What are the impacts of bottom-up activities on listening comprehension and self-efficacy in Spanish?

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A Research & Development Project

Submitted for the MSc in Learning & Teaching 2022

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Abstract:

This practitioner research study investigated the impact of activities based around developing bottom-up processes in L2 listening would affect both the proficiency and self-efficacy in L2 listening across a cohort of 85 year 9 students of Spanish. Pre- and post-intervention listening tasks were carried out, alongside questionnaires to give students an opportunity to self-assess their understanding of their listening proficiency. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a small cohort of students as well as with teachers. All students across the four classes participated in weekly listening strategy sessions targeting the development of bottom-up listening processes. The results suggest that bottom-up listening instruction can support the development of L2 listening comprehension and self-efficacy in languages, but this would need to be conducted with a larger sample over a longer period of time to strengthen the validity of the findings.

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1. Introduction

Second language (L2) listening remains a common area of difficulty in the Modern Language classroom, and has been an area of focus of research for several decades. Several models of listening have been formulated over the years, such as that of Richards (1983) and Field (2008), as well as being a significant area of research in the context of English as a Foreign Language education. Different debates have arisen within this body of research such as the value of explicit listening strategy instruction or the different applications of top-down decoding processes from listeners of different proficiencies, which shall be explored in the literature review. In England, the importance of listening in L2 learning is underlined by the fact that it is worth 25% of the current GCSE, alongside writing, speaking and reading (AQA, 2016). However, it could be argued that listening also plays a significant role in speaking exams due to the need to respond spontaneously to unprepared language, as highlighted by the Ofsted research review (Ofsted, 2021).

This is a similar picture in my current school, where listening has consistently been the skill in which students underperform; not only in summative assessments such as GCSE examinations, but also internal assessments and in individual listening tasks within a lesson. This is a common issue across Spanish, French and German within our school context.

The school in which this practitioner research was conducted is a co-educational Church of England secondary Academy located in West London, forming part of a small Academy Trust. Languages are compulsory for most students from year 7, with approximately half of the year group beginning to learn French and half starting Spanish based on parental request, with four classes in each language which are streamed depending on data from primary school. These are initially based on Key Stage 2 data and students are in the same sets for several subjects such as humanities. At the end of year 7, students in the upper two sets in both

French and Spanish begin learning German in year 8 before deciding which language to continue at the end of the year. As the subject leader for Spanish within the school, I focused the following study on year 9 Spanish classes, although similar issues in L2 listening are prevalent in French and German. There are four sets in Spanish in year 9, taught by four different teachers simultaneously.

In most lessons in this context, L2 listening tasks replicate exam-style tasks as found in textbooks designed for the current GCSE. Having taught several cohorts across the setting spectrum, attitudes towards listening are generally consistent with students often disengaging in the middle of a recording, or in some cases failing to begin the task at all. Having learned French and Spanish from year 7 through to undergraduate level, this is something which I understand, as this was always the part of language learning with which I struggled the most in school, and I often experienced higher stress levels during classroom listening tasks due to the fleeting nature of listening to recordings.

I have therefore been very interested in student attitudes towards L2 listening and identifying ways to support them in developing this competence. This formed the basis of my Part 2 assignment, where I investigated student attitudes towards listening in their Spanish lessons (as Author, 2021). This highlighted interesting issues, where students viewed all listening as a test, and were more concerned with the score they achieved in a task than how much they had actually understood. Coping strategies that were identified revolved around having estimated guesses in multiple choice questions rather than answers that I would have predicted such as using context to work out the gist of the text.

Furthermore, it was found that students identified different difficulties when completing listening activities. Field's (2008) micro-skills in listening were used as a framework for students to assess their confidence in different components of L2 listening. Some identified

difficulties in separating words within utterances, others struggled to match sounds to the corresponding letters when presented orally, and others struggled to understand anything due to the speed of speech. The results aligned with Field's (2008) assertion that high-proficiency listeners used the context, or top-down processes', to enrich their understanding of a text, whereas low-proficiency listeners depended on top-down processes for all comprehension. Therefore, it opened the question if L2 listening proficiency could be improved by instruction in bottom-up processes (syllable recognition or word level comprehension upwards towards context).

Lowered self-efficacy was the second key impact that arose from the findings of my Part 2 assignment, with students experiencing repeated failure in listening, eventually leading to experiencing 'learned helplessness' (Dweck, 1986) not only in listening, but also in other aspects of their language learning. This consequently impacted on their attitudes towards languages, where they saw them as being too difficult, despite experiencing much more success in the productive skills of writing and speaking, as well as in reading.

This perception drove me towards my project for this research project, where I aimed to move student focus away from focusing purely on exam technique, and make listening activities more of a clearly formative experience. We do not expect students to be able to translate sentences into Spanish without first providing explicit instruction on how to do this, but very often this approach is adopted when teaching listening. The overall aim of the project was not only to improve student comprehension through the development of bottom-up processes, but also to develop a more formative attitude towards listening as a whole and remove the performative, anxiety-inducing element of every listening activity.

Therefore, the following research questions were devised:

1. Can L2 listening comprehension be improved through bottom-up strategy instruction?
2. What effect does existing language proficiency have on the impact of bottom-up activity instruction?
3. Can self-efficacy in MFL be improved through bottom-up listening activities?

2. Literature review

In the following literature review, I will review the key theoretical framework behind this practitioner research, focusing first on decoding processes (the process of matching letters or letter combinations to their sounds, and then to words or phrases) in L2 listening and the debate between the application of top-down and bottom-up approach to listening. This will then be followed by an examination of self-efficacy and motivation in the context of the UK Modern Foreign Language classroom. The questions to be explored throughout the literature review will be:

1. What is the role of bottom-up and top-down processes in L2 listening?
    a. Bottom-up and top-down processing.
    b. The impact of existing listening proficiency in the application of these processes.
    c. The interconnectivity of bottom-up and top-down processes.
    d. Barriers to comprehension in listening.

2. Can self-efficacy in MFL be improved through bottom-up listening activities?
    a. Motivation or self-efficacy?
    b. Key theories of motivation.
    c. Self-efficacy.
    d. The effect of L2 listening on motivation and self-efficacy.

2.1. What is the role of bottom-up and top-down processes in L2 listening?

2.1.1. Bottom-up and top-down processing

L2 listening is a complex phenomenon and the processes involved within it have been the subject of discussion in much research, with the importance placed on bottom-up and top-down processes differing across the literature. Bottom-up processing refers to the listener recognising an individual sound before then moving onto word level, as can be seen in the first level on Field's levels of processing (seen in Figure 2), which will be discussed later. On the other hand, top-down processing refers to focusing on the overall context of the aural text and listening for 'gist'. The successful application of these processes during the action of listening varies depending on the proficiency of the listeners. The importance of these decoding processes is underlined by Ke and Wang (2022), who recently found that 'if the decoding score was lower than 80%, the possibility of reaching good listening comprehension was quite low (10%). However, as long as the score could reach more than 80%, the possibility jumped to more than 60%' (p.8). Furthermore, a strong correlation was found between L2 learners aural decoding and their listening comprehension. Although this research was conducted amongst university students in China, it lends a useful perspective to classroom practitioners when considering how they teach listening. Similarly, Manihuruk and Sidabutar (2022) found that there was a significant effect from both top-down and bottom-up strategy instruction on students' L2 listening skills, this time in an Indonesian university. Much of this research comes from the context of English as a foreign language education, and often with university students, so results cannot be immediately applied to the general languages classroom in any context, as will be explored later in the literature review. Research based in

a more similar context to my own was conducted by Macaro and Erler (2008), who found that beginner students of French in England benefitted from improved reading comprehension following explicit instruction in top-down and bottom-up processes. However, it is important to note that the skill of L2 reading differs from listening, as will be explored over the course of this literature review.

Several models of listening have been formulated, for example Richards's (1983) list of micro-skills within listening. This early model can be criticised for the large quantity of these micro-skills as well as failing to illustrate how these processes interact with each other. Vanderdrift and Goh (2012, p.58), offer a different model, recognising the importance of the context of the listening, such as real-life listening as opposed to classroom practice or assessments, as well as the impact of affective personal factors such as anxiety, self-efficacy and motivation, as will be discussed in the second part of the literature review. However, although this model illustrates how different factors interconnect with each other, it does not provide a framework which can be readily applied to classroom practice, but rather gives a deeper understanding of factors that may impact L2 comprehension. A similar criticism can be aimed at their 'cognitive model of listening comprehension', seen in figure 1, (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p.39) which, despite providing a much more detailed understanding of the process of L2 listening and its connection with the production of language, is too complex to apply directly to classroom practice. It does, however, offer a clear progression from bottom-up processes up towards top-down processes on the right-hand side of the model, as well as recognising that these processes do not occur in isolation, but are interconnected and often happen simultaneously.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Vandergrift, L., & Goh, C. C. M. (2012). Teaching and learning second language listening [electronic resource] : metacognition in action. Routledge.

Figure 1: (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p.39)

A model which is more readily applicable to classroom practice is Field's (2008) framework, as seen in Figure 2. It is more concise in what it views as the key levels, which can be communicated to students more clearly compared to Vandergrift and Goh's. A misconception linked to these models is that students must fulfil the bottom level to move to the next one, however this is not the case, and several levels will be influencing comprehension at once, both from the bottom-up and top-down levels of processing. It is therefore important to note that listening is not a static process but rather a dynamic one, which is more obviously portrayed in Vandergrift and Goh's model in Figure 1. It is, however, a clear framework to illustrate the debate between top-down and bottom-up processing, though in this model, the 'bottom' level is portrayed at the top of the figure, starting with 'phoneme level' and the 'top'

level is understanding the overall meaning or 'gist', which is often derived from the context of the text.

