

An Investigation of Top-down Listening Processing Skills Taught by EFL Teachers in Gaza Governmental High Schools

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Abstract

Top-down processing is needed for real world listening (Richard, 1990). This study aimed at investigating top-down listening processing skills included in *English for Palestine* 11 & 12 and used by Gaza high school EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers, besides exploring the problems of teaching top-down-listening processing skills as perceived by Gaza high school EFL teachers and their supervisors. For fulfilling the study aims, the researcher utilized five instruments: two evaluation checklists, a closed-question questionnaire, an open-question questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview. Participants were two EFL university instructors, four EFL school supervisors and 81 EFL teachers working in Gaza governmental high schools. Using frequencies means, standard deviations, percentages, and the rubrics put by Gillham (2000), the study concluded that *English for Palestine* 11 & 12 focused on no top-down listening skills other than listening for a gist and listening for supporting details. Furthermore, the open-question questionnaire data showed that the participants experienced problems when attempting to teach top-down listening skills (i.e., lack of students' external motivation, students' poor linguistic competence). Based on the study results, implications were offered.

Keywords: Top-down listening skills, EFL teachers, Gaza

Introduction

Listening is very essential for developing a second or a foreign language (Vandergrift, 2008; Wallace, 1998). Listening gives a foundation for all language aspects such as speaking (Brown, 2001), syntax and pronunciation (Cross, 1992). Moreover, through listening, people can gain large amounts of knowledge and information (Villegas, 2013), and therefore, it can help people participate and communicate effectively. Due to this importance, recent research has focused on L2/FL (Second language, foreign language) listening instruction. While some studies centered on L2/FL listening problems (e.g., Hamouda, 2013; Yahya, 2007), other studies investigated L2/FL listening strategies (e.g., Abdelhamid, 2012; Alili, 2009; Bidabadi & Yamat, 2011; Hasan, 2000).

Amongst the strategies emphasized by many L2/FL educators are top-down and bottom-up processing strategies (Orii-Akita, 2014; Al-Qaraghooly & Al-Bermani, 2010). While bottom-up processing focuses on listener's understanding based on analyzing sounds, words, clauses, and sentences, top-down processing refers to the use of background information in understanding a message, assigning things and places into categories, and in drawing inferences (Richards, 1990). Moreover, Brown (2011) states that top-down skills include making predictions about what students are listening to.

Taking into account top-down listening strategies and piaget's (1996/2000) stages of development, which suggest that abstract concepts, deductive reasoning, and logical analysis tend to appear in the age of 11-15 year olds (Lewis & Dahbany, 2008), it may be argued that EFL students between grades 6 and 12 in Palestine need to be trained to use top-down strategies. However, Hammad (2014a) reported that Gaza public preparatory school students tended to focus on bottom-up processing skills rather than top-down processing skills in their English reading classes. Moreover, through her experience as an academic supervisor of EFL pre-service teachers, the researcher had noticed that Gaza EFL teachers placed heavy emphasis on bottom-up strategies at the expense of top-down strategies in English classes, particularly English listening classes, at Gaza high schools (eleventh and twelfth grade, ages 17-18 years old). Given that very limited research has been conducted on the use of top-down listening processing strategies in Palestinian EFL context, it was necessary to approach this research area examining top-down listening processing skills included in English textbooks utilized in Gaza high schools and the problems Gaza high school teachers encountered in teaching such skills.

Literature Review

This section presents the theoretical framework related to the topic of the study, followed by a review for the related studies on L2/FL listening in general and bottom-up and top-down processing skills in particular.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework in this study discusses the definition of listening, bottom-up and top-down processing skills, and extensive and intensive listening including the stages of teaching the listening class.

Definition of 'listening'

While Oxford dictionaries (2014) define *listening* as being ready to hear something, Bordonaro (2014) notes that *listening* is more than hearing. In Bordonaro's view, *listening* is understanding, reacting, predicting, and acting on what is said. Additionally, Rost (2013) defines *listening* as a

mental process of decoding a message from spoken input. Verghese (1989) also views *listening* as decoding a message and comprehending it.

For the present study, *listening* is using linguistic knowledge and prior information to decode and understand a heard message. Additionally, good listeners should react to what is being said through a series of behaviors such as predicting, sequencing information or events, inferencing, summarizing, and suggesting.

Definition of 'Gaza Governmental High Schools'

Congruent with Palestinian Ministry of Education (2012), the term *Gaza Governmental High schools* in this study refers to the governmental schools which admit eleventh and twelfth graders in Gaza.

'English for Palestine 11 & 12'

English for Palestine 11 & 12 are the textbooks that were used in teaching English language to Palestinian eleventh and twelfth graders in the school year 2014-2015. While *English for Palestine 11* includes 12 units, *English for Palestine 12* is composed of 9 units. Each unit in both textbooks has 10 lessons, the fourth of which is a listening lesson, and each listening lesson should be delivered within one class period.

