Students' and Teachers' Perspectives and Performance of Pre-listening Activities in EFL Classes: A Study Case in Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance

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Abstract

Pre-listening activity has a significant role in improving comprehension skills. The study investigates the benefits and the effects of pre-listening activities in facilitating the students' listening comprehension in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The research also examined the teachers' performance of pre-listening activities as well as the students' preferences for the activities. 103 freshmen in General English classes and 12 teachers participated in this study. Data were collected through questionnaires and then quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. The findings indicated that pre-listening activities are believed to be significant in building confidence, generating interest, activating background or cultural knowledge, increasing input and greatly assisting comprehension. Accordingly, pedagogical implications as well as recommendations on how to employ pre-listening activities at the preparatory more effectively in the listening process will be provided.

Keywords: pre-listening activities, perception, attitudes, benefits, listening comprehension

1. Introduction

The skill of listening poses a challenge for both language teachers and learners. Many educators struggle to teach it effectively because it requires understanding spoken language in a natural context. Unfortunately, in various language learning situations, the emphasis on spoken texts has led to the neglect of the listening skills [1]. In the past, second language acquisition mainly focused on speaking and writing, relegating listening to a secondary role. Vandergrift [2] even referred to listening as a Cinderella skill, implying its overlooked status. However, contemporary understanding recognizes listening as an interactive and dynamic process crucial to second language (L2) acquisition, highlighting its significance as a complex problem-solving activity [3]. In recent years, listening skills have grown in priority and are now considered essential in the development of language proficiency.

Listening in our native language is usually not challenging, but when it comes to a foreign or second language, listening is proved to be the most difficult skill to develop. It becomes even more challenging when we lack information about the discussed topic or the speakers involved. It seems a little unfair to simply ask students to listen to something and answer some

questions without providing them with prior guidance on what to listen for. As a result, it makes improving listening skills much harder. It will be greatly useful for language learners to perform some activities before they actually do a listening task and those activities are named pre-listening activities. These activities not only spark interest and build confidence but to facilitate their listening comprehension [4, 5, 6]. They not only help learners develop background knowledge, but improve their understanding of the spoken text as well. Therefore, how pre-listening activities are designed and carried out in classrooms plays a crucial role in determining the success of a listening lesson. In this paper, I shall explore the teachers' and students' perceptions of pre-listening activities, focusing on the teachers' performance of pre-listening activities compared to the students' preferences and offering recommendations on effectively employing pre-listening activities. The aim is to assist the students in activating their relevant schematic knowledge, fostering educated anticipations, and making the connection between predictions and the listening text clear; as a result, facilitating their listening comprehension skills.

2. Literature review

2.1. Previous studies

There have been a number of studies conducted so far in terms of adopting various pretests and posttests to explore the effects of pre-listening activities in promoting language learner's listening comprehension. For example, Barjesteh & Ghaseminia [7] employed three task-based activities namely, podcast, video and topic preparation tasks as pre-listening tasks in their Iranian English foreign language learners and they found that podcast-based tasks significantly promoted students' listening performance ability. This finding suggests that educators can integrate podcasts at the pre-stage of the listening process to enhance students' listening abilities. Karimi, Chalak, & Biria [8] applied vocabulary preparation and content related support as the treatment to two experimental groups. The results confirmed the great impact of two types of pre-listening activities: bottom-up and top-down on listening comprehension performance of Iranian elementary EFL learners.

In another aspect, many studies have explored the effectiveness of top-down pre-listening activities in enhancing the listening comprehension skills of EFL learners by activating the pre-existing knowledge of the learners. For instance, Herron [5] assessed the effectiveness of the advance organizer strategy providing relevant background information before listening to a passage, as a top-down pre-listening activity. This strategy aims to enhance comprehension by narrowing down the potential interpretations of the passage. The results indicated that students in the treatment group, exposed to the advance organizer strategy as a pre-activity, exhibited improved comprehension scores. Schmidt-Rinehart [9] and Vandergrift [10] similarly demonstrated the significant influence of topic familiarity on learners' listening comprehension. Sui and Wang, Jia, Sadighi and Zare [11, 12, 13] also investigated the impact of schema activation through the provision of relevant background knowledge. The findings underscored that activating prior background knowledge assisted learners in recognizing more words and reducing the possibility of miscomprehension. Actually, a considerable number of unfamiliar words can hinder learners' understanding and reduce their confidence. Poor vocabulary knowledge is often identified as the primary factor contributing to listening difficulties [14,15]. Sadat Madani and Kheirzadeh [16] strongly emphasized, based on their

research, the vital role of vocabulary preparation in the pre-listening stage. Chang and Read [17] determined that vocabulary preparation was more effective for lower-level language learners. Molavi and Kuhi's [18] findings highlighted the significant positive impact of lexical support on intermediate learners. In their investigation, Farrokhi and Modarres [19] explored the influence of unknown words on Iranian EFL students' listening comprehension, revealing the efficacy of vocabulary preparation for elementary learners. Pan [20] demonstrated through his study that pre-teaching vocabulary enhanced the comprehension of Taiwanese learners. Although the outcomes of the mentioned studies validated the efficiency of top-down pre-listening activities, there are contrasting findings in other research that constrain the effectiveness of this approach. Jensen and Hansen's [21] research on 128 university-level L2 learners, investigating the impact of activating prior information on listening performance had a slight effect on the improvement of students' listening comprehension. Similarly, in Herron, Cole, and Linden's [22] study, no significant difference was observed between students who received two different types of advance organizers in two experimental groups. The results of Chung's [23] studies, in addition, were against the efficiency of vocabulary preinstruction. Hui [24] in a similar survey, showed that teaching vocabulary just before actual listening could not change the listening ability of the learners significantly.