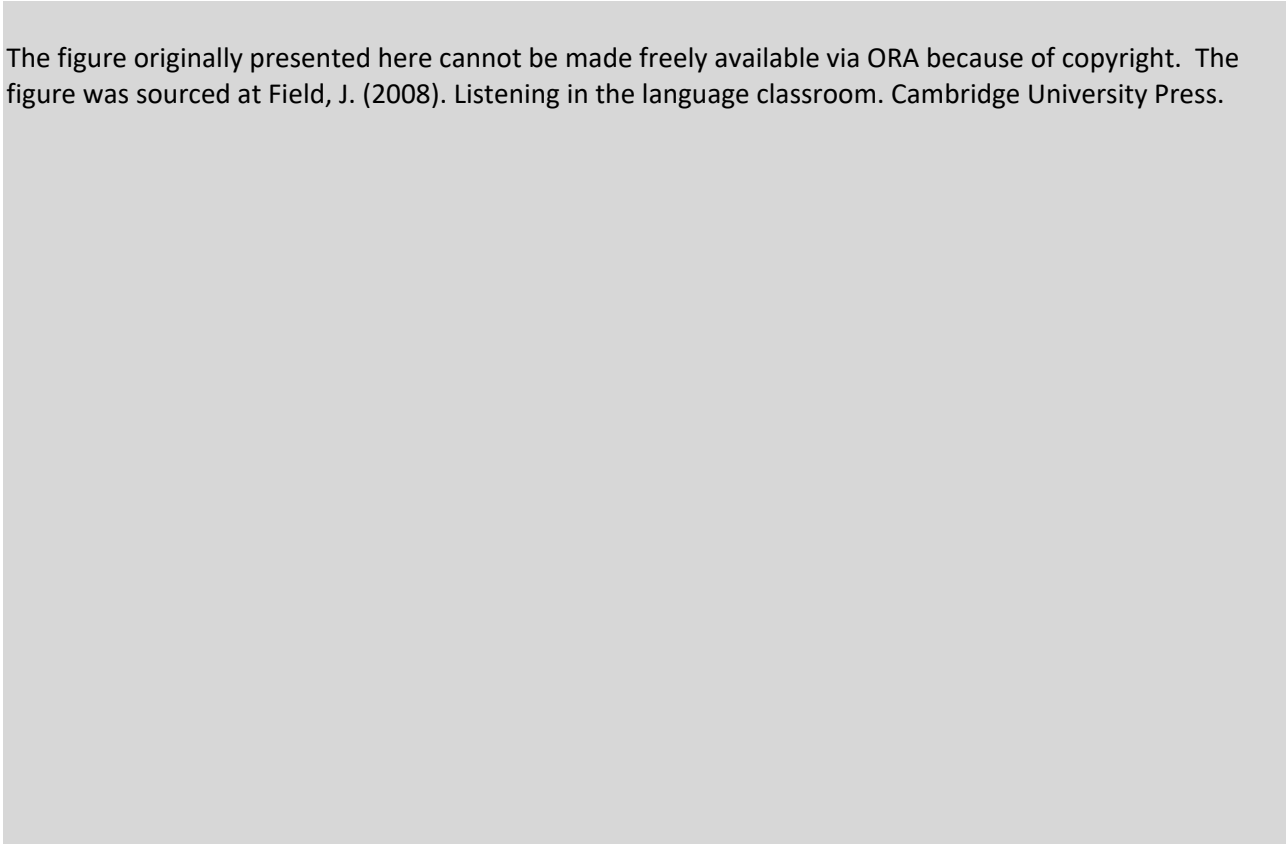


Figure 2: (Field, 2008, p.114)

These processes have been explored in depth by Smith, Conti and Jones (2016), who aimed to contextualise these processes in the setting of classroom activities. For example, top-down processes were developed through the use of summarising or modelling inference strategies, whereas bottom-up processes were targeted through activities such as spot the mistake of the transcript, spotting silent letters from a transcript and both open and closed dictation, which involve students transcribing either individual words into the gaps in a transcript, or transcribing full utterances. This focus on dictation is support by Satori (2010) who found that dictation was an effective method to develop students' bottom-up processes. Furthermore, similar activities based on transcript use have been shown to be effective in the development

of bottom-up processes in recent research (Cárdenas-Claros & Campos-Ibaceta, 2018), lending support to the activities suggested by Smith, Conti and Jones (2016). The inclusion of such activities (in a book aimed at classroom practitioners) suggests that this understanding of the micro-processes of listening may be moving towards a more mainstream audience. Indeed, this book has proved very popular with teachers in England, with the 'Conti method'[1] referred to frequently online and has been widely adopted.

2.1.2. The impact of existing listening proficiency in the application of these processes.

Several research studies have focused on the different applications of these micro-processes by L2 listeners of differing levels of listening proficiency, which is relevant to classroom teachers who often have varying levels of proficiency within the teaching group.

Common classroom practice is often driven by the need for students to produce the correct response in contexts where examination-style exercises are being used to assess L2 listening competence. Therefore, a frequently suggested strategy to achieve this is to ask the students to rely on a particular top-down strategy, such as focusing predominantly on the context of the listening text, in order to be better able to make an 'educated guess' at the 'correct' answer. Although the student may be happy with this outcome, this guesswork does not indicate a high level of linguistic competence (Yeldham & Gruba, 2016). Wilson (2003) contests this approach, championing a departure from top-down approaches in the languages classroom and instead implementing a 'bottom-up primacy', with a greater emphasis on the

[1] https://gianfrancoconti.com/category/general-pedagogy/

individual words heard, through his notion of 'discovery listening' (Wilson, 2003, p.335). In this, students take more agency in their learning, as the emphasis is on identifying the individual's particular needs. Wilson's approach seems relevant in the language classroom, where students have a wide variety of pre-existing proficiencies and individual needs that may not be the most effectively supported by a focus purely on top-down instruction. This issue is also addressed by Graham and Macaro (2008), who concluded that lower-intermediate L2 learners of French experienced improvement both in listening self-efficacy and proficiency following an intervention based on bottom-up processes, as the strategies employed by more and less proficient listeners can differ greatly. More recently, Yeldham (2022) found that lower-intermediate learners benefit greatly from explicit instruction in bottom-up processes, whereas more proficient learners are able to balance these processes more effectively. However, although approaches such as Wilson's promote student agency in the learning process, it assumes that the group of students is relatively homogonous in their language proficiency. Yeldman (2022) even suggests groups classes based on a reliable listening test to benefit the most from these approaches. As previously discussed, this is not the case in most classrooms, which are often 'mixed ability', but this can also be the case even within classes set by proficiency. In addition, as Wilson himself highlights, it is difficult for the teacher to assess student progress in this approach given the large role played by self-assessment.

Despite being more readily applicable to classroom practice, focusing on top-down processing also does not provide a holistic solution. As Field (2008) illustrates, less proficient listeners rely on the context of the listening task to approximate a meaning, whereas more proficient listeners use this same context to 'enrich' their understanding of a text. In this scenario, despite being instructed in top-down understanding, the ways in which students apply these

processes differ based on their pre-existing proficiency in L2 listening. Kissling (2018) supports this viewpoint, finding that novice L2 listeners depend on bottom-up processes over top-down processes, suggesting that early instruction in pronunciation can support the development of bottom-up processing. What is not clear, however, is how and at which point top-down processes enter the process of L2 listening comprehension. Furthermore, at the opposite end of L2 proficiency, Yi-Ching Pan and Yo In'nami (2015) discovered that across the proficiency spectrum amongst university students, top-down approaches were applied with similar frequency, whereas bottom-up processes were implemented more frequently by the advanced learners. However, Yeldham (2018) concluded that specific training of bottom-up processes did not significantly improve L2 listening comprehension, but acknowledged that this may have differed if the intervention had been implemented over a longer period of time.

When comparing the arguments for both bottom-up and top-down processing, it can be argued that a practitioner can combine both in their practice, rather than focusing purely on one approach, to support the progress of students of varying proficiency. Both approaches are interconnected, for example bottom-up misunderstanding may cause issues with top-down inference. This was found by Swan and Walter (2017), who found that high achieving listeners experienced very different issues, such as picking up irony, as opposed to low achieving listeners who may find parsing (finding the gaps between words) more difficult due to unfamiliar grammatical concepts. They also highlight the need for a responsive approach to this instruction, as a 'blanket approach' to instruction will not fully address the needs of any student.

This has been addressed in recent research studies, for example Roussel et al. (2019), investigated L2 learners of English, Spanish and German in France. Each group participated in activities focusing on developing either top-down or bottom-up listening decoding processes.

They found that following this targeted intervention, less-proficient listeners significantly improved their listening comprehension, whereas the more proficient listeners did not experience the same levels of improvement from tasks aimed at developing high-level processes. Thus, similar tasks could be implemented by teachers to support lower-proficiency listeners, but mixed ability classes where there will be a wide spectrum proficiency levels, this level of differentiation may prove difficult.

2.1.3. The interconnectivity of bottom-up and top-down processes

In the field of L1 reading, both approaches have been combined in previous research (Stanovich, 2000), where comprehension is based on simultaneous bottom-up and top-down processes, so there is cause for this to be more thoroughly investigated in L2 listening research. While Leonard (2019) contests this in the context of listening in a Spanish classroom, limitations in sample size suggest that further research should be conducted before ruling out this line of enquiry.

Recent literature has investigated how both bottom-up and top-down processing is applied in L2 listening comprehension (Yeldham, 2018). Vandergrift et al. (2010) highlight that a mixture of top-down and bottom-up instruction would prove effective, while also preventing the intervention from becoming repetitive, a limitation which was highlighted in their study.

Furthermore, Yeldham and Gruba (2016) found that explicit strategy instruction can lead to the learners demonstrating 'a more balanced, efficient use of top-down and bottom-up strategies' in L2 listening, as well as identifying the differences in strategy use by different students, with varying approaches to the tasks arising from across the group. They also

highlight the need to avoid spending too long on one categories of listening strategies to avoid alienating those who already employ these strategies effectively.

2.1.4. Barriers to comprehension in listening.

As seen across many issues in learning, a prevalent barrier to L2 listening comprehension is the limited capacity of our working memory (Field, 2008). This suggests that if the working memory is occupied with translating an aural text at individual word level, therefore implementing a fully bottom-up approach to understanding, there is less space in the working memory to dedicate to the comprehension of the utterance as a whole. Moreover, some L2 words are not decoded automatically as would be the case in L1 listening (Lund, 1991), so listeners may end up finding themselves lost in the individual utterance (Goh, 2000), therefore failing to understand the input. It could therefore be argued that students could avoid this misunderstanding by employing top-down processes by focusing on the context to anchor their understanding of the text. However, Goh (2000) asserts that low proficiency learners simply do not yet have enough linguistic understanding to apply top-down processes effectively and therefore rely predominantly on bottom-up approaches to listening.