Top-down and bottom-up

Research indicates that there are two main models of the listening process: top-down and bottom-up models (e.g., Brown, 2001; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Peterson, 2001; Richards, 1990). Top-down model refers to the use of background information which helps in guessing and making predictions (Brown, 2001). It is higher level processing that is driven by the listener's comprehension of the context, the topic, the nature of the text, and the nature of the world (Peterson, 2001). Such processing includes drawing inferences, sequencing pictures and events (Richards, 1990), finding main ideas, finding supporting details, and recognizing point of view (Peterson, 2001). According to Batova (2013), top-down processes enable students to extract meanings from messages, and enrich what they hear.

Bottom-up model, on the other hand, implies that listeners build understanding by starting with the smallest units of language such as individual sounds or phonemes. Then, listeners try to combine such sounds into words which make phrases, clauses, and sentences (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). In other words, the listeners analyze the message they receive into successful levels of organization (i.e., sounds, words, phrases, and sentences) for the sake of comprehending the text message. Thus, bottom-up model is based on using phonological cues, lexical items, grammatical rules for identifying information (Richards, 1990). Examples of the bottom-up listening skills are discriminating between intonation contours, discriminating between phonemes, listening for morphological endings, recognizing syllable patterns and word stress, and recognizing words with reduced vowels and dropped syllables (Peterson, 2001).

Based on the above, it may be argued that both bottom-up and top-down processing strategies are effective in L2/FL listening instruction. While novice learners need to develop bottom-up skills, advanced learners should focus on top-down processing. In other words, once learners acquired adequate phonological, lexical, and syntactic knowledge and cultural backgrounds, emphasis should be placed on top-down listening skills. In this context, Vargas (2009) provides that learners need to practice bottom-up listening strategies from the beginning level classes as the foundation on which to build top-down listening strategies.

Intensive listening and extensive listening

According to many educators (e.g., Baruah, 2006; Kailani & Muqattash, 2008; Verghese, 1989), listening can be taught intensively and extensively. Intensive listening is concerned with training students to comprehend meaning and identify particular features of grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation (Baruah, 2006). This kind of listening is usually considered as a part of language teaching program (Verghese, 1989). It is carried out in the classroom, and controlled by the teacher (Kailani & Muqattash, 2008).

According to some educators (e.g., Gordon, 2007; Kan, 2010), FL/L2 listening class is best taught through three stages: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening. Pre-listening stage prepares students for listening tasks through activating prior background knowledge, discussing the title, and pre-teaching unfamiliar vocabulary. In the while-listening stage, teacher helps students get a detailed understanding of the text (Kan, 2010) through identifying specific information, answering detailed comprehension question, and dictation exercises. Post-listening activities help students apply the target language items included in the listening materials in context through role-plays and simulations (Gordon, 2007).

Considering the above literature on intensive listening, top-down processing skills, and bottom-up processing skills, it appears that it is through intensive listening classes, learners can practice both bottom-up strategies (i.e., recognizing unfamiliar language items, pronunciation, dictation exercises) and top-down strategies (i.e., predicting and inferencing based on getting a detailed understanding of the text). Additionally, Richards and Lockhart (1996) and Flowerdew and Miller (2005) view that developing both bottom-up and top-down processing can be achieved through and exposure to native speakers (i.e., broadcast and radio programs).

In extensive listening, it is not necessary to give detailed exercises of the listening materials since such type of listening is conducted for gathering information and enjoying stories, plays, and shows (Baruah, 2006). Extensive listening can be used for two purposes: representation of already known material in a new environment and exposing students to language items that are unfamiliar to them, but within their capacity (Broughton, Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, & Wilde, 2003).

It is noteworthy that the present study focused on the listening activities included in *English for Palestine 11 & 12* and taught by Gaza high school EFL teachers (intensive listening activities) in the school year 2014-2015.

Previous Studies

A number of relevant studies have been conducted on L2/FL listening skills including top-down skills. For example, Abdalhamid (2012) examined listening comprehension skills of a sample of native speakers of Arabic in US. The study showed that advanced listeners used more top-down skills than intermediate listeners. In the same vein, Li and Renandya (2012) examined the approaches considered effective by Chinese EFL teachers in solving their students' problems with listening. The results indicated that the participants shared a preference for bottom up approach, assuring the importance of coping with fast speech and recognizing words in speech.

Related to the descriptive studies conducted on L2/FL listening comprehension, the two studies of Ghoneim (2013) and Yahya (2007) focused on the problems listeners encountered while listening. Ghoneim (2013) showed that unlike less proficient learners, advanced learners used top-down processing while listening. Moreover, Yahya (2007) investigated the obstacles Iraqi EFL university learners encountered while listening. The study reported that the

participants were unable to use prior information and background knowledge to guess the new words and expressions.