According to the literature, there is no general agreement regarding the effectiveness of what categories of pre-listening activities in enhancing listening comprehension. While certain studies supported the substantial influence of both bottom-up and top-down pre-listening activities, others questioned their effectiveness in improving students' comprehension. Some studies, as mentioned above, confirmed the positive effects of vocabulary preparation or background knowledge on listening comprehension performance, some studies, on the other hand, disapproved of their efficient roles. To reach a solid conclusion, the current study attempted to investigate the extent of the effectiveness of both bottom-up and top-down pre-listening activities on listening comprehension performance.

Furthermore, the research explored what common pre-listening activities, which haven't been examined in any research, are carried out in EFL classes at UEF in order to give some implications for effective deploymentof pre-listening activities in accordance with the situation.

2.2. Theoretical background

2.2.1. Definition of pre-listening activities

As the words suggest – pre-listening activities, these kinds of activities should be performed before listening to get the learners prepared for the coming listening tasks. Pre-listening is the preparation stage for while-listening. The crucial aspect of this phase is to provide sufficient context comparable to real-life situations and establish motivation. This can be achieved by making learners aware of the intended purpose behind the upcoming listening input. [25]

Nunan [26] also shares the idea that in pre-listening activities, learners do tasks to "activate their schemata", that is, helping them anticipate a situation and what they may hear based on their previous knowledge. In addition, he defines "Pre-listening as how we can help learners achieve the balance between top-down and bottom-up processing."

Underwood [27] describes the pre-listening activity as "preparatory work" in which a teacher prepares some previous knowledge and helps learners expect some possible answers, then matches what they hear with what they expect to hear and finally, uses their schemata to make sense of it.

To sum up, pre-listening activities are those that serve as a preparation for listening. They are carried out before students begin listening to a passage to generate interest, build confidence, and facilitate comprehension.

2.2.2. The listening process

2.2.2.1. Bottom-up processing

In the view of Brown [28], Harmer [29] and Lingzhu [30], in bottom-up processing, learners rely on their linguistic knowledge to recognise linguistic elements vowels, consonants, words, sentences – to do the construction of meaning. They build meaning from lower-level sounds to words, from grammatical relationships to lexical meanings in order to arrive at the final message.

According to Nunan [26], "Bottom-up processing is trying to make sense of what we hear by focusing on the different parts: the vocabulary, the grammar or functional phrases, sounds, etc." Pre-teaching new words is a typical demonstration for bottom-up processing and as mentioned in 2.1, the majority of researchers showed strong agreement with the significant effects of vocabulary instruction on learner's listening comprehension.

2.2.2.2. Top-down processing

In top-down processing, learners use their prior knowledge – it can be content schema (general knowledge based on life experience and previous learning) or textual schema (knowledge of language and content used in a particular situation) [26] – to make predictions about the text [27] to "get a general view of the listening passage by, in some way, absorbing the overall picture."

2.2.2.3. Bottom-up processing or Top-down processing

Karimi, Chalak, & Biria [9], Nunan [26], Brown [28], Harmer [29], Lingzhu [30] and other researchers tend to agree that the listening process contains both bottom-up and top-down elements. It is useful for students to recognize the importance of both these types of processing and for teachers to arrange opportunities to work on both aspects.

Generally, bottom-up exercises will be more useful for beginners, and top-down exercises will be more necessary for intermediate and advanced students, but both types should be used for all levels since "putting too much focus on either bottom-up or top-down processing leads to misunderstanding."

In short, it is advisable for language users "to balance the two kinds of processing" in improvement in receptive skills generally, and listening particularly [26].

2.2.3. Importance of pre-listening activities

2.2.3.1. Pre-listening activities help generate interest, build confidence and facilitate comprehension.

Evidently, pre-listening activities bring a considerable benefit to EFL learners. They first generate learners' interest in performing some interesting and relevant activities in order to bring them into the topic and make them more willing to listen. At pre-listening stage, it is vital

"to provide enough context to mirror what is accessible in real life and to inspire drive" [29, p 2].

Secondly, they build students' confidence since one of the key tasks of pre-listening activities aims to provide knowledge input to help them deal with a listening exercise. Ellis [31] presents a number of tasks for this stage that can enable the students to gain the knowledge that is needed for the listening task. This gained knowledge gives the students confidence that is necessary for successful listening. The tasks include: starting a discussion about the topic, brainstorming, game, and guiding questions.