Much research has been conducted on the role of working memory in learning, and also within this particular field of L2 listening. Van Zeeland and Schmitt's (2012) research investigated how high-frequency, incidental vocabulary can be retained through L2 listening with international postgraduate students with a high-intermediate or advanced level of English in a British university. This study suggested that some types of knowledge, such as word form, are retained more effectively through the medium of listening, whereas others, such as meaning are not so easily retained. Furthermore, it was also found that knowledge of

the written form of the word differed from that of the aural form. It is not immediately clear how to use these findings to facilitate vocabulary recognition and retention, but Matthews and Cheng's study (2015) found a positive relationship between the ability to recognise high frequency aural vocabulary and high performance on a standardised listening test amongst university L2 learners of English in China. Thus, as long as issues in decoding do not impede comprehension, such as problems in segmentation (the ability to identify the gaps between words), less working memory will be required in order to understand L2 utterances if the decoding of high frequency L2 vocabulary can be automatised, minimising the strain on the working memory and freeing it to be used on other listening processes. Similarly, Brunfaut and Révész (2014) found that 'complex verbal WM (working memory) capacity showed a moderate, positive link with L2 listening performance' (p.158). However, Yeldham (2018) questions Field's (Field, 2008) idea that the automatisation of high frequency language can provide more working memory to facilitate L2 listening comprehension, instead suggesting the identification of key words and building meaning around them as an effective method of L2 listening instruction.

Further research on the working memory in L2 listening was conducted by Satori (2012), providing some interesting results. This study, which focused on L2 learners of English in Japan aged 19 or 20, suggested that working memory demands differed between more and less proficient L2 learners when listening, with more proficient listeners committing more of their working memory to applying top-down processes, using the context to enrich their understanding given that the bottom-up processes were already automatised. Contrastingly, less proficient listeners need to use their working memory to apply bottom-up and top-down processes simultaneously which closely aligns with findings discovered in L2 reading (Alptekin & Erçetin, 2010). This is therefore the distinction between literal comprehension and

inferential comprehension. If more working memory is required by the listener to understanding meaning of each individual word (literal comprehension), then less working memory is available to commit to inferential comprehension (building up the wider meaning of the text). In their study, Satori acknowledges several methodological issues that may have impacted on the validity of the findings, the results still provide a very relevant perspective aligning with Field's concepts of working memory in L2 listening (Field, 2008), thus building on existing research on the subject.

Although the two fields are clearly linked, research conducted on L2 reading cannot be automatically generalised to L2 listening due to inherent differences in the processes required. Several factors may affect listening comprehension which are not relevant to the field of L2 reading, such as the variations in national and regional accents, the speed of speech (Lintunen et al., 2019), volume and elision are all barriers to comprehension relevant only to L2 listening which reading does not present (Schroeders et al., 2010), and thus key findings from L2 reading research studies cannot be immediately generalised to the field of L2 listening. This issue can be observed in Cheng and Matthew's (2018) study on vocabulary knowledge and retention in L2 reading and listening. In this research, they found that different forms of vocabulary knowledge correlated more strongly with either L2 listening or reading scores. This illustrates the issues posed in the generalisation of research findings between L2 reading and listening, with explicit research of the issue in question needed in the context of L2 listening. In a similar vein, in an English as a foreign language context, Oh (2016) found that L2 learners acquire vocabulary most effectively through a combination of both listening and reading, as they are different constructs. In a separate study, Masrai (2022) found that approaches that focus on productive aural word knowledge help learners to develop their word knowledge beyond receptive, form-based understanding, improving the

level of word knowledge which has been most strongly linked with L2 listening comprehension. This issue does not appear in this study in isolation, and has appeared across several research studies (Chang, 2009; Hatami, 2017). Interestingly, Chang (2013) found that students who received a mixture of reading and listening instruction experienced a higher level of attainment in L2 listening than those who only received instruction in either reading or listening. Despite this, they do note that extended practice that solely focuses on listening is the key to improving fluency. However, it is worth noting that many of these studies have been carried out in the context of English as a foreign language, and therefore we must be careful when making inferences relating to the teaching of Modern Foreign Languages in the average classroom in the United Kingdom, where important factors such as motivation may differ greatly, which will be discussed in the second section of the literature review.

As well as difficulties in generalising findings between reading and listening, there are also issues in generalising findings between languages due to the different difficulties which are posed by each. A key example of this is seen in Medina et al.'s (2020) study, which found that in the context of L2 Spanish secondary education, students with high oral fluency were more proficient in understanding longer utterances. This is consistent with Field's (2008) concept that by automatising high-frequency language, there is more available working memory, in this case being presented as oral fluency. Moreover, Medina et al (2020) also concluded that higher speech speeds had a more substantial negative impact on L2 listening comprehension from higher proficiency listeners, whereas participants of lower proficiency already displayed low levels of comprehension at lower speeds of speech. Once again, this finding illustrates that there are issues which may be relevant to L2 listening but not L2 reading, and therefore separate research on these skills must be conducted to account for these issues. Finally, Chou (2022) concluded that university level Spanish majors were more likely to use listening

strategies than those in English, French, German or Japanese, again raising the difficulty in generalising findings between languages and educational settings.

2.2. Can self-efficacy in MFL be improved through bottom-up listening activities?

2.2.1. Motivation or self-efficacy?

In the following section of the literature review, I will consider the role of motivation and self-efficacy in L2 listening. While the concepts of motivation and self-efficacy are closely related, it is important to note the key differences between the two. Motivation is the force that initiates, guides, and sustains goal-oriented behaviour (Spinath, 2014). On the other hand, self-efficacy refers to the person's belief that they will be able to achieve their target (Bandura, 1977). Before exploring motivation and self-efficacy in the context of L2 listening, I will first explore broader theories of these concepts, before moving onto motivation and self-efficacy in L2 listening, and the role of L2 listening on student self-efficacy.

2.2.2. Key theories of motivation

An early theory of motivation is Achievement Theory (Atkinson, 1964), which suggests that one's motivation is influenced by their perception of their chance of success, alongside their perceived value of this success. However, this approach may be criticised as overly simplistic as in a school context, it does not provide an explanation for the behaviour of students who fail to engage with schoolwork at all, or how success impact different individuals in different ways.

Weiner's (1985) Attribution Theory offers a contrast to Achievement Theory, claiming that we attribute our successes or failures to factors which may be outside of our control. For example, two individuals may experience failure with the same task, but be affected

differently based on what they perceive to be the cause of their failure. For example, one person could attribute the failure to their own lack of ability, therefore negatively impacting their sense of self-worth and possibly self-efficacy, whereas the second person may view the failure to be due to the perceived excessive difficulty of the task, thereby preserving their sense of self-worth. In both cases, however, they attribute the outcome to forces outside of their control. Dweck (1986) expands this framework and developed the concept of 'learned helplessness'. In a school context, 'learned helplessness' is when students repeatedly experience failure, begin to believe that this is not changeable, therefore learning that it does not make sense to even try. Therefore, learned helplessness can offer an explanation for students who choose not to engage with tasks at all as in order to avoid experiencing failure, which they have learned will be the inevitable outcome. Claxton (2009) offers support for this explanation, claiming that if students expect to fail due to their perceived lack of ability, it makes sense for them to not attempt the task. These approaches therefore address some of the issues which are not accounted for in Atkinson's (1964) Achievement Theory.

Social factors have also been seen to have important impacts on motivation. For example, Spratt (2016) emphasises the social role of motivation, suggesting that experiencing success and receiving recognition from peers has an important impact on motivation. In a school context, these findings are very relevant, especially when we consider the average class size in England is 22.3 students (GOV.UK, 2022). This aligns with Achievement Theory (Atkinson, 1964) by emphasising the importance of targeting success but in this scenario, the driving motive is for positive social recognition instead of an intrinsic sense of achievement. However, this can also have a negative impact, as shown by Covington (1992), who found that even 'bright' students can have their motivation and self-efficacy damaged by immediately comparing themselves with their peers. Galloway (2004) raises a pertinent perspective on

the negative impacts of peer comparison, claiming that when students do not feel that they can achieve success academically, they instead aim for social affirmation, therefore experiencing success. This idea is not unique to Galloway, and this concept has been supported by various pieces of research from before and after Galloway's publication (Jagenow et al., 2012; Juvonen & Wentzel, 1996; Raufelder et al., 2013). Galloways's perspective aligns with Claxton's (Daniels et al., 2009) notion that students will not attempt a task if they feel that they do not possess the ability required to succeed. This highlights the interconnectivity between these approaches, and ideas from several of these can be relevant to classroom motivation.

A final concept that will be considered is DeCharms' (1965) origin-pawn theory, in which the individual can either view themselves and their actions as being determined by outside forces (therefore seeing themselves as pawns), or they have the capacity have agency in what happens (therefore viewing themselves as origins). Although aligning with elements of Weiner's (1985) Attribution Theory, such as the role of attribution in understandings of success, one difference is the increased agency is placed on the individual and they therefore have more control over their actions, or in a school context, their learning. However, the idea of being the 'origin' of your actions is consistent with Dweck's notion of 'Mastery Orientation' (1986), where the individual focuses on the process of improvement instead of focusing purely on achieving success or avoiding failure (Sorrenti et al., 2018). This contests the belief that the predetermined attribute of 'ability' will impede success, as was explored in the breakdown of Dweck's concept of learned helplessness (1986) and Atkinson's Achievement Theory (1964).

Dweck and Legget (1988) also provide us with an interesting concept which has become very pertinent in modern education. This is the notion of having a 'growth mindset' as opposed to

a ‘fixed mindset’. Put simply, a growth mindset relates to the person believing that although they cannot do something yet, they will be able to grow, and that their ability or intelligence is able to change. Inversely, a fixed mindset involves the person believing that their ability and intelligence is not changeable, and therefore display lower levels of resilience when faced with challenge. Interventions around growth mindsets have been used in much research in education (Burnette et al., 2020; Cosette Fox & Maria Barrera, 2020; Fraser, 2018; Tan & Maeda, 2021), which provide us with a more introspective understanding of motivation and self-efficacy.

2.2.3. Self-efficacy

As mentioned earlier, motivation and self-efficacy are linked concepts, but it is important to note the key differences between them. Whereas motivation can be caused by external factors, such as social acceptance, and refers to the person’s desire to achieve a goal, self-efficacy refers to ‘a person’s particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute a plan of action in prospective situations’ (Bandura, 1977). This therefore places greater emphasis on the intrinsic self-belief, or lack thereof, that the person can achieve the desired outcome. It is logical to argue that students with high levels of motivation tend to also have high self-efficacy, which often is the case, but it is not a foregone conclusion as a student may be motivated to complete a particular task quickly to receive an external reward without believing that they are capable of getting the answers correct.

According to Bandura (1977), a person’s self-efficacy can be influenced by four main sources of influence. These are performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological feedback. Beginning first with performance outcomes, this refers to the impact

that positive or negative influences can have on the person's likelihood to attempt a similar task in the future. This echoes Dweck's concept of learned helplessness, where the person has experienced repeated failure and learns that they are not capable of achieving this success. Vicarious experiences by contrast focuses on the person assesses their performance in comparison with those around them, as well as the impact of social role-models. Verbal persuasion refers to the impact that encouragement and discouragement can have on the person's self-belief, whereas physiological feedback alludes to the physical or emotional sensations that the person experiences which affect their belief in their ability. For example, anxiety around exams may have an adverse effect on a student's belief that they can achieve their desired outcome.