As for the experimental studies conducted in this area, the four studies of Al-Qaraghooly and Al-Bermani (2010), Orii-Akita (2014), Siegel and Siegel (2013), and Villegas (2013) centered on evaluating the effectiveness of top-down and bottom-up strategies in FL/L2 instruction. Al-Qaraghooly and Al-Bermani (2010) investigated the effectiveness of both top-down and bottom-up processing in developing Iraqi EFL college students listening comprehension. The study reported the both types of strategies were equally effective in developing listening comprehension. Moreover, Orii-Akita (2014) examined the effects of bottom-up, top-down, and interactive models on Japanese EFL university students' listening comprehension. The study indicated that interactive model was more effective than top-down and bottom-up models in EFL listening comprehension. Siegel and Siegel (2013) also investigated the effects of both top-down and bottom-up strategies on Japanese ESL students' listening comprehension, and the study showed that such strategies improved the participants' phoneme processing and sentence phrasing abilities. Villegas (2013) reported the impact of incorporating bottom-up and top-down strategies in listening comprehension tasks of pre-intermediate EFL students, and the study indicated that such impact was positive.

It is clear that none of the previous studies probed the problems teachers encountered in teaching top-down listening strategies in Palestinian EFL context. Thus, the present study attempted to examine top-down listening processing skills included in the English textbooks utilized in Gaza high schools and the problems Gaza high school EFL teachers encountered in teaching such strategies.

The present study considered the research methodologies employed in the previous studies. Indeed, such studies assisted in designing the study instruments and analyzing its data.

Questions of the Study:

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are top-down listening processing skills included in *English for Palestine* 11 & 12?
2. To what extent do EFL teachers of Gaza high schools enrich English classes with top-down listening processing skills?
3. How do EFL teachers of Gaza high schools perceive the problems of teaching top-down-listening processing skills?
4. How do EFL supervisors of Gaza high schools perceive teachers' problems of teaching top-down-listening processing skills?

Method

Participants

The participants were two EFL university instructors, 81 EFL teachers, and four EFL school supervisors. The two instructors were teaching ELT (English language teaching) courses at Gaza Universities: The first was a 8-year experience female teacher and the second was a 6-year experience male teacher. The 81 teachers were working in Gaza governmental high schools located in two areas: West of Gaza and East of Gaza. Gaza directorate included forty eight governmental high schools. Since stratified random sampling technique is utilized for getting a representative sample (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007), 50% (twenty-four schools) in both

West of Gaza and East of Gaza were selected to participate in this study. The teachers were both males and females teaching the two grades of the high school stage (i.e., eleventh grade and twelfth grade). Additionally, four EFL school supervisors were selected from all supervisors working in West of Gaza and East of Gaza directorates (eight supervisors) to be interviewed in this study. All participants took part in the study voluntarily.

Data collection and analysis procedures

This study was conducted in the first semester of the school year 2014-2015, August. First, two experts working in Gaza universities were asked to examine top-down listening skills included in *English for Palestine* 11 & 12. They were asked to count the frequencies of the sub skills mentioned. Second, after getting the consent from the Palestinian Ministry of Education, the researcher asked all the teachers (81 female and male teachers) working in the twenty-four schools selected from all Gaza governmental high schools to respond to two questionnaires: A closed-question questionnaire and an open-question questionnaire. While all teachers completed the closed-question questionnaire, only 62 teachers responded to the open-question questionnaire. Third, to supplement the data gathered by the questionnaires, four EFL supervisors were interviewed.

As for analyzing the study data, first, the two researchers' responses to the two evaluation checklists were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The comparison of the researchers' responses revealed that they had a high degree of agreement and consistency (95%). Second, the closed question-questionnaire data were analyzed utilizing SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Means, standard deviations, and percentages were computed to determine the top-down listening skills taught by Gaza high school EFL teachers. Third, for analyzing the open-question questionnaire data, the researcher used the rubrics put by Gillham (2000): Looking through the participants' responses, highlighting substantive statements, forming categories, rethinking about the categories, and checking each response under the category heading. The researcher formed seven categories: lack of teachers' and students' external motivation, students' poor linguistic competence (i.e., vocabulary and knowledge), difference between EFL teachers' accents and English native speakers' accents, irrelevance of the listening materials to students' background knowledge, lack of in-service training programs, listening as a difficult skill, and inadequacy of time devoted to teaching English listening materials. To achieve the open-questionnaire data credibility, another researcher reviewed and coded the material and the two researchers agreed on 90% of the coded material.