Pre-listening activities, particularly, facilitate second-language listening comprehension [5,4] by helping students develop background knowledge and improve their understanding of the spoken text. Students will be able to generate ideas about the topic and such information will help them activate relevant schema for the listening text; consequently, they become able to connect new information with prior knowledge schema [4, 12, 13, 23, 32, 36].

2.2.3.1. Pre-listening activities change the role of listeners from passive "recorders" to active participants

It is supposed that listeners can record, store and even replay the outside language input mechanically. More and more scholars turned to believe that listening was "an active and complex process" [33] and in the process "listeners are assigned certain roles, such as participants, addressees, auditors, overhears and the process places responsibility for constructing an acceptable understanding on them" [34]. With the knowledge that pre-listening activities have offered and the relaxed atmosphere they bring about, students' anxiety levels will be lowered and they will be more confident of bearing certain purposes in mind in advance and having the competence to decide what they want to do with the text. In this way, the passive recorder becomes an active participant.

2.2.3.2. Pre-listening activities increase the input

In Vietnam, the students learn English as a foreign language and most college students have little exposure to cultural information. Without understanding the culture within which a foreign language is located, it is very hard for one to master a foreign language and communicate very well with its native speakers. Bearing this in mind, more and more language education researchers consider cultural aspects in their research in language learning and teaching. foreign language listening comprehension if well designed [4, 6, 10]. Language teachers should spare no effort to design and apply the pre-listening activities into full play in the hope that students will achieve more in listening comprehension.

3. Methodology

As the purpose of this research is to investigate the students' and teachers' perspectives and performances of the pre-listening activities in EFL classes, which aims to promote students' listening performance ability, quantitative and qualitative approaches were combined. A qualitative approach was useful for describing, explaining, and investigating the factors that have an influence on the first-year students' listening comprehension skills in the hope of gaining effective pedagogical strategies and techniques. The quantitative approach, in contrast, was mainly for a full analysis of the descriptive data relating to the answers to the research questions based on the responses from the questionnaires.

The survey was conducted in the second term of the school year 2022-2023 and six questions were randomly sent by Google Forms to four General English Program 2 classes with an average of 30 questionnaires per class, but the valid responses were 101 since some did not check their questionnaires, and others produced invalid responses. The other six questions were sent to 12 teachers in charge of General English Program 2 at the Faculty of English.

Likert-scale questions are predominant in the questionnaires as they are typically used to investigate how respondents feel about a series of statements. They, additionally, are very popular on questionnaires and "are effective for gathering respondents' views, opinions, and attitudes about various language-related issues…" [35].

However, there is a possibility that the items in the closed questions do not cover all aspects relevant to the questions as the range of possible responses is determined by the researcher and the respondents would like to give detailed information they often face in the process of listening comprehension. Therefore, "Others" in most Likert-scale questions was also provided to accommodate other points that might be important. The data from both responses to the questionnaire are coded in numerical values ranging from (1), (2), (3), (4),

(5) and the statistics have been processed using SPSS and Excel software program.

Many researchers and methodologists studying

pre-listening activities tend to agree that these activities aim at activating learners' prior knowledge and then help increase their listening comprehension. [4, 12, 13, 23, 30, 32, 33, 36]. These six advantageous and beneficial pre-activities include Brainstorming, Using a class discussion, Questioning and answering sessions, Predicting the content of the listening text, Pre-teaching new words or difficult keywords, and Studying the listening tasks. In this paper, they are selected to explore what activities are more employed and what activities are more preferred in EFL classes at the University of Economics and Finance (UEF).

4. Findings

4.1 Students' response to the questionnaire

4.1.1. Students' attitudes towards four English skills

According to the survey findings, a significant a portion of participants considers enhancing listening skills to be the most challenging, with 49.8% and 38% indicating it as 'very difficult' and 'difficult,' respectively.
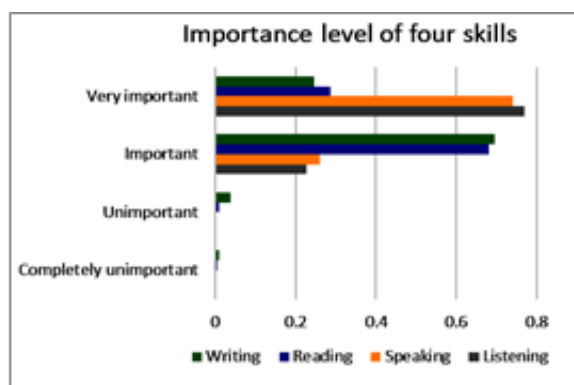

Figure 1. Students' perceptions toward the difficulty level of four skills

To assess the significance that students attribute to listening comprehension skills, the importance of the four language skills is examined. Overall, students tend to assign relatively equal importance to both listening and speaking skills, as well as reading and writing skills, as indicated in Figure 2.
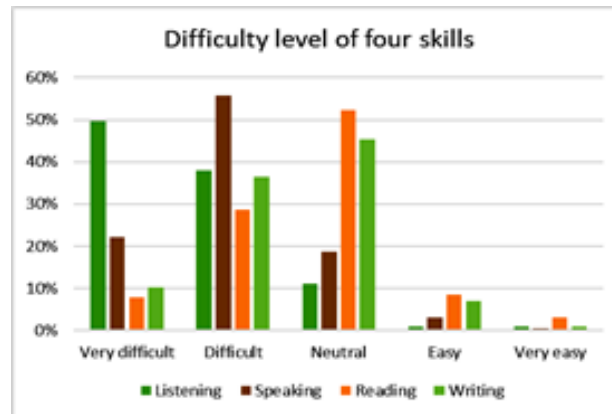