The impact of physiological feedback strongly linked to the field of education and has been the subject of much research. This has been researched in the context of school as a whole (Abdollahi et al., 2016; Higham & Demkowicz, 2021; Schnell et al., 2015) but also within subject areas. For example, anxiety around learning mathematics has been an area of significant research (Barroso et al., 2021; Foley et al., 2017; Maloney et al., 2015), finding that there was a direct link between students' levels of 'Maths anxiety' and their attainment. There is a similar phenomenon in the teaching of languages which has been shown to be prevalent across languages, cultures and macro-skills (Biggane, 2016; Papi, 2010; Pérez Castillejo, 2019). This anxiety is particularly relevant to the subject of L2 listening, as will be explored in the following section.

A final consideration is the potential impact of gender on self-efficacy, which has been shown in Marshman et al.'s (2018) findings where female students experienced lower self-efficacy in physics than male similarly performing male students. Inversely, Namaziondost and Cakmak (2020) found that in the EFL education setting, female students experienced greater

improvements in self-efficacy through the flipped learning model of classroom practice when compared to their male counterparts. This is a current area of research and begs the question why these differences may be the case across school subjects, however for the purposes of this practitioner research, we will not be exploring self-efficacy as a gendered issue, although this may open questions for future research.

2.2.4. The effect of L2 listening on motivation and self-efficacy

After having explored wider theories of motivation and self-efficacy, the focus will now move towards motivation within the context of L2 listening, particularly in the Modern Foreign Language classroom in the United Kingdom.

To begin, some issues exist in the context of L2 teaching which may be less relevant when compared with the teaching of other subjects. For example, Gardner's (1985) notion of 'integrativeness', where student motivation in modern languages is impacted by the desire of that individual learner to integrate in the target language and its culture. This is specific to language education, as the same issue is not prevalent in for example Mathematics education. Furthermore, Dörnyei (2003) highlights the differing attitudes towards language learning between cultures and contexts. For example, the intellectual importance placed on the English language in China has led to heightened levels of motivation of students in learning it as a foreign language. This is not a directly comparable context to the average L2 classroom in the United Kingdom, where MFL often is not afforded this same level of intellectual importance, an effect that has been further exacerbated by the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (British Council, 2020). Generating and maintaining motivation within a British Modern Foreign Languages classroom may then face different

challenges to those presented by Dörnyei. Therefore, despite providing us with useful perspectives, we must consider the difficulties in generalising such findings across contexts as well as across languages (Lanvers et al., 2021), as previously discussed.

In addition, leading on from Weiner's (1985) Attribution Theory, Graham and Macaro (2008) claim that learners who perceive their success to be due to factors within their control are more likely to attempt similar tasks in the future. Conversely, those learners who attribute success and failure to factors outside their control are more likely to exhibit lower levels of motivation. As listening is generally found to be a difficult skill, as experienced in my current school context, repeated experience of failure in this skill may lead to students disengaging with language learning more generally, as found by Graham (2006). Moreover, Wilson (2003) found that learners are not motivated by a listening task which is of an inappropriate difficulty, and therefore a differentiated approach should be used to prevent low-proficiency listeners from simply resorting to top-down guesses based on context. Similarly, this should aim to prevent high-proficiency listeners from losing motivation due to them finding the task too simplistic. These reasons for students disengaging reflect Dweck's (1986) concept of 'learned helplessness', and L2 learners therefore should be provided with regular opportunities for success planned into listening activities to avoid wholesale disengagement with their language learning.

Listening in the L2 is a unique skill, both within the language classroom and across the curriculum. Field (2008) mentions the performative and fleeting nature of L2 listening, as students do not have control over the pace of the aural input, they have one or two efforts and then the information is lost. Therefore, this may cause anxiety for student listeners, as claimed by Fathi et al. (2020), who found that listening strategy instruction led to significant improvements in Iranian EFL students' listening comprehension ability and reduced L2

listening anxiety experienced by learners. Interestingly, they did not find that this intervention had a significant impact on student self-efficacy. Thus, a similar intervention may need to be replicated over a longer timeframe to ascertain whether this would lead to an improvement in learner self-efficacy. Similarly, Canaran et al. (2020) found that 'anxiety, self-efficacy, and proficiency in L2 listening are correlated and higher levels of anxiety in L2 listening reduce learners' self-efficacy and proficiency'. This aligns with existing bodies of research which have linked L2 listening anxiety with lower levels of self-efficacy in students (Golchi, 2012; Graham, 2011; Kimura, 2016). Sparks and Patton (2013) lend further support for this viewpoint, contesting earlier work suggesting that anxiety played a positive role in language acquisition (Sparks & Ganschow, 1995). Elkhafaifi (2005) also contests previous viewpoints on this, identifying in the context of postsecondary learners of Arabic that while L2 anxiety and listening anxiety are two separate phenomena, they both correlate with lower attainment in L2 listening. Similarly, Brunfaut and Révész (2014) concluded that listening anxiety correlated significantly with lower performance in L2 listening tasks. This wealth of research highlights the important role of anxiety in L2 acquisition, in particular in listening, and teachers should find ways to alleviate this anxiety to allow students to progress most effectively.

Interestingly, Lee (2018) found that short-term study abroad placements reduced students' anxiety and increased their willingness to communicate, suggesting that learning languages in the language classroom may be more anxiety inducing, rather than the process of language learning itself. This is particularly interesting when compared with the 'messy' nature of real-life listening, as pointed out by Wagner (2022), with false starts, mumbling and slang for example. Zhang et al. (2020) promoted the 'ideal L2 self' with students, where students envisage the ideal version of themselves and keep this active in their minds. This may be

useful in stimulating motivation, but it is reliant on the students actually wanting to be able to speak the language or integrate into the target language culture, linking to Gardner's (1985) notion of 'integrativemess'.

Graham (2011) claims that self-efficacy is vital in L2 listening, where learners must possess the self-belief that they can cope with the aural language with which they are faced rather than merely the motivation to attempt the task. Given that students are constantly appraising their performance (Dörnyei, 2003), teachers should plan frequent opportunities for success over time into their lessons to build this self-belief. Regular opportunities for success would therefore need to be carefully planned within listening to avoid students from viewing all listening tasks as a test, and should be pitched at an appropriate difficulty. Zhang (2020) also advocates for this approach, naming failure as the most significant demotivating force in English as a second language education, as well as its contribution to L2 anxiety. Tahsildar and Yusiff (2014) found that a significant cause of anxiety for students of English at a Malaysian university when listening was a lack of repetitions when listening to the L2 text, coupled with low levels of confidence, lack of knowledge of new vocabulary, speech rate and unfamiliar pronunciation, again underlining the importance of pitching listening activities at the correct level of difficulty. However, as previously mentioned, a mixed ability classroom may present more difficulties, as the teacher may need to implement various forms of differentiation in order to ensure an appropriate difficulty for the whole group. Linking back to Fathi et al.'s (2020) findings discussed above, this may also help to reduce anxiety alongside improving L2 listening comprehension, therefore supporting the development self-efficacy. Conversely, Du and Man (2022) found that self-efficacy was not a significant indicator of listening comprehension, contrasting with the findings discussed above. They did however find that aural vocabulary size was a more significant predictor of listening success,

which offers an alternative perspective on improving L2 listening. However, Du and Man acknowledge that the findings are limited by the sample consisting only of English majors from Chinese universities, and the results may be more useful if they had included a wider variety of language proficiencies on a larger scale.

A final possibility would be to give students more control over the text played rather than limiting it to two repetitions (mirroring the current GCSE), reducing the anxiety prompted by the performative nature of classroom listening (Yeldham, 2022). Xu et al. (2021) also advocate for a move away from a purely teacher-led approach, such as comprehension questions where students passively receive information, and instead by focusing on strategy instruction, self-efficacy and strategy use is more effectively supported. The teacher's role is to facilitate students' listening instead of asking them to complete a task on their own (Goh & Goh, 2010). However, Xu et al. acknowledge the limitations in generalising these findings from English as a foreign language education, while also highlighting that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods would have provided a more enriched perspective.

Wang and MacIntyre (2021) have recently addressed the impact of positive emotions as well as negative in L2 listening comprehension, identifying that anxiety and enjoyment are related but separate emotions that have differing roles in L2 listening. Although for the purposes of this research, we will focus primarily on the role of anxiety in L2 listening, it is useful to consider the tole of positive emotions in fostering self-efficacy in students.

2.3. Summary

In summary, several levels of decoding processing occur simultaneously during L2 listening, but they do not occur solely from a top-down or bottom-up perspective and are all

interconnected. Field (2008) claims that automatising high-frequency language may help in freeing up working memory, therefore preparing listeners to apply literal and inferential comprehension, however the body of evidence discussed offers conflicting viewpoints on this. The second section focused on motivation and self-efficacy, beginning with theories of these concepts before focusing on the impact that listening can have on the motivation and self-efficacy of a L2 learner. L2 listening anxiety was also raised as having an impact on L2 listening performance through several pieces of research literature and will be relevant to the results of this study, however it will be treated in the context of self-efficacy.

Therefore, the following research questions were devised:

1. Can L2 listening comprehension be improved through bottom-up strategy instruction?
2. What effect does existing language proficiency have on the impact of bottom-up activity instruction?
3. Can self-efficacy in MFL be improved through bottom-up listening activities?

3. Methodology

To explore these research questions, I used several methods to gain both qualitative and quantitative data. As previously stated, the intervention was conducted across four year 9 classes of Spanish, with all classes taking part in the intervention tasks simultaneously. At the end of a lesson prior to the start of the intervention, the entire cohort was shown a PowerPoint presentation which laid out the aims of the study and also an overview of what the intervention would involve. Consent forms for the pre-intervention questionnaire were given out to all students at this point and handed back to their class teacher. Full CUREC approval had been obtained and 'Approved procedure 15/MLT modus operandi' was used to ensure the study complied with all ethical policies.

3.1. Benchmark listening tasks

In order to address the first two research questions, I adapted a Foundation GCSE past paper from previous specification based on topics covered up to that point of the year, which lasted around ten minutes in total. Students filled out a worksheet as they listened to the recordings and then peer-assessed their work. This was used as my pre-intervention benchmark listening task and gave all students an opportunity for extended L2 listening before the intervention began over the following weeks.