As for analyzing the interviews data, the researcher employed the analysis steps put by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006). The interviews were transcribed, coded, and organized into five categories: lack of facilities, lack of teachers' exposure to English spoken discourses, lack of EFL listening assessment, lack of teachers' internal motivation for teaching, and inadequacy of time devoted to teaching English listening materials. The credibility of the data was achieved through asking another researcher to review and code it, and the two researchers agreed on 88% of the coded data.

Instruments

The data of this study were gathered by five instruments: two textbook evaluation checklists, a closed-question questionnaire, an open-question questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview. It is noteworthy that the researcher checked the content validity of all instruments.

Two evaluation checklists

For Hartley (2005), textbook evaluation checklist is commonly used for evaluating school textbooks. Furthermore, Nation and Macalister (2010) view that the focus of evaluation checklist is on evaluation. After reviewing some relevant references (e.g., Brown, 2001; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Peterson, 2001; Richards, 1990; Villegas, 2013), the researcher designed two textbook evaluation checklists (Appendixes A, B). Two experts were asked to count the frequencies of the top-down listening skills included in *English for Palestine 11 & 12*.

A closed-question questionnaire

According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), in closed question-questionnaire, a set of answers are presented to respondents. Reviewing some relevant references (e.g., Brown, 2001; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Peterson, 2001; Richards, 1990; Villegas, 2013), the researcher designed a 9-item questionnaire so as to determine the top-down listening skills Gaza high school EFL teachers taught. All the questionnaire items required multiple choice answers with a five-point likert scale: 1=always, 2=often, 3=sometimes, 4=occasionally, and 5=never (Appendix C). After checking the content validity and face validity of the questionnaire, the internal consistency reliability was established through Cronbach Alpha. The Alpha coefficient for the overall questionnaire (9 items) was at 0.73.

An open question questionnaire

Open-question questionnaire is used when the possible answer is not suggested where participants are allowed to express themselves freely (Foddy, 1993), and it is utilized where rich data is required (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). To identify the problems Gaza high school EFL teachers encountered when teaching top-down-listening skills, the researcher prepared an open question-questionnaire (Appendix D).

A semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews can help in gathering in-depth data through probing beyond the interview questions (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2006). To supplement the open-questionnaire data, the researcher conducted four semi-structured interviews with four EFL supervisors. Based on some references (e.g., Batova, 2013; Hasan, 2000), the researcher designed the interview questions (Appendix E). Each interview took thirty minutes, and was recorded.

Results

Results of first Research Question

To answer the first question "To what extent are top-down listening processing skills included in *English for Palestine 11 & 12*?", two evaluation checklists were prepared. Two experts were asked to count the frequencies of top-down listening skills in *English for Palestine 11 & 12*. Table 1 shows the top-down listening skills mentioned in the first evaluation checklist and the frequency and percentage of each skill.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of top-down listening skills included in English for Palestine 12

Subskill	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
1.Listening for main ideas	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	2	1	9	26%
2.Listening for supporting details	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	4	3	1	24	68.5%
3.Predicting information	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
4.Sequencing information or events	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Making suggestions	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	2	5.5%
6..Drawing inferences	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. Generating questions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8. Summarizing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9. Recognizing a point of view	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	4	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	5	2	35	100

Table 1 shows that *English for Palestine 12* does not include any top-down listening skills other than 'listening for supporting details', 'listening for main ideas', and 'making suggestions'. As shown in the above table, 'listening for supporting details' got the highest score followed by 'listening for main ideas', and then 'making suggestions'. Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of top-down listening skills included in English for Palestine 11.

Table2. Frequencies and percentages of top-down listening skills included in English for Palestine 11

Subskill	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Unit 11	Unit 12	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
1.Listening for main ideas	1	1	1	2	2	2	-	1	2	2	2	2	18	40%
2.Listening for supporting details	2	2	1	2	1	3	4	1	2	2	2	2	24	53.3%
3.making predictions	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2.2%
4.Sequencing information or events	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5.Drawing inferences	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	-
6. Summarizing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7.Making suggestions	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	4.5%
8.Generating questions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9. Recognizing a point of view	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	3	3	2	4	5	5	4	3	4	4	4	4	45	100

Table 2 shows that the top-down listening skills included in *English for Palestine 11* are 'listening for main ideas', 'listening for supporting details', 'making predictions', 'making suggestions'. Where as 'listening for supporting details' got the highest score, 'making predictions' fell into the lowest.

It is clear that both *English for Palestine 11* and *English for Palestine 12* do not pay much attention to top-down listening processing skills. According to Vargas (2009), when moving from the beginning level classes, students need to practice top-down listening strategies since such strategies contribute to the students' comprehension of the texts. Batova (2013) also views that top-down processes enable students to extract meanings from messages, and enrich what they hear.