Figure 2. Students' perceptions toward the importance level of four skills

This raises a huge question that the students are fully aware of the importance of listening; however, it remains the most difficult skill to acquire. It might be inferred that EFL learners' awareness of the importance of a certain skill fails to have a positive effect on their language learning but other factors ought to be taken into consideration. Listening has likely been supposed to be so new, challenging, and hard to digest. Besides, listening strategies and listeners' linguistic knowledge should be taken into account. It may be true that not all listeners are trained to listen effectively and that linguistic knowledge considerably affects their listening comprehension.

Referring to the instructor's teaching-listening methods, question 3 is supported to look into how pre-listening activities are performed. The question is included in both of the questionnaires to confirm the information (Question 2 in the teacher's questionnaire). Actually, there appears a subtle difference in the results in which 80.3% of the students agree that their teachers do perform some activities at the pre-listening stage while 100% of the teachers claim that they follow the three stages – pre- listening, while-listening and post-listening – during a listening process (shown in Figure 3)
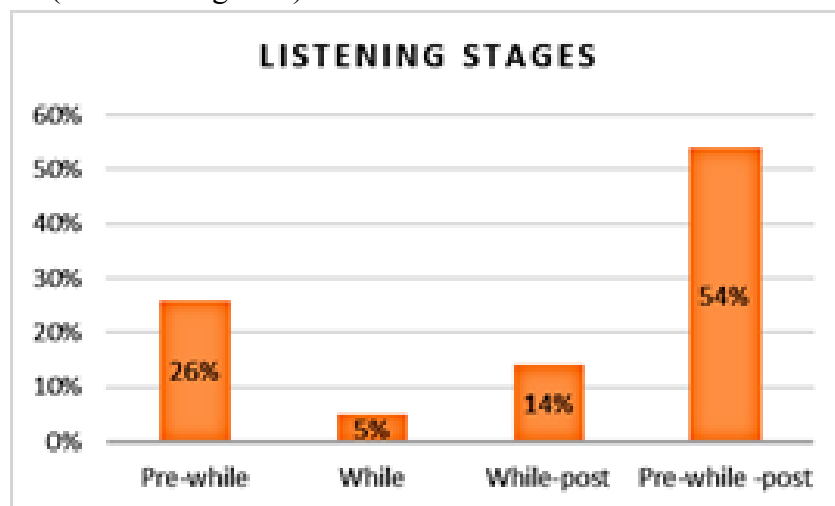

Figure 3. Students' comments on teachers' performance about listening stages

It is supposed that the different result sounds reasonable since firstly, the term 'pre-listening' seems weird to the learners even if it is separately noted. Secondly, their ideas of the three stages are occasionally limited and finally, in terms of teaching method, all instructors have been trained to include the three phases, especially, pre-listening, to achieve a good listening lesson.

4.1.2. Students' perception of pre-listening activities

Many students find it challenging to develop effective listening skills. Teachers should recognize the significance of pre-listening activities, as they play a crucial role in activating students' background knowledge and aiding comprehension. The students will become more confident, active and thus eager to listen if something is interesting and helpful done at the early minutes of a lesson. There exist a variety of profits but the study focuses on the five most common benefits namely, (1) Facilitating comprehension, (2) Becoming an active participant, (3) Activating background or cultural knowledge, (4) Building confidence, (5) Increasing the input.

Table 1. Students' awareness of the benefits of pre-listening activities

Questions	Number of responses/percentage				Central tendency
	Completely disagree	*Disagree*	*Agree*	*Completely agree*	
4.1	1%	3%	69%	27%	**3.22**
4.2	2%	4%	62%	32%	**3.24**
4.3	1.5%	7.4%	64%	27%	**3.16**
4.4	1%	11%	62%	26%	**3.14**
4.5	1%	7.9%	69%	22%	**3.13**

Table 1 offers an overview of the students' cognition of the five valuable pre-listening activities. The figures in the table above show that the treatment of these activities seems relatively equal, demonstrated by central tendencies ranking around from 3.22 to 3.11 out of 4 (as illustrated in Figure 4].