3.2. Pre-intervention questionnaire on listening micro-processes

Once the benchmark tasks were collected by the class teacher, students were asked to fill out a Microsoft Forms questionnaire to self-assess their proficiency in L2 listening based on decoding processes, reflecting immediately back on the tasks completed in class. A questionnaire was used as it is a useful way to collect data from a large sample (Cohen et al., 2011). The questionnaire about decoding processes (see Appendix 1) used Field's (2008) decoding processes as previously discussed as a model, but the language used was simplified and contextualised to ensure as much clarity as possibly for a year 9 student. I followed Sellitz's (1976) guide to question construction to make these questions are effective as possible. I considered using Richards's (1983) list of micro-abilities which lead to L2 listening comprehension, but these were deemed too complex and numerous to formulate a questionnaire for year 9 students. Thus, I primarily based the questionnaires on Field's model discussed earlier. A contextualised example was also provided for every question based on a recently covered topic, in this case, home town or free time activities. Furthermore, students were provided with an option of 'I don't know' for every question. Microsoft Forms was chosen to produce the questionnaire as every student in the year group is familiar with this system after having used these questionnaires repeatedly over the periods of school closure in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, Cohen (2011) highlights that the questionnaire's appearance must be clear, attractive, and easy to process, which was once again supported by the students' familiarity with the Microsoft Forms system. The hyperlink was sent to the full year 9 Spanish cohort using their school email accounts in order to follow the school safeguarding policy, and students were asked to complete this as an extra task to

complete at home, but this was optional. All students also filled out a consent form so that their responses could be used as part of this project.

A five-point Likert scale was chosen to be used to allow students to assess their confidence in the chosen decoding process levels, which ranged from 'Really not confident' to 'Really confident', with a final option for 'I don't know'. An odd-numbered scale with a mid-point option of 'moderately confident' as well as an 'I don't know' option was chosen in order to mitigate the impact of response bias (Cohen et al., 2011). However, a mid-point option may affect the results of the questionnaire as participants choose the middle option rather than making a decision either way (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). Despite some researchers preferring to implement a seven-point Likert scale (Cohen et al., 2011), as I aimed to maintain as much clarity as possible in the questionnaire, I chose to limit it to five points. In addition, with a small maximum sample size, the increased reliability of the questionnaire results would not be worth analysing in any great depth as this may have opened up more room for interpretation from the participant, as one person's 'quite confident' may equate to another's 'quite unconfident' (Cohen et al., 2011). A similar questionnaire was piloted as part of my Part 2 assignment, which acted as a pilot for the chosen questions (as Author, 2021). Due to the low maximum sample size, the results from this questionnaire will only be displayed in the form of raw numbers rather than using percentages, thus avoiding any misrepresentation of results. The results of both the questionnaire and the listening benchmark task were stored on a password-protected private folder on the school computer system.

3.3. Pre-intervention interview

A small sample of students from different proficiency profiles were then asked to participate in a short semi-structured interview with me to further explore their perceptions of their L2 listening proficiency. These were all students who I either had been teaching this academic year or the year before, so they were comfortable to speak with me. The interview questions at this stage were:

- What is your opinion of listening in Spanish compared to the other three skills of reading, speaking and writing?
- Would you rather have a listening that is too easy or too difficult? Why?
- What do you find easiest and most challenging when doing a listening task?
- What effect does listening have on your confidence in Spanish?
- What do you do when you are finding a listening task challenging?
- How can a student improve their listening skills?

These questions were adapted from interviews conducted as part of my Part 2 assignment (as Author, 2021). Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the participant is able to shape the discourse of the interview, therefore reducing the potential impact of the interviewer guiding the participants towards a potential 'desired' answer to each question (Elliott, 1991). Elliott (1991) also notes that participant perspectives and understandings can change throughout the semi-structured interview, and ideas may crystallise as the participant verbalises their thoughts. This is especially pertinent in the case of L2 listening where many of Field's model's

processes may be occurring unconsciously, so ideas may not initially be clear about how students feel about this. I devised a list of questions that I used as a guide but I was able to pose subsequent questions to prompt them to develop their ideas.

The possibility of using group interview was rejected for various reasons. For instance, students with alternate perspectives may be reluctant to speak honestly, in particular if they are being interviewed alongside peers of different proficiency profiles (Smithson, 2000). Additionally, it also mitigates the impact of the students copying each other's responses when attempting to give the perceived 'correct' answer which they think that the interviewer wants them to give (Lavrakas, 2012). Therefore, the direction of the interview is led by the participant.

Purposive sampling was used (Cohen et al., 2011) to choose participants for the interview. Ideally, I had aimed to interview students of varying of language proficiencies which would be based on the baseline task. I asked several students, but unfortunately only students from the set 1 and 3 (of 4 sets) agreed to be interviewed. Furthermore, given that students from classes which I do not teach were being chosen for the interview, I selected students whom I had previously taught in year 7 or year 8. The aim of this was to encourage students to be as honest as possible without feeling pressured to give what they perceived as the 'correct' answer to an unfamiliar teacher, especially as they knew that this was for a piece of research. Therefore, this should mitigate the role of the 'power relationships' (Atkins & Wallace, 2012) by making students feel more comfortable and therefore improve the validity of the results from the interviews. Teachers of the other year 9 Spanish classes were also interviewed at this point to better understand what their standard practice was of teaching listening, and what their perceptions of this skill were.

Every stage of the interviews followed ethical guidelines extremely closely. I received written, informed consent from all participants, and informed them that participation in the study was optional and that they were able to withdraw at any point (Farrimond, 2017). I also informed them that the audio recordings of the interviews would be destroyed once they had been transcribed and that all audio information was stored on a password-protected laptop until that point.

3.4. Intervention tasks

Over the following term, all year 9 Spanish classes had 15 to 20 minutes of targeted Micro-Listening practice each Friday, conducted by four teachers simultaneously. A few weeks were missed by individual classes due to a whole school assessment week and a participating teacher who missed a week with Covid-19, but no class missed more than one session. In total, eight weeks of Micro-listening instruction was carried out. Due to the heavy emphasis on top-down instruction in this school context, I decided to focus on bottom-up listening instruction for the basis of the intervention.

As discussed in the literature review, the micro-listening activities from Smith, Conti and Jones (2016) were used for the intervention, aimed at developing bottom-up listening processes. These activities consisted of:

1. 'Tick the words', where students were given a list of words, and had to tick these in the order that they were uttered.
2. Closed dictation, where students filled in individual gaps in a transcript.
3. Spot the mistake, where one word per line of the transcript did not match what was said and needed to be corrected.

4. True or false based on very comprehensible input focusing on individual words such as a time phrase.
5. Sudden stop, where the recording would stop in the middle of a sentence, and students wrote the last word that was said each time.
6. Break the flow, where students had to separate a string of letters into words based on the audio.
7. Free dictation of short texts.
8. Spot the intruder, where students had extra words inserted into the transcript which were not in the audio, but the sentence made sense with or without these words. The extra words needed to be crossed out for each sentence.

For each of the intervention sessions, I adapted the audio recording from a textbook activity and sent the intervention slides to all class teachers. The listening recording always related to what had been learned that week in lessons. Four of the above eight tasks were completed each time, and I received informal feedback from class teachers each week to understand how all classes were finding the sessions.

For these sessions, I wanted students to focus on the process rather than the product, so tried to make it seem less like a test compared to a normal listening task compared to 'normal' textbook activities and told teachers to use their discretion to play the recording as many times as needed for their class. This was aimed at alleviating some of the performance anxiety discussed in the literature review, and get students to focus on what they can learn from the task rather than a numeric score that they would compare with their peers. They self-assessed their answers for each activity, but without looking at the meaning of the text. A traditional listening comprehension followed based on the same audio, which students would complete as if in a usual lesson.

3.5. Post-intervention questionnaire and interviews

Following the classroom-based intervention, students completed a second standardised listening task based on Foundation GCSE past paper from previous specification before being sent a second questionnaire requiring them to self-assess their listening proficiency mirroring the questions asked in the pre-intervention questionnaire, with a final option this time to indicate how useful they found the intervention sessions. This was again on a five-point Likert scale from Very negative up to Very positive.

The same students who were interviewed before the intervention sessions were then asked to take part in a follow-up interview to assess their perception of the intervention and its impact. Students were again informed that they could leave the study at any point. The questions for students were:

- Did you notice a difference in difficulty between the listening activity at the beginning of January and the one from May?
- What did you find the most and least useful parts of the intervention?
- Would you like to continue doing these activities in Spanish lessons?
- Do you think that your attitude towards listening activities has been affected following the intervention?
- How do you feel when you are finding a listening activity hard?
- How can a student improve their listening skills?

A final interview was also conducted with the class teachers to understand teacher attitudes towards the intervention. Both of these interviews again took the form of a semi-structured interview to allow room for students and teachers to develop their ideas without strict confines. The questions for staff at this stage were:

- What do you think was the impact of the listening intervention?
- How do you normally teach listening? What do you find works?
- Do you focus more on bottom-up or top-down comprehension in listening?
- What are students' attitudes towards listening in your lessons?

3.6. Data analysis

To analyse the results, pre-intervention listening task scores were compared to the post-intervention scores to assess if there had been an impact on L2 listening comprehension. Results from both questionnaires were also compared to understand if students felt that they had improved in their listening. All scores were displayed as numbers rather than percentages to avoid the results being misrepresented due to the small sample size.

Finally, interviews with both students and staff were transcribed and the responses from before the intervention compared with those from afterwards to assess the impact of the sessions. In these interviews, the primary foci were student perspectives to listening before and after the intervention, as well as how they responded to difficulty in listening. The responses between students of varying listening proficiencies were also compared to identify areas of similarity and difference, both before and after the intervention. As with the audio from the pre-intervention questionnaires, these were transcribed and then the audio was

immediately deleted. All participants were given the opportunity to withdraw at any point, as per the CUREC guidelines.

4. Findings and Discussion

To illustrate the findings of the study and discuss their implications, the research questions formulated earlier will be used as a structure. Research question 1 and 2 will be addressed primarily through the pre and post intervention listening tasks, however the results of the questionnaires and interviews with teachers and students will also be relevant. Research question 3 will be dealt with primarily through the interviews with students before and after the intervention, as well as those with their teachers.

The full year 9 Spanish cohort took part in the pre- and post- intervention listening task, however those who were absent for one or both of the benchmarks will not be taken into account in the analysis. 38 students completed the initial questionnaire in January, and 38 completed the second questionnaire following the intervention out of a total cohort of 87 students. Four students (with a variety of linguistic proficiency) participated in the initial interview, with two attending for a second interview following the intervention. The students who participated in both interviews will be referred to as student A, a high proficiency female listener in the top set who displays high levels of motivation, and student B, a low proficiency male listener in the third set of four who does not display high levels of motivation. Those who attended only the initial interview will be referred to as student C, a high proficiency female listener in the top set and student D, a medium proficiency male listener in set 3 who displays high levels of motivation in Spanish. As discussed, I would have liked a wider range of students to interview, but these were the only students selected who were willing to participate.