Results of Second Research Questions

For the second research question " To what extent do EFL teachers of Gaza high schools enrich English classes with top-down listening processing skills?" to be answered, the researcher utilized a closed-question questionnaire. Statistics were computed to determine the means, standard deviations and percentages of the questionnaire items. Following are the rubrics put by three researchers to determine the level of Gaza high school EFL teachers' teaching of top-down listening skills:

- Excellent: 90% and above
- Very good: 80%- 89.9%
- Good: 70%: 79.9%
- Poor : 60%- 69%
- Very poor: Less than 60%

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and percentages of the questionnaire items

No	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
1	Listening for main ideas.	4.50	0.60	90.0
2	Listening for supporting details.	4.33	0.61	86.5
3	Making predictions	2.14	0.69	42.8
4	Sequencing information or events	2.14	0.74	42.8
5	Recognizing appoint of view	2.08	0.83	41.5
6	Drawing inferences	1.64	0.80	32.8
7	Summarizing the text ideas	1.75	0.85	35.0
8	Making suggestions	2.21	0.94	44.3
9	Generating questions.	2.06	0.99	41.3
Total		2.54	0.44	50.8

Table 3 shows that the level of the participants' instruction of top-down listening strategies fell into the very poor level. The table also shows that the first item 'Listening for main ideas' fell into the excellent level; the second item 'Listening for supporting details' got the very good level; and the rest of the items fell the very poor level. This data indicates that the two skills most frequently emphasized by the participants were 'Listening for main ideas' and 'Listening for supporting details'. The obstacles hindering EFL teachers of Gaza high school from teaching top-down listening processing skills are reported below.

Results of Third Research Question

As shown by the open-question questionnaire data, all participants complained that they experienced problems when attempting to teach top-down listening skills. Such problems included lack of teachers' and students' external motivation, students' poor linguistic competence (i.e., vocabulary and knowledge), difference between EFL teachers' accents and English native speakers' accents, irrelevance of the listening materials to students' background knowledge, lack of in-service training programs, listening as a difficult skill, and inadequacy of time devoted to

teaching English listening materials. It was reported that while most participants (56 female and male teachers) did not focus on any listening exercises, they placed too much emphasis on vocabulary items and grammatical rules included in the listening materials.

Participant T. 11 (a 14-year experience female teacher): *I always centre on teaching only difficult vocabulary in listening classes, since the Ministry of Education final exams centre on such vocabulary. In fact, the final exams do not contain any listening exercises. Because our students study for nothing but exams, they neglect all listening sub skills including top-down skills.*

Participant T. 22 (a 10-year experience male teacher): *I devote only half of a class a week for teaching unfamiliar words in the listening materials. I don't pay attention to listening exercises since they are not included in the final exam.*

As seen by the above, most teachers tended to focus on some bottom-up strategies (i.e., pronunciation, spelling, and repetition) due to two main reasons: the emphasis Palestinian Ministry of Education placed on key vocabulary and structures in the final exams and the huge amounts of vocabulary items the teachers taught in English classes in general and English listening classes in particular. According to such teachers, the students did not need to focus on top-down strategies since the Ministry of Education final exams neglected them.

Moreover, all participants (62 male and female teachers) reported that students' poor linguistic competence hindered English listening comprehension. According to such teachers, the students could hardly understand the facts explicitly stated in the text, and consequently could not practice higher-level thinking activities.

Participant T. 5 (a 9-year experience female teacher): *For students to process top-down strategies, they need to be linguistically proficient. Unfortunately, our students' achievement level is very low. They were transferred from elementary school to high school with very low language abilities. This may be due to receiving huge amounts of key vocabulary and structures, the thing which precludes them from acquiring language appropriately.*

In addition to students' general lower language abilities, the students were reported to have problems with the English spoken discourses they listened to. According to a majority of the teachers (45 male and female teachers), students could not comprehend the accents of English native speakers which were, in their opinions, extremely different from most Gaza EFL teachers' accents.

Participant T. 1 (a 14-year experience female teacher): *Students are familiar with my accent which is totally different from the English native speakers' accents.*

Participant T. 25 (a 6-year experience male teacher): *My speech is different from that in the recording, that is why students find a difficulty in understanding the voice from the recording.*

A fourth problem was irrelevance of the listening materials to students' background knowledge. For some participants (28 male and female teachers), the contents of such materials might be a main source of listening comprehension problems since they were not related to students' previous information.

Participant T. 7 (a 11-year experience male teacher): *Listening materials are difficult to understand. For example, 'globalization', students do not know anything about this term in Arabic, how, then, they are required to learn it in English, and go beyond what is explicit in the text?*

Participant T. 12 (a 7-year experience male teacher): *For example, banking, students have never experienced going to banks and having accounts, that is why they can not understand it well.*

A fifth problem was lack of in-service training programs. Some teachers (26 male and female teachers) in this study reported that they did not train the students to use top-down listening strategies, because they themselves could not use such skills. From their perspectives, they needed to get involved in proper training courses that could help them understand all listening processes and skills.