Besides, no participants gave any other benefits to the question. It can be said that those suggested items almost cover all the cases the first-year students have. This is quite helpful for a complete analysis and conclusion to the situation.
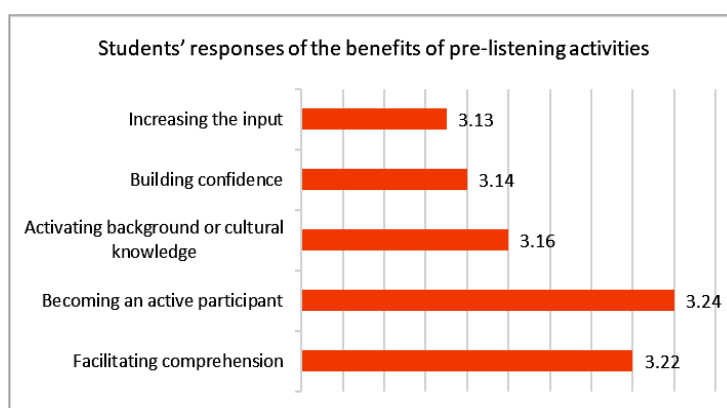

Figure 4. Central tendency in benefits of pre-listening activities in students' perceptions

As Buck [1] emphasizes "listening comprehension is an active process", a very large proportion of the students perceive becoming an active participant as the most outstanding profit pre-listening activities result in with the highest central tendency – 3.24 out of 4. The finding clearly indicates a positive attitude toward the given advantages of pre- listening activities that have been considered to be far more effective than others.

Another aspect examined in the study is the frequency of pre-listening activities employed in the class. Figure 5 displays the students' perception of their teacher's employment in the six pre-listening activities: (1) Brainstorming words, structures or ideas, (2) Using a class discussion about the rubrics, (3) Asking students some questions about the rubrics, (4) Pre-teaching new words or difficult keywords, (5) Making students predict the content of the text, (6) Helping students understand listening tasks.

Generally speaking, the majority of the subjects view positively their teacher's performance of pre-listening activities. Most interestingly, the greatest central tendencies do not lie in the highly appreciated activities including Prediction, Question-answer section,   and Discussion, but in Pre-teaching new words (3.82 out of 4) and Studying listening tasks (3.68 out of 4) (Figure 5).

 The choice of teaching vocabulary or bottom-up activities is in line with many other methodologists' or researchers' findings [14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 26, 28, 29, 31, 36].

In addition, in students' view, top-down activities   such   as   Brainstorming   ideas,

Discussing   and   Questioning   are less   paid attention to, though they are proven to be really useful to activate learners' prior knowledge and enable them to make inferences and form expectations about the given topics [4, 11, 12,13, 23, 24, 30, 31, 33] (shown in Figure 5)
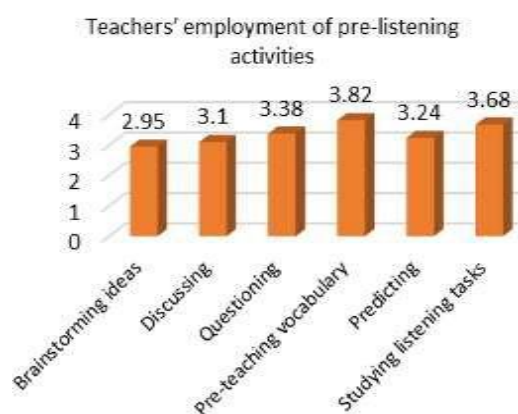

Figure 5. Teachers' employment of pre-listening activities in students' perceptions

In terms of the students' preferences for the same six pre-listening activities compared to the teachers' frequency of the activities in the classroom, the findings are shown in Figure 6 below.

In general, the majority of the subjects are in line with the research findings of Bern [14], Kelly [15], Chang &Read [17], Molavi & Kuhi [18], Farrokhi & Modarres [19], Nunan [26], Brown [28], Harmer [29] about the vital role of Pre-teaching new words. This activity is put nearly the highest rank (the central tendency is 3.32 out of 4) while Brainstorming words, structures or ideas is ranked the lowest which is against the idea of Sui and Wang [11] and

Lingzhu [30]. They explain Brainstorming is an open-sharing activity which encourages all students to participate. By expressing ideas and listening to what others say, students adjust
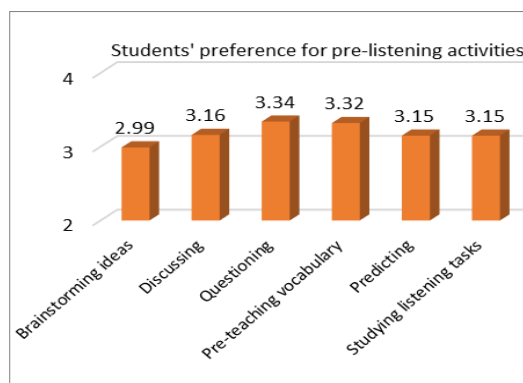

Figure 6. Central tendencies in students' preference for pre-listening activities new information.

In addition, the participants order Predicting in the fourth level. It may be inferred that the students are somewhat satisfied with the current practices of teaching and learning listening skills at the preparatory stage and that the teachers' adoption of pre-listening activities gets on rather well with their students' suggestions. However, there are some unbalanced treatments; for example, Questioning and discussing. The Question-answer session is suggested for the top rank while it is employed in the third one by the teachers; similarly, Using a class discussion is suggested for the third position while it is employed in the fifth one. As Berne [4], Lingzhu [30], and Underwood [27] have stated listening demands students' participation and the immediate feedback helps keep their interest and motivation. It is confirmed that "this approach is especially helpful with regard to some long and difficult text" [11]. The results indicate Questioning and discussing activities are proved to be more effective, more popular and thus highly preferred.