Post-intervention interviews were conducted with three of the other class teachers, one of which was a trainee teacher who had taken over the class for a period of this intervention.

These teachers will be referred to as teacher A (teaches foundation class, which is set four of four), teacher B (teaches second set of four) and teacher C (trainee teacher who took teacher B's class for a large section of the year).

4.1. Can L2 listening comprehension be improved through bottom-up activity instruction?

4.1.1. Quantitative understanding of the impact on L2 listening comprehension

The first results used to test this research question will be presented through the pre- and post-intervention listening tasks. As discussed in the methodology, both sets of tasks were derived from GCSE past papers from years of similar difficulty, and students who missed one or both of these benchmarks were excluded from the results. Of 87 potential participants, 77 students completed both parts. The pre-intervention listening assessment results were compared against the post-intervention assessment results and are shown in the table below.

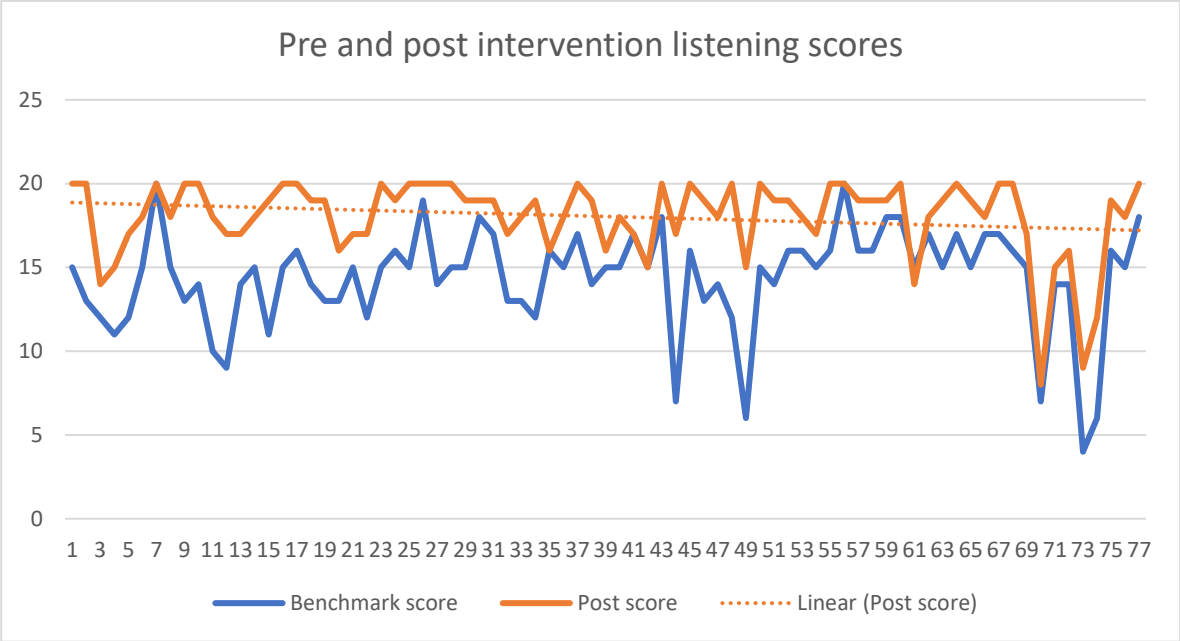


Table 1

As can be seen in table 1, the vast majority of students improved their score out of twenty between the pre- and post-intervention listening tests. Five students scored the same in both of these tests, two of whom are native speakers of Spanish and got full marks in both, and one student got one mark less in the post-intervention test. This means that 71 of the 77 participants improved on their score in the first pre-intervention test. These results therefore could suggest that the micro-listening intervention had a positive impact on L2 listening comprehension, therefore supporting the findings from research discussed earlier, such as that of Graham and Macaro (2008) or Yeldman (2022). However, it is important to note several potentially significant limitations of the study which may affect the validity of the results, which will be explored in detail later.

4.1.2. Student and teacher perspectives on the impact of the intervention on L2 listening comprehension

To further address this research question, the pre-intervention questionnaire results will also be analysed. Student perspectives on their L2 listening proficiency before the intervention took place are displayed in Table 2. These come from the Microsoft Forms questionnaire which was sent out via email to all students in the cohort.

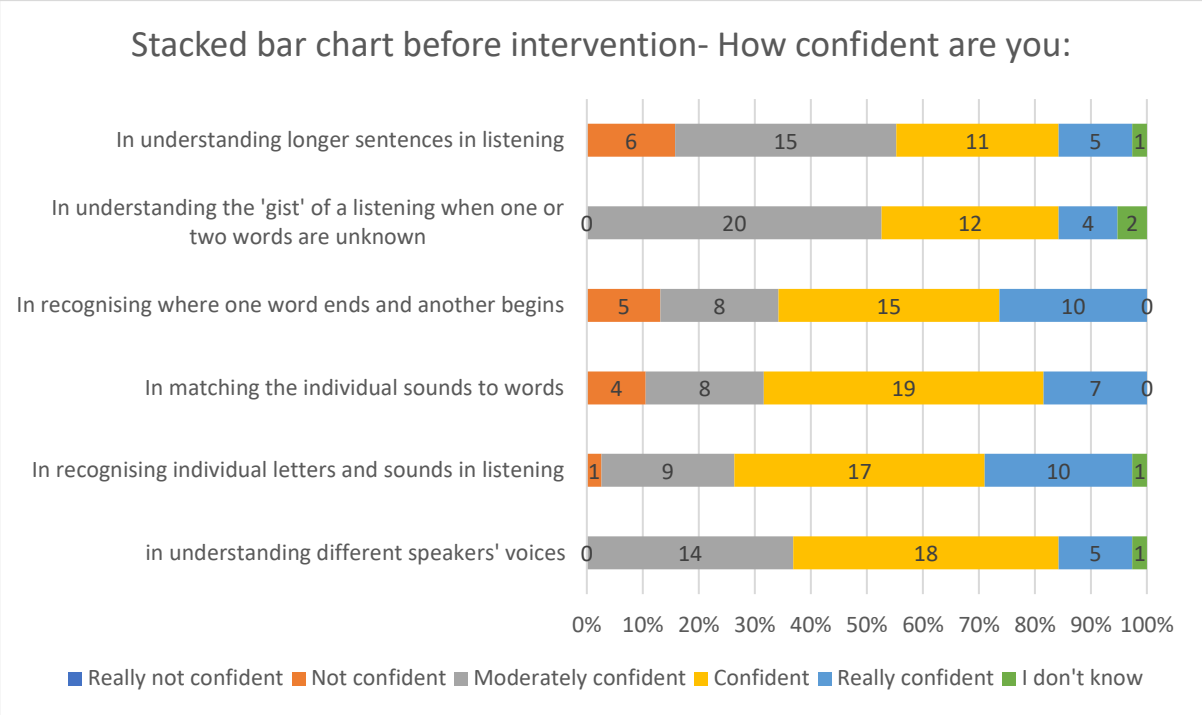


Table 2

As can be seen in the table above, student perspectives on their own proficiency in these micro-processes differ greatly across the cohort, with the majority responding that they were at least confident in recognising individual letters and sounds, as well as matching these sounds to words. Interestingly, no one chose the 'Really not confident' option for any of the questions, with a large proportion of students choosing the 'moderately confident' option, particularly in the first two questions, aligning with Croasmun and Ostrom's (2011) findings

discussed earlier. The findings above can then be compared with the results from the post-intervention questionnaire.

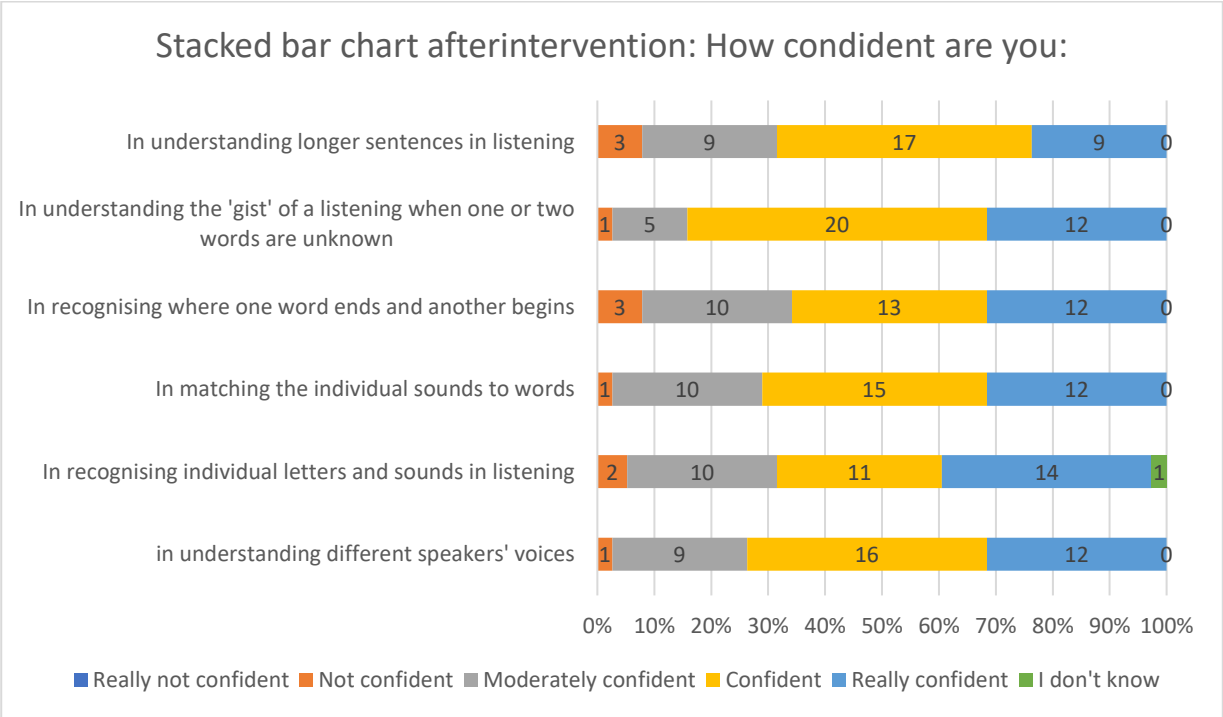


Table 3

The second questionnaire raises some very interesting questions, as well as contrasting with some of the findings found earlier. For example, the 'moderately confident' option dropped significantly in the first two questions, whereas it rose very slightly in three of the later questions. The proportion of students assessing themselves as confident or above is now comfortably above half of the participants in every question, compared to the initial questionnaire where two of the questions had over half of the responses being 'moderately confident' or below. Interestingly, more questions received at a response of 'not confident' this time compared to the initial questionnaire, at least one respondent per question, however the overall number of 'Not confident' responses across the questions drops from sixteen to eleven. Although this could be interpreted as the intervention having a negative

effect on student confidence in their listening capabilities, it may also be indicative of greater self-awareness with regards to the micro-processes involved in L2 listening. Indeed, the number of overall 'I don't know' responses fell from five in the pre-intervention questionnaire to just one in the post-intervention, further lending support to this viewpoint. Overall, these questionnaire results suggest that the intervention positively impacted student perspectives on their L2 listening ability, though self-belief may not necessarily lead to competence.