Participant T. 15 (a 19-year experience female teacher): *I, like some teachers, am not trained to practice such skills, and consequently I can not teach them to my students.*

Participant T. 50 (a 9-year experience male teacher): *I think that I should know how to teach my students top-down skills.*

Additionally, some teachers (18 female and male teachers) believed that listening was a difficult skill, and it was better to practice top-down strategies in reading classes than in listening classes. In their opinions, while in reading classes students can revisit the text several times, they might miss a lot of information and loose concentration during listening.

Participant T. 25 (a 14-year experience female teacher): *I think that skills of higher level of thinking should be handled in reading classes rather than listening classes, since in reading classes students usually have enough time to read the text several times.*

Related to the problems, the number of class periods devoted to teaching English textbooks in general and English listening materials (i.e., one class period a week for teaching listening) in particular was perceived by all teachers to be inadequate.

Participant T. 2 (a 10-year experience female teacher): *Indeed, English curricula are overcrowded of vocabulary items and grammatical rules, and I can hardly find time for teaching such language items.*

Participant T. 45 (a 16-year experience male teacher): *Give me enough time, I will teach my students all English listening sub skills.*

To sum-up, the open-question questionnaire data revealed that participants experienced problems in teaching top-down listening strategies. Such problems included lack of teachers' and students' external motivation, students' poor linguistic competence (i.e., vocabulary and knowledge), difference between EFL teachers' accents and English native speakers' accents, irrelevance of the listening materials to students' background knowledge, lack of in-service training programs, listening as a difficult skill, and inadequacy of time devoted to teaching English listening materials.

Results of Fourth Research Question

For answering the fourth research question "How do EFL supervisors of Gaza high schools perceive teachers' problems of teaching top-down-listening processing skills?", the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with four EFL school supervisors. According to such supervisors, the problems that might preclude Gaza high school EFL teachers from teaching top-down-listening processing skills successfully included lack of facilities, lack of teachers' exposure to English spoken discourses, lack of EFL listening assessment, lack of teachers' internal motivation for teaching, and inadequacy of time devoted to teaching English listening materials.

As shown by the interviews, the main problem Gaza high school EFL teachers encountered when teaching listening processing skills including top-down skills was lack of facilities:

Participant T. 2 (a 9-year experience female supervisor): *I think that most teachers do not teach English listening sub skills including top-down skills, because they do not have the cassettes required for teaching English listening besides that the electricity in Gaza schools is sometimes unavailable.*

A second problem reported by two interviewees was lack of teachers' exposure to English spoken discourses. In the interviewees views, due to lack of teachers' practice of English listening, there was a difference between the teachers' speech and the voice from recordings.

Participant T. 1 (a 5-year experience male supervisor): *Our teachers do not practice any English listening outside classrooms. I know that they can hardly meet native speakers of English in Gaza, but at least they can develop their English listening through watching English TV shows and listening to radio programs. Due such lack of practice g, there is a difference between the teachers' speech and the voice from recording.*

Additionally, three supervisors reported that both teachers and students neglected English listening, because the final exams did not include any listening exercises. According to such supervisors, testing English listening needed time and effort, and they had neither audio-materials nor time for employing any listening tests.

Furthermore, two supervisors indicated that some teachers did not have any real desire for teaching in general. It was indicated that such teachers hated their specialization (i.e., English language teaching) and they were not interested in what they were trying to teach.

Participant T. 4 (a 8-year experience female supervisor): *Some EFL teachers have hated their specialization , i.e., English language teaching since they were university students. Such teachers sometimes expressed their dislike for their specialization through statements such as: "I hate teaching in general", "I specialized in ELT teaching just to have a job", I did not like any one from those taught us ELT courses in the university", this specialization is very boring" etc.*

A final problem reported by all interviewees was that most EFL Gaza high school teachers complained that the textbooks were overcrowded of vocabulary items and the number of class periods devoted to teaching such items was inadequate.

Participant T. 2 (a 9-year experience female supervisor): *Teachers always complain that they can not teach all items included in the textbooks. They spent much time on teaching such keywords at the expense of teaching English listening sub skills including top-down skills.*

In short, the semi-structured interviews data showed Gaza EFL high school teachers' problems of teaching top-down-listening processing skills as perceived by their supervisors. Such problems included lack of facilities, lack of teachers' exposure to English spoken discourses, lack of EFL listening assessment, lack of teachers' internal motivation for teaching, and inadequacy of time devoted to teaching English listening materials.