To sum up, it can be said that most of the first-year students are fully aware of the significant role of listening as well as pre-listening activities of the listening process. The majority view pre-listening activities as an important factor in activating background knowledge, becoming an active and confident participant, generating their interests and thus facilitating their listening comprehension.

4.2. Teachers' response to the questionnaire

4.2.1. Teachers' viewpoints on listening skills and listening teaching techniques

The result from question 1 clarifies a deep understanding that listening needs most improving (11 participants out of 12 chose Completely Agree and the other one chose Agree). Both the samples are fully aware of the difficulty of listening skills and that much attention has been paid to the skill but the result is still unsatisfactory.

The next question focuses on the teachers' agreement on the three options of processing – bottom-up, top-down, or both of them.
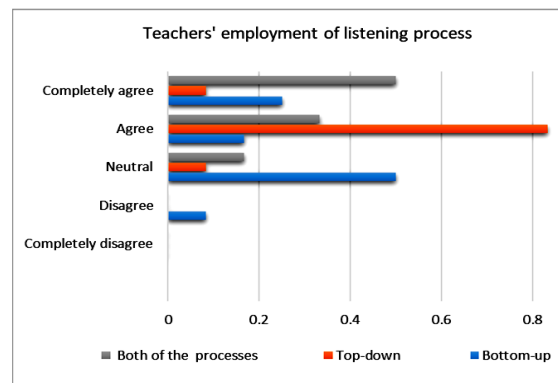
Figure 7. Teachers' employment of listening processes

The results from Figure 7 do not make a clear perception about the specific process as reviewed in Part 2. Teachers should bring both views to a lesson and top-down processing is preferred. More employment in bottom-up means a big challenge for the students due to their poor linguistic knowledge. However, a very large number of respondents agree to utilize top-down processing (10 chose Completely Agree and 1, Agree). In addition, 83.3% state that they employ both of the processes (33.3% Agree and 50%, Completely Agree)

4.2.2 Teachers' perceptions of pre-listening activities

According to the survey, all the samples appreciate the importance of doing lead-in activities before asking the students to listen. 9 of 12 the teachers (75%) view these activities as Very much important and 3/12 (25%), Very important.

Based on the review of the variety of important roles and considerable benefits of pre-listening activities in 2.2.3, the nine sub-questions of question 4 are modified to seek agreement or strong agreement from the teachers. Figure 8 offers an overview of the teachers' purposes in employing the activities.

•Purpose 4.1: To predict the content
•Purpose 4.2: To increase motivation
•Purpose 4.3: To activate background knowledge
•Purpose 4.4: To become active participants
•Purpose 4.5: To build confidence
•Purpose 4.6: To generate interests
•Purpose 4.7: To facilitate comprehension
•Purpose 4.8: To increase the input
•Purpose 4.9: To learn new language

It is obvious that before applying certain pre-listening activities, the teachers often consider the purposes. At a glance, it is interesting to note that the majority belong to the last two scales – Agree and Strongly agree. No answer is received in negative scales – Disagree and Strongly disagree and a very small population expresses Neutral for his hesitation. This declares the coincidence of the high awareness of the advantages of the activities among the two groups of samples and the review in Part 2. An overview of the central tendencies in the teachers' purposes for the activities is more vividly represented in the bar chart below:
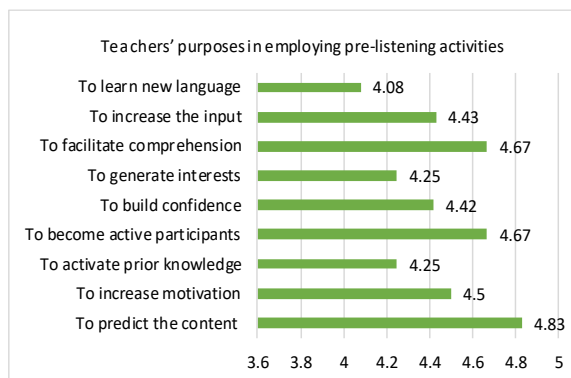
Figure 8. Central tendencies in teachers' purposes for employing pre-listening activities

Surprisingly, the greatest central tendency lies in To predict the content (4.83 out of 5) since in that way, the learners bring prior knowledge to the coming listening passage and it helps familiarize them with the given topic. However, this point was stated among the six analyzed pre-listening activities in the study and its role of purpose was not mentioned. To facilitate comprehension and To become active participants both share the same level of agreement (the central tendency is 4.67 out of 5). Whatever the pre-listening activities are, they try to get the target of assisting students with a better interpretation of the spoken text [4, 5]. Furthermore, these activities usually bring students some key knowledge, certain tasks to do, and a relaxing atmosphere and thus they feel more confident and become active listeners [33, 34].

Many other central tendencies for purposes of applying pre-listening activities to a listening period also reach rather high proportions such as To increase motivation (4.50 out of 5), To increase the input (4.43 out of 5), To build confidence (4.42 out of 5). These results confirm the great benefits of the activities [4, 6, 10, 28, 31].