However, these questionnaire results may be skewed by the fact that students completed this outside of lesson time, and therefore only thirty-eight students responded out of a potential 87. Furthermore, the majority of responses came from students towards the top of the proficiency spectrum. For example, not a single student from the bottom set responded to either of these questionnaires, whereas the majority of the 38 came from the top set. This may indicate that students in the top-set, who display higher levels of motivation, will be more likely to complete an optional piece of 'extra homework' than those who are already more disengaged with language learning. These results would therefore have been further enriched if we had received a higher number of responses from students of more varying proficiency levels.

The results from the interviews with students also provide an interesting perspective on their views of their language proficiency. For example, when asked about her view on listening in the initial interview, student A said:

> *'I would say that I probably struggle with listening the most since the speakers sometimes speak too fast and I can't pick up key words that like, you can infer what the answer is from, or sometimes it's not very good, like they use like words to trick you, so say something that you think it's the answer when it's not.'*

In this response, student A has referred to processes which are particular to listening, such as speed of speech, and refers to the application of top-down processes to fill in the gaps in her

understanding. Interestingly, she also addresses attempts made in listening tests to trick the listener, which in itself is an artificial construct unlike real world L2 listening. Student B by contrast refers only to exam difficulty in listening when asked the same question:

> *'It's hard. It's like sometimes because like in Q2 (name of internal assessment) we had our exams. It was hard to understand what they were saying because they were talking about subjects describing them, but they didn't say the actual subjects. So I could get them. I lost like a good amount of marks on questions like that.'*

By focusing purely on exam success, student B's response suggests that his perception of his own ability in listening is closely linked to the number of marks that he receives in a task rather than on the amount of language that has been successfully understood. Difficulties highlighted in inferencing is likely an issue of bottom-up processing, as there is not appropriate context to work from in this scenario and word-level comprehension is not strong enough to answer with anything more than an estimated guess. Interestingly, student C, a stronger listener, referred to the same particular question in a very different way:

> *'Then the easiest ones are like, um. Like, for example, which subject are they talking about? And you've got a list of three.'*

Where student B found this task very difficult, a stronger listener found it to be much more straightforward, instead highlighting difficulties in questions with very long streams of speech:

> *'Um, what is the most challenging, I think, is always like the last question because they, like, read out a paragraph, and then you've got a list of boxes to tick or cross. And you don't know which ones to, because it goes quite quickly.'*

Not only does this again focus disproportionately on listening in the context of exams, but it also aligns with Field's (2008) idea that weak listeners rely on the context to guess the answer whereas stronger listeners use this to enrich understanding. As teacher C points out:

> *'I think it helped the learning on the details as I think it's easy in listening for it to just all be like a wall of sound sometimes and it helps them really pinpoint the individual words.'*

Following the intervention however, when asked which activity he found the most useful, student B stated:

> *'I think the most useful ones were the ones where we were like ordering the words of which ones came first in the sentence, because I'll be able to recognise words a lot faster. Which helps with, like, my actual key for listening.'*

In this, he recognises the importance of word level comprehension and bottom-up processing, acknowledging that following the intervention he feels much more proficient in the recognition of individual words. The therefore supports Field's (2008) notion that comprehension can be supported through the automatisation of L2 listening processes, avoiding the working memory from becoming overloaded.

4.1.3. Summary

In summary, the results discussed suggest that the intervention supported the development of L2 listening proficiency. However, this intervention would need to be conducted on a larger scale to determine if it has a significant impact on L2 listening comprehension, or if the most significant effect is on the listener's self-efficacy, as will be discussed later.

4.2. What effect does existing language proficiency have on the impact of bottom-up activity instruction?

4.2.1. A comparison of the pre- and post-intervention listening task scores

In order to address this research question, scores from the pre-intervention benchmark task were compared against the scores from the post-intervention, and the difference in scores was compared across the proficiency spectrum.

Student	Benchmark score	Post intervention score	Difference
1	7	17	10
2	6	15	9
3	12	20	8
4	11	19	8
5	10	18	8
6	9	17	8
7	13	20	7
8	13	20	7
9	12	19	7
10	14	20	6

Table 4

Student	Benchmark score	Post intervention score	Difference
68	17	18	1
69	15	16	1
70	14	15	1
71	7	8	1
72	20	20	0
73	20	20	0
74	17	17	0
75	16	16	0
76	15	15	0
77	15	14	-1

Table 5

In Table 4, the ten students who experienced the biggest improvement between the pre- and post-intervention listening tasks. The ten students who experienced the least improvement are also displayed in Table 5. The full table is available in Appendix 3. The pre-intervention scores from Table 4 vary between six and 14 out of 20, with the most dramatic increase being ten marks. These results suggest that students who have a middle to low level of L2 listening proficiency benefitted more acutely from this bottom-up listening intervention compared to their high proficiency peers. This would therefore support assertions from of Graham and Macaro (2008) and Yeldman (2022) that lower-intermediate learners can gain more from bottom-up strategy instruction that those with high existing L2 listening proficiency.

However, as with the results in research question 1, it is not clear if the higher proficiency students were limited by the number of marks available, and may have in fact made a bigger jump if there had been a wider range of marks available. For example, 27 students achieved full marks in the post-intervention listening test compared to just two native speakers before the intervention, so these students may have been limited by the ceiling effect in this case. Furthermore, it is not immediately clear if the improvement from the middle to bottom level proficiency students is purely down to L2 listening comprehension but rather improved self-efficacy, as several questions in the pre-intervention listening task were not attempted, suggesting that they gave up rather than having a go. This was not the case in the post-intervention listening test where the vast majority of students attempted all questions. The potential implications of this will be discussed in more detail as part of research question 3.

4.2.2. Interview results from students of different L2 listening proficiencies

Similar to research question 1, the interviews with students can also provide insight into the views of students with varying language proficiency. As discussed in research question 1, more proficient students such as student C use the context to enrich their understanding whereas less proficient listeners rely on it, and this can be seen in the responses from the interviews. For example, in the initial interview, when asked to describe difficulties faced during listening, student B said:

> *'I think focusing on what they're saying, because I think that native speakers, that they speak really fast and with a really like Spanish accent. So it's harder to understand than I would be talking to my teacher. They have a very Spanish accent.'*

This was a very general answer which focused on the Spanish accent and speed, but he was unable to describe this in any greater detail. In contrast, student A was able to detail her perspective on listening more clearly in this first interview, saying:

> *'Um, I find the easiest, the, the true or false statement because I can pick up some words. And when it says like not mentioned and stuff like that, I can like listen for key words that I can recognise. Um, but I find it difficult when it asks like which person said this and which person said that because sometimes it goes too far and you can't really remember what people say.'*

In this response, she was able to describe the identification of key words in listening tasks as well as the difficulty in keeping track in longer passages, where listeners can become lost in the utterance, and the speed of speech. Although not extremely detailed, it still provides more insight into what she finds difficult about listening rather than just the accent. This suggests that more adept listeners are more aware of the bottom-up processes that they are applying, as opposed to simply being overwhelmed by the quantity of unfamiliar language.

Attitudes towards listening also varied greatly between the proficiency levels. When asked if they preferred more difficult or easy listening tasks, student A responded with:

> *'Too difficult, because if it's too difficult, then you know your weaknesses and you can, like, improve it. But when it's too easy, then you're just going over the same things when you're not really doing anything.'*

This is highly focused on improvement and challenging themselves, in line with Dweck's (1986) concept of 'Mastery orientation'. In contrast, student B says:

> *'Maybe I think too easy because it's easy. Just like it's easy to get marks. With difficulty it makes my brain hurt.'*

However, this was focused on success in exams, and when prompted for his preference when in a normal lesson, he said:

> *'Hard because then I'd learn in time for my exams.'*

This focus purely on exams contrasts with student A, who focused on improvement, suggesting that student B may view his ability in listening as being tied to his exam results. This is also seen when asked what they do when finding a listening task difficult. Student A replied with:

> *'So on the side, I'll write down like key words, all right, like little notes to myself so that I can remember what they've said and so that I don't get mixed up with different things.'*

Student B, however, replied with:

> *'I have a look in my book or I just skip the question and see what I did wrong.'*

This suggests that student B was more likely to give up when faced with difficulty in a listening task, as looking in his book for the answer during the listening may be a way to avoid doing

the task, as he mentioned in skipping the question and answering it afterwards. This echoes Dweck's (1986) concept of learned helplessness as he presumes that he does not have the linguistic knowledge to achieve success in the task, instead looking for external support or not attempting the task at all, which is therefore an opposing end to the spectrum compared to mastery orientation. However, following the intervention and when asked the same question, student B replied with:

> *'I wait for the person to say it again, and then I write down what I think.'*

Although this may seem like a simple response, it is a vast improvement from the avoidance seen in the pre-intervention interview. Therefore, less proficient listeners may benefit from this targeted intervention more than highly proficient learners due to the impact that regular, low stakes success has on their self-efficacy, as will be discussed below.

A final consideration on this research question comes from student C, who, when asked about the impact that listening has on her confidence, said:

> *'Um, I mean, obviously I don't want to get bad marks. Um, I don't think anyone does. Um, and I mean, it does boost my confidence a bit if I get good marks because. Yeah, um. But then... Yeah. Otherwise, it's not really particular to listening. I mean, I know that Spanish teachers and the class teachers say that listening is really hard. Um, I think I'm used to hearing different languages with different accents and stuff. My dad speaks French, and my mom speaks Hindi.'*

This student finds listening considerably easier than the other students interviewed, acknowledging the potential impact from having home languages of French and Hindi might have on her Spanish listening comprehension. Although outside the scope of this study, this would be very interesting to investigate further, and whether already acquired second languages in general facilitate L2 listening, or if this is particular to languages within the same family, in this case French linking with Spanish as a 'romance language'.