Discussion and Implications

Results reported that *English for Palestine* 11 &12 neglected top-down listening skills. The evaluation checklists analyses in this study revealed that such materials focused on no top-down listening skills other than listening for a gist and listening for supporting details. According to Vargas (2009), when moving from the beginning level classes, students need to practice top-

down listening strategies since such strategies contribute to the students' comprehension of the texts. Batova (2013) also views that top-down processes enable students to extract meanings from messages, and enrich what they hear. Based on that, the study suggests that EFL textbook designers in Palestine should incorporate more top-down listening activities (i.e., predicting, sequencing events, generating questions, summarizing, drawing inferences, and making suggestions) in English materials, so as to improve students' listening comprehension.

Additionally, the open-question questionnaire data showed that the participants experienced problems when attempting to teach top-down listening skills. Such problems included lack of teachers' and students' external motivation, students' poor linguistic competence, irrelevance of the listening materials to students' background knowledge, listening as a difficult skill, lack of in-service training programs, and inadequacy of time devoted to teaching English listening materials. The first problem teachers had was lack of teachers' and students' external motivation. It was reported that while Palestinian Ministry of Education final exams did not include any listening exercises, they placed too much emphasis on only vocabulary items and grammatical rules included in the listening materials. In fact, Palestinian EFL test designers need to considerably endorse listening exercises in the final exams so that eleventh and twelfth graders in Gaza high schools could value listening activities. In this context, Nichols and Dawson (2012) note that summative exams affect students' efforts and goals. Additionally, Murray (2011) provides that tests can pressure students in language learning.

A second problem reported by Gaza high school EFL supervisors was lack of teachers' internal motivation. It was indicated that some EFL teachers hated their specialization, i.e., English language teaching. In this context Kailani and Muquattash (1995) state that EFL teacher should be genially interested in what s/he is trying to teach, and enthusiast enough to deliver curricula successfully. Hence, EFL university instructors are advised to help EFL pre-service teachers enjoy English language teaching through using a variety of strategies, i.e., discussions, micro-teaching, role play, debates, and problem solving.

A third problem was students' deficient linguistic competence. According to most participants, students transferred from elementary school to high school with poor language abilities due to the huge amounts of key vocabulary and structures they received at all stages of English language acquisition. This result may go along with Hammad (2014b) that indicated that the EFL textbooks of the first three grades of elementary school were perceived by Palestinian teachers to include a large number of key vocabulary items and pronunciation practice. Similar to Hammad (2014b), the present study strongly recommends that Palestinian EFL textbook designers should decrease the number of the language items included in *English for Palestine* series.

Another important factor contributing to students' poor listening comprehension level was the difference between the teachers' speech and recording voice. A majority of the teachers provided that the students found a difficulty in understanding the recording materials, and therefore hardly grasp the explicit meaning of the text. As shown by the interviews, the reason why the students found a difference between the teachers' speech and the voice from recording was that such teachers did not have much exposure to English spoken discourses. For teachers and students in Gaza high schools to get familiar with English speakers' accents, they should practice listening to English TV shows and radio programs. According to Flowerdew and Miller (2005), exposure to broadcast and radio programs can develop listening comprehension. Furthermore, Richards and Lockhart (1996) view that it is through listening to native speakers, learners can acquire language successfully.

A fourth problem was irrelevance of the listening materials to students' background information. According to some teachers, such instructional materials were sources of listening comprehension problems, in that they did not centre on the students' use of existing knowledge. In this respect, Hasan (2000) views that learners can guess the meanings of a passage if the newly heard information is related to prior knowledge. Consequently, EFL textbook designers in Palestine are advised to consider students' background knowledge prior to preparing English listening materials.

A fifth problem was lack of in-service training programs. Some teachers in this study reported that they did not train the students to use top-down listening strategies, because they themselves could not use them. From their perspectives, they needed to get involved in proper training courses that could help them understand all listening processes and skills. This result may be in line with Al-Qaraghooley and Al-Bermani (2010) that concluded that Iraqi EFL teachers needed to take in-service training programs in listening comprehension processes. According to Griego Jones (2002) and Samuelson, Pawan, and Hung, (2012), in-service training programs are essential for teacher preparation. Thus, it is important for Gaza Ministry of Education supervisors to hold proper language training programs that could help in-service teachers become aware of update education trends in the world.

A sixth problem was the inadequacy of the time devoted to teaching English listening materials. It was revealed in this study that the number of class periods devoted to teaching English textbooks in general and English listening materials (i.e., one class period a week for teaching listening) in particular was perceived by all teachers to be inadequate. This finding may be in line with Ali (2010), Hammad (2014b), and Mahmoud (2007) that indicated that the number of class periods allocated for teaching *English for Palestine* series needed to be increased. Hence, it is essential for EFL textbook designers in Palestine either to decrease language items included in *English for Palestine* series or increase the number of class periods allocated for teaching such textbooks.

