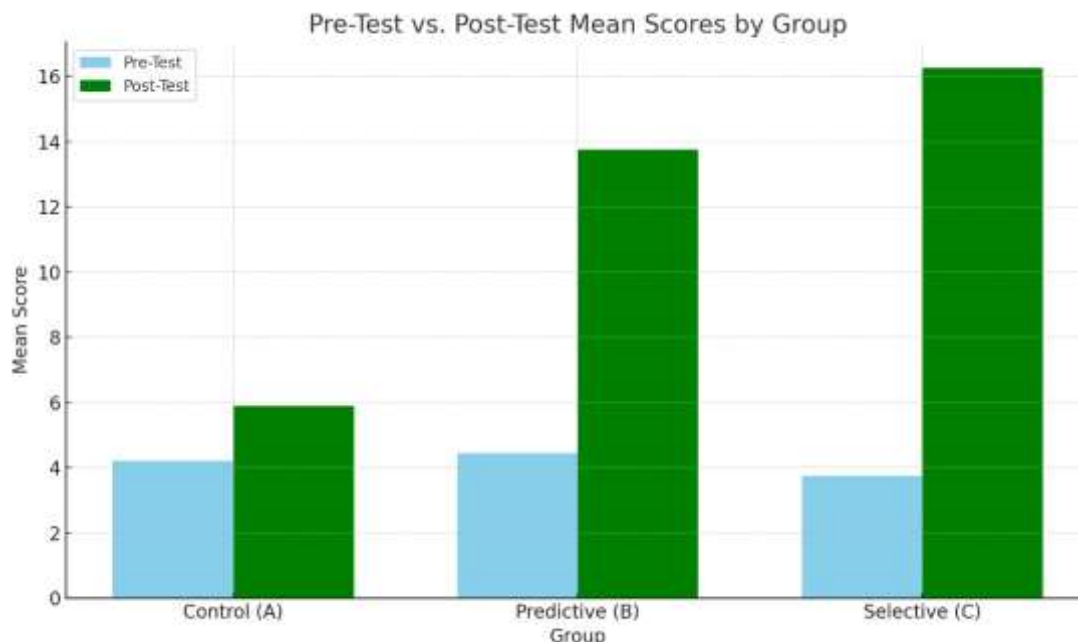

Average Post-Test Scores by Group

This bar chart compares the average post-test scores among the three groups. The results indicate that Group C, utilising the selective listening strategy, achieved the highest scores, followed by Group B and then Group A.

Graph 2: Gain Score (Post-Pre) by Group

Gain Score (Post - Pre) by Group

This graph illustrates the gain scores for each group, calculated by subtracting the pretest scores from the posttest scores. Group C experienced the most significant improvement, reinforcing the effectiveness of the bottom-up strategy.

Graph 3 : Pre-Test vs. Post-Test Mean Scores by Group

The bar chart above presents the mean scores of pre- and post- tests across three instructional groups: Control (A), Predictive (B), and Selective (C). The Control Group, taught through traditional methods, showed only a modest improvement, with scores increasing from 4.20 to 5.90. In contrast, the Predictive Group, which engaged in top-down listening activities, demonstrated a substantial gain, rising from a mean of 4.45 to 13.75. The Selective Group, exposed to bottom-up listening strategies, recorded the most notable enhancement, progressing from 3.75 to 16.25. These results reveal a marked contrast in instructional effectiveness. While all groups improved, the data strongly suggest that strategy – oriented approaches, particularly those grounded in bottom-up processing, lead to significantly greater gains in listening comprehension. The findings reinforce the pedagogical merit of differentiated instruction and provide compelling evidence for the incorporation of selective and predictive listening strategies within EFL curricula.

5. Dissection

The findings presented strong empirical support for the pedagogical efficacy of predictive and selective listening strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Statistically significant gains in post-test scores, particularly among learners exposed to bottom-up (selective) listening techniques, underscore the value of structured strategy training in developing listening comprehension. These outcomes reinforce key theoretical positions within second language acquisition research, specifically regarding cognitive load regulation (Field, 2008), the application of metacognitive strategies (Goh, 2000).

5.1 Research Question One

To what extent do predictive and selective listening strategies influence students' listening performance compared to traditional instruction?

The statistical data reveal an apparent disparity in listening gains between students instructed through strategy-based techniques and those taught using conventional methods. Group C, which received instruction in selective (bottom-up) listening strategies, demonstrated the highest improvement, with a mean increase from 3.75 to 16.25. Similarly, Group B, which was trained in predictive (top-down) strategies, also recorded a substantial gain, rising from 4.45 to 13.75. In contrast, Group A, exposed to traditional instruction without strategic scaffolding, achieved only a marginal improvement, with a mean gain from 4.20 to 5.90. These quantitative differences offer compelling support for the pedagogical effectiveness of targeted listening strategies.

5.1 Research Question Two

How are the different types of listening strategies correlated with gains in listening proficiency among EFL students at the University of Benghazi, Al-Abyar Branch?

The correlation between listening strategy type and proficiency gains is evident in the progressive score trajectories reported in the statistical analysis. The interaction effects elucidated in the mixed ANOVA (Group B × Time = 7.60;

Group C × Time = 10.80; both $p < 0.001$) indicate that learners who received instruction in predictive or selective strategies significantly outperformed those instructed through conventional methods. Notably, the higher coefficient associated with Group C underscores the superior impact of selective listening strategies specifically those aimed at identifying keywords, tone shifts, and semantic clusters in facilitating meaningful advancements in comprehension.

5.3 Research Question Three

To what extent does this study show the relationship between the types of strategies used and how much students' listening skills improved?

The findings of this study provide clear empirical support for a positive relationship between the type of listening strategy employed and the degree of improvement in listening proficiency among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The distinct performance patterns across the three instructional groups underscore the differentiated impact of strategy-based instruction. Group C, which received training in bottom-up (selective) strategies, demonstrated the most substantial gains in post-test scores. This outcome reinforces the pedagogical value of training learners to decode speech at the lexical and syntactic levels by isolating relevant information and focusing on acoustic and semantic cues. These findings substantiate Erinta and Listyani's (2022) conclusion that selective strategies reduce cognitive overload and foster targeted listening, which in turn enhances comprehension outcomes.

6. Conclusion

The study validates the instructional merit of predictive and selective listening strategies within EFL education. Selective (bottom-up) instruction yielded the most significant gains in listening proficiency, followed by predictive (top-down) approaches. Traditional methods proved markedly less effective, affirming the need for strategic frameworks in Libyan university classrooms. These findings call for a

paradigm shift in listening instruction—away from passive exposure and toward active, structured engagement with spoken language. The study provides a localised, empirical basis for reforming listening pedagogy in resource-constrained English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings.

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