Undoubtedly, To learn a new language is paid the lowest attention since the new language is frequently not included but some new words and it is not always successful when teachers think that pre-teaching vocabulary help learners comprehend better.

4.2.1. Teachers' performance for pre-listening activities

In this study, one of the most important aims is to investigate the teachers' performance in pre-listening activities, and the last question's result is demonstrated below:
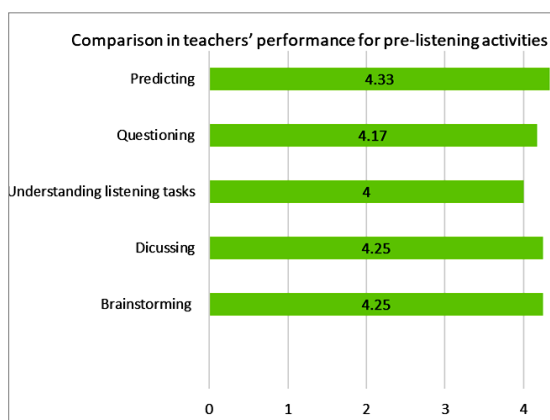

Figure 9. Teachers' performance for pre-listening activities

The most noticeable finding concerns Predicting with the highest mean of 4.33. It is reported that in the process of doing this activity, students could build on their prior knowledge

and at the same time, use vocabulary and structures that are connected with particular functions. Besides, Predicting "encourages students to monitor their comprehension as they listen" and "reminds students to review what they are hearing to see if it makes sense in the context of their prior knowledge and what they already know of the topic or events of the passage" [36].

As presented in Part 2, Discussing and Brainstorming are a necessity for learners as they help them focus on the topic and increase their interest in the text. Discussing is useful not only for students' interaction with each other, for creating a friendly teaching and learning environment, but for their involvement in speaking skills. Therefore, the second runner-up of Discussing and Brainstorming (4.25 out of 5) leads to a greatly positive result of utilizing the pre-listening activities at the pre-stage.

In addition, the fact that the employment of Pre-teaching vocabulary is the least frequently used by the teachers (3.83 out of 5) means a coincidence since it has been previously stated that Pre-teaching vocabulary does not really work when taught right beforehand. This finding strongly agrees with the results of Chung's [23] studies that were against the efficiency of vocabulary pre-instruction.

Furthermore, Hui [24], in a similar survey, showed that teaching vocabulary just before actual listening could not change the listening ability of the learners significantly.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Perceptions towards teaching and learning listening skills
-To students

A significant number of first-year students recognize the crucial role of listening skills, ranking it as the most important among the four English skills. Nevertheless, improving this skill poses challenges, and for some, it seems impossible. The importance of addressing this issue is emphasized, considering that competence in listening is not naturally acquired but requires intentional effort.

-To teachers

The teachers at UEF are commendably trained in instructing listening skills, assuming roles as facilitators, leaders, and even psychologists. They consistently implement an effective teaching method comprising three stages, incorporating various activities suitable for each stage. Most teachers employ both bottom-up and top-down processing in teaching listening, with a preference for the latter to activate learners' prior knowledge. The teachers acknowledge the students' limited listening ability and prioritize their improvement.

5.1.2. Perceptions towards the important role of Pre-listening skills
-To students

Virtually all first-year students enjoy participating in pre-listening activities, recognizing their importance and associated benefits. They express preferences for the six activities in descending order: Questioning, pre-teaching vocabulary, Discussing, Predicting, Studying tasks, and Brainstorming. This alignment with teachers' performance in these activities yields positive outcomes.

-To teachers

In alignment with students' responses, teachers recognize and appreciate the significance of pre-listening activities which involve Predicting, Discussing, Brainstorming, Questioning, Pre-teaching vocabulary, and Studying tasks for listening comprehension. Both groups strongly agree that pre-listening activities help learners become active listeners, predict the content of the message, build confidence, generate interest and greatly assist comprehension, which turns out to be really consistent with previous researchers' and methodologists' viewpoints discussed in detail in Part 2.

It is clear that pre-listening activities help learners become active listeners, predict the content of the message, build confidence, generate interest and greatly assist comprehension. Therefore, it seems logical to activate the students' prior knowledge of the target topic since a learner can utilize the schematic knowledge for comprehension purposes when they do not have sufficient linguistic input to support understanding [4, 11, 12, 13, 23, 24, 30, 32, 33, 36].

Whatever types of listening tasks or contexts are, one or some of those six activities have ever been widely implemented and proved to be much more effective than others. However, the appropriateness and flexibility of the chosen activities ought to be taken into consideration to better the situation for the sake of the students. In other words, depending on learners' level of proficiency and their personal factors such as feelings, interests, needs, and so on, some typical activities are devoted to motivating and simultaneously facilitating their listening comprehension [30].