A seventh problem was that listening comprehension as a difficult task. According to some teachers, it was better to practice top-down strategies in reading classes than in listening classes. In their opinions, while in reading classes students can extract meanings through revisiting the text several times, they might lose concentration and miss a lot of information while listening. It may be argued here that the opinions of such teachers are advocated only in case of teaching primary and preparatory pupils where students should practice bottom-up skills and get exposed to English native speakers' accents. While novice learners need to develop bottom-up skills, advanced learners should focus on top-down processing. In other words, once learners acquired adequate phonological, lexical, and syntactic knowledge and cultural backgrounds, emphasis should be placed on top-down listening skills. In this context, Vargas (2009) provides that learners need to practice bottom-up listening strategies from the beginning level classes as the foundation on which to build top-down listening strategies. Batova (2013) also views that top-down processes enable students to extract meanings from messages, and enrich what they hear. It seems that due to the problems discussed above (i.e., lack of teachers' and students' external motivation, students' poor linguistic competence, difference between EFL teachers' accents and English native speakers' accents, irrelevance of the listening materials to students' background knowledge, lack of in-service training programs, listening as a difficult skill, and inadequacy of time devoted to teaching English listening materials) Gaza high school teachers tended to teach top-down skills in reading classes rather than listening classes.

Still a final problem reported by Gaza high school EFL supervisors was lack of facilities, i.e., lack of language laboratories, lack of audio-materials, and unavailability of electricity. Mohamadkhani, Farokhi, and Farokhi (2013) reported that audio files had positive effect on improving EFL listening comprehension. Thus, Palestinian Ministry of Education is strongly recommended to devote adequate funds to developing English listening.

Recommendations

In light of the above discussion, recommendations can be summarized as follows:

1. EFL textbook designers in Palestine should incorporate more top-down listening activities (i.e., predicting, sequencing events, generating questions, summarizing, drawing inferences, and making suggestions) in English materials.
2. Palestinian EFL test designers need to considerably endorse listening exercises in the final exams so that eleventh and twelfth graders in Gaza high schools could value listening activities.
3. EFL university instructors are advised to help EFL pre-service teachers enjoy English language teaching through using a variety of strategies, i.e., discussions, micro-teaching, role play, debates, and problem solving.
4. For teachers and students in Gaza high schools to get familiar with English speakers' accents, they should practice listening to English TV shows and radio programs.
5. EFL textbook designers in Palestine are advised to consider students' background knowledge prior to preparing English listening materials.
6. EFL textbook designers in Palestine are advised either to decrease language items included in *English for Palestine* series or increase the number of class periods allocated for teaching such textbooks.
7. Palestinian Ministry of Education is strongly recommended to devote adequate funds to developing EFL listening.
8. Gaza Ministry of Education EFL supervisors are advised to hold proper in-service teachers training programs in listening comprehension processes.

Conclusion

The study results showed that *English for Palestine* 11 &12 neglected top-down listening skills. The evaluation checklists analyses in this study revealed that such materials focused on no top-down listening skills other than listening for a gist and listening for supporting details. Furthermore, the qualitative data revealed that Gaza high school EFL teachers experienced problems in teaching top-down listening strategies. Such problems included lack of facilities, lack of teachers' and students' external motivation, lack of teachers' internal motivation for teaching, students' poor linguistic competence (i.e., vocabulary and knowledge), difference between EFL teachers' accents and English native speakers' accents, irrelevance of the listening materials to students' background knowledge, lack of in-service training programs, listening as a difficult skill, and inadequacy of time devoted to teaching English listening materials.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: The evaluation checklist of top-down listening skills included in 'English for Palestine 12'

Subskill	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
1.Listening for main ideas												
2.Listening for supporting details												
3.Making predictions												
4.Sequencing information or events												
5. Making suggestions												
6..Drawing inferences												
7 Generating questions												
8. Summarizing												
9. Recognizing a point of view												
Total												

Appendix B: The evaluation checklist of top-down listening skills included in 'English for Palestine 11'

Subskill	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Unit 11	Unit 12	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
1.Listening for main ideas														

2.Listening for supporting details														
3.making predictions														
4.Sequencing information or events														
5.Drawing inferences														
6. Summarizing														
7.Making suggestions														
8.Generating questions														
9. .Recognizing a point of view														
Total														

Appendix C: The closed-question questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

You are kindly required to answer the questionnaire by ticking the answer you find more appropriate. Please, note that there is no right or wrong answer. The confidentiality of your answers is confirmed.

Statement	Always	Usually	Sometimes	rarely	Never
I train the students to:					
1. Listen for main ideas.					
2. Listen for supporting details.					
3. make predictions.					
4. Sequence information or events.					
5. Draw inferences.					
6. Summarize a text.					