5.2. Recommendation

5.2.1 To teachers

Pre-listening activities are supposed to serve as preparation for listening in several ways, and thus the teacher should decide if more linguistic or background knowledge is needed and determine whether to enter the text from the top-down or from the bottom-up. More particularly, a wide range of pre-listening activities should be flexibly and appropriately employed not just those six ones, basing on the students' level of proficiency and their familiarity with the topic. In addition, some pronunciation training about the coming spoken text is recommended as a useful pre-listening activity. For instance, International Phonetic Symbols need to be introduced at the beginning of the course and the teachers make sure of their students' understanding and application during the course. Besides, some other aspects of pronunciation so called changes in phonological modification (such as assimilation, elision, intrusion, a strong form, a weak form and so on) and prosodic features (including stress and intonation) ought to be paid attention during the course.

As far as good pre-listening activities are concerned, they just sometimes involve reading and writing but usually involve speaking (Davies, 2000). That is, before listening, a variety of activities connected to speaking ought to be chosen and employed such as questioning-answering sessions, predicting the content of the listening passage, discussing in pairs or in groups. Furthermore, after listening students need to retell and discuss the material they have just heard in order to synthesize their understanding. In this way they learn to combine listening with speaking properly. With regard to building the basics of oral communication, inevitably, listeners will lose the information resources without speaking; speaking will lose its objective without careful listening and, as a result, speaking ability will not be acquired. Listening and

speaking rely on each other and regulate each other. It is important to strengthen listening through speaking and to improve speaking through listening.

5.2.2 To students

In accordance with the teachers' role in the new curriculum forum, firstly, the students have to certainly become active participants in learning and are encouraged to be explorers and creators of language, rather than passive recipients of it. Secondly, the students need to be encouraged to carry on self-study activities. In activities outside the class the students need to engage in extensive listening; listening to many different varieties of language phenomena and gaining more knowledge through TV programs (Animal Planet, Cartoon Network, Disney Channel, Discovery Channel, MTV, National Geographies, TED talks, AFC, etc.) Smartphone applications, social networking sites and as many other kinds of exposure to listening training (like English songs) as they can find. In these ways, it is possible to raise the students' enthusiasm, cultivate their listening interests, and achieve the goals of learning English. Finally, when the students follow the recommendations to the teachers about pronunciation training including identification, imitation and practice, progress will be made. Noticeably, improvement in pronunciation depends upon significant commitments of both time and energy from learners themselves and it cannot be expected to take place overnight. Students' abilities to identify the sounds of the language and to gain control over the forms practiced in class are steadily developing processes.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRES

Part I: Student's Questionnaire

1. How difficult do you find these four skills?

Very difficult / Difficult / Neutral / Easy / Very easy

1.1 Listening

1.2 Speaking

1.3 Writing

1.4 Reading

2. How important do you find these four skills?

Completely unimportant / Unimportant /   Important / Very important

2.1 Listening

2.2 Speaking

2.3 Writing

2.4 Reading

3. What procedure does your teacher follow when teaching listening?

 Pre-While / While / While-Post / Pre-While-Post

4. What benefit(s) do you think you can get from pre-listening activities?

Completely disagree / Disagree / Agree / Completely agree

4.1: Facilitating comprehension

4.2: Becoming an active participant

4.3: Activating background or cultural knowledge

4.4: Building confidence

4.5: Increasing the input

Others:

5. How often does your teacher employ these pre-listening activities?

Never / Seldom / Sometimes / Often / Always

5.1: Brainstorming words, structures or ideas

5.2: Using a class discussion about the rubrics

5.3: Asking students some questions about the rubrics

5.4: Pre-teaching new words or difficult keywords

5.5: Making students predict the content of the text

5.6: Helping students understand listening tasks

Others:

6. What pre-listening activities should be employed to help you enhance listening comprehension?

Completely disagree / Disagree / Agree / Completely agree

6.1: Helping students understand listening tasks

6.2: Using a class discussion about the rubrics

6.3: Making students predict the content of the text

6.4: Pre-teaching new words or difficult key words

6.5: Asking students some questions about the rubrics

6.6: Brainstorming words, structures or ideas

Others:

Part II: Teacher's questionnaire

1. What skills do you think your students need improvement?

Completely disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Completely agree

1.1 Listening

1.2 Speaking

1.3 Writing

1.4 Reading

2. When teaching listening, which way do you follow?

2.1. Pre and While

2.2 While and Post

2.3 Pre, While and Post

3. When teaching listening, which process do you center on?

Completely disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Completely agree

3.1 Bottom-up processing

3.2 Top-down processing

3.3 Both of the processes

4. How important do you think to do some pre-listening activities before asking students to listen to a text?

Very much / Important / Much important

5. What are your purposes in using pre-listening activities?

Completely disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Completely agree

5.1: To predict the content of listening text

5.2: To increase motivation

5.3: To activate background knowledge

5.4: To become active participants

5.5: To build confidence

5.6: To generate interests

5.7: To facilitate comprehension

5.8: To increase the input

5.9: To learn a new language

Others:

6. Which of the following pre-listening activities are effective for doing listening tasks?

Completely disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Completely agree

6.1: Brainstorming words, structures or ideas

6.2: Using a class discussion about the rubrics

6.3: Helping students understand listening tasks

6.4: Asking students some questions about rubrics

6.5: Making students predict the content of the text

6.6: Pre-teaching new words

Others