4.2.3. Summary

The results therefore suggest that lower-intermediate proficiency learners experience greater improvements in their L2 listening proficiency due to targeted bottom-up listening instruction compared to high-proficiency listeners, aligning with Goh's (2000) findings. However, due to methodological issues identified such as the potential ceiling effect in the post-intervention listening task, this would need to be replicated in future research to determine the validity of these results.

4.3. Can self-efficacy in MFL be improved through bottom-up listening activities?

4.3.1. Student perspectives on the micro-skills listening intervention

To deal with this research question, the transcripts from the interviews with students from before and after the intervention will be analysed, as well as those from the teachers following the intervention. As we have interviews from students A and B from both before and after the intervention, their responses will be the primary focus of the discussion, nevertheless students C and D offer wider evidence to enrich these responses. However, before addressing this, one additional question from the post-intervention questionnaire provides an interesting insight to the group perspective on the intervention.

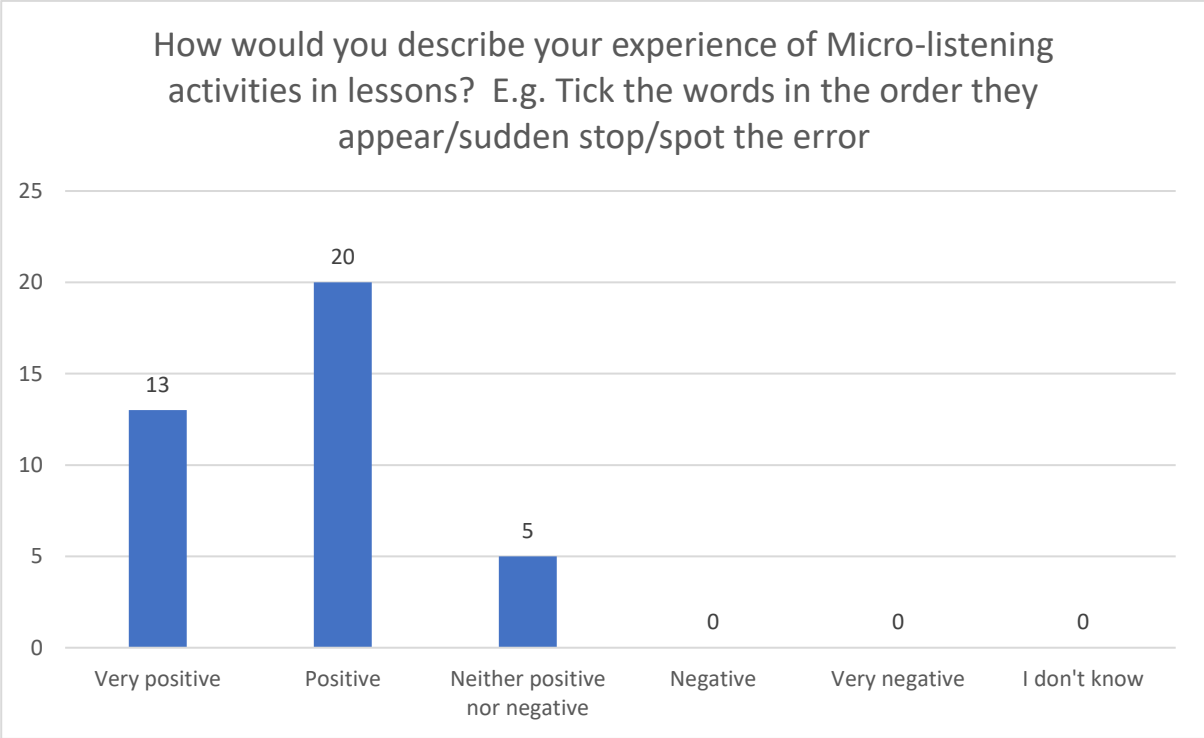


Table 6

On the second questionnaire, students were asked to assess their experience of the micro-listening intervention on another five-point Likert scale from 'very positive' down to 'very negative'. As can be seen in the bar chart above, 33 of the 38 respondents ranked their experience of the micro-listening as either 'positive' or 'very positive', with 5 respondents choosing 'neither positive or negative'. None of the respondents chose 'negative' or 'very negative'. This suggests that students as a whole experienced success in these micro-listening tasks, however it is possible that students have answered this question based on what they perceive to be the desired response (Lavrakas, 2012). To address these potential concerns, we will look first at the interview results from student A, who is a high-proficiency listener based both on internal results and those from the baseline tasks within this study.

4.3.2. A comparison of interview results before and after the intervention

In the initial interview, when asked about the effect that listening has on their confidence, they responded with:

> *'I mean, it does tell me that I need to focus more on revising that. But I wouldn't say it knocks my confidence.'*

Given this student's high levels of motivation and existing language proficiency, it is not surprising that she does not feel that listening negatively affects her confidence given that she experiences regular success in other aspects of her language learning. This is despite finding listening the most difficult skill, as she points out by saying:

> '*I would say that I probably struggle with listening the most*'.

Student D, despite not having the same level of proficiency as student A, displays a similar attitude towards the impact of listening on his confidence, stating:

> *'It doesn't really damage it, to be honest, because I if I just didn't understand it, then I'll just say I can't. It's kind of just need to improve on that.'*

The fact that this student does not have the same level of proficiency as student A yet expresses a similar attitude in this respect suggests that individual personality aspects may also play a role in how students respond to difficulty in L2 listening. However, it is worth noting that student D has one of the highest L2 proficiencies in his class and therefore if he does not know an answer, it is unlikely that many others in the class would, aligning with Spratt (2016) and Covington's (1992) findings discussed earlier which emphasised the role that social reinforcement has on motivation. Thus, it is unclear if he would display this

attitude if he were in a higher set where students would display higher levels of L2 proficiency.

In the post-intervention interview, student A still highlights listening as the skill with which she faces the most difficulty, saying:

> *'With listening, I feel like I've always kind of found it difficult. So it makes me more confident in like people coming out now that we've been practising it almost every lesson*.'

Here, student A acknowledges that she has always struggled with listening but feels more confident following the repeated focus on this skill in lessons. She continues to show high levels of resilience, stating:

> *'When I find it difficult, obviously, it's not like the best feeling in the world, but like, I know that I need to practice. And without that, then I wouldn't know why I needed to work on so.'*

It is interesting to note that despite finding listening difficult, student A still expresses a need for listening to be difficult to identify areas to improve. Interestingly, this mirrors what student C said in the pre-intervention interview, where he was asked if he would rather a listening task that is too hard or too easy, and he responded by saying he would rather a listening task that is too hard in order to better prepare for exams. This focus on exams is again something which arises very clearly from the pre-intervention interviews in particular, with students more concerned on their score in a task or a test than on the amount of language that they have actually understood. Student B also highlights the positive impact that listening can have on confidence, saying:

> *'It shows me that I can understand Spanish, but it does still need some work.'*

Although interesting to note that both students A and B verbally expressed a desire for difficult listening tasks to either improve their language or prepare for exams, their answers were quite short and there may have been room to further probe these questions to allow the students to talk their ideas through more fully.

Student B's post-intervention interview did provide a clearer insight into this, as after identifying that the micro-listening intervention became easier as the intervention progressed, when asked if these activities have impacted on his attitude towards listening in Spanish, he responded with:

> *'Oh, yeah, in a good way. I think because of like, I've tried to, because I've realised that this isn't as hard as it was at the start, but it's kind of maybe it is me changing, you know, maybe it's the sound change and like it's getting a lot easier to be over time.'*

In this response, student B has expressed a much clearer understanding of how his listening skills are developing over time, aligning with Dweck's concept of the 'growth mindset' as discussed earlier, where he views his ability as changeable. This is facilitated by regular opportunities for low-stakes listening in contrast to the exam-style activities usually found in textbooks, thereby supporting the development of self-efficacy in L2 listening. Interestingly, he addresses the possibility that the text is getting easier rather than him improving, casting doubt over the strength of his self-efficacy in listening. Furthermore, when asked about how a student can improve their listening skills, he responded with:

> *'Um, I think, uh, in year 7 we did like a listening assessed homework that you could take your time on, and I think there's also probably things like your school website or even like Google that could help you.'*

Given that student B ordinarily displays lower levels of motivation, this was a surprising answer as he does not usually express this level of proactivity in his revision. However, being

able to point to sources of support is not necessarily indicative of a drive to actually use these sources, but it does sharply contrast to his response in the pre-intervention interview to a similar question:

> *'I think maybe... (long pause) Maybe you've had... Whatever advice. I listen to someone who is a native speaker because then I'd be able to understand them during an exam.'*

However, a common issue with generalising these results is that, as with the questionnaire, the students who were willing to participate in these components of the research were the students who were already more engaged with language learning, and a wider range of student profiles would enrich these results significantly. Furthermore, despite not exploring self-efficacy as a gendered issue for this research, as both students interviewed from the 'high-proficiency' profile were female, and those from lower proficiencies male, there may be gender issues that influence their self-efficacy which could be explored in future research.

Moving towards teacher perspectives on the intervention, perceptions of the impact of the intervention on student self-efficacy in listening were largely positive. For example, teacher A stated:

> *'And also I think it was really good that we could play it as many times as possible because um, yeah, especially for my class, which is a lower ability class, I think it was good for them because they could kind of feel more confident and not stressed out as much with the fast pace of listening activities as much.'*

In this, teacher A recognises the performative nature of many textbook based tasks, where a recording is played twice and success is measured against how many exam-style tasks students got correct. A class like this may therefore struggle to experience regular success in listening as discussed earlier, instead potentially experiencing Dweck's concept of 'learned helplessness' (1986) based on repeated failure. The stress induced by these tasks is again

referenced in a later response when asked about how student attitudes towards listening are in normal lessons, where they said:

> *'I think students feel… used to like feel quite stressed or they still do in some of my other classes where we haven't been doing this. I think stress is the biggest thing, whereas now they seem a lot more like calm when they're doing the listening because they know that it can be repeated and that it's low stakes as well.'*

This supports Tahsildar and Yusiff's (2014) findings which suggested that L2 anxiety can be reduced by removing the performative nature of limited repetitions of the utterance, therefore supporting student self-efficacy in listening. How to then support students when moving back towards exam-style tasks in the revision period before exams is therefore an area for consideration, as under preparation for this component of language learning in its current model in the UK education system may also be a cause for significant anxiety and potential underperformance.

Similar to teacher A, teacher B highlights the increase in student confidence in listening, saying:

> *'I think it was overwhelmingly positive. They were more confident. They were actually looking forward to the micro listening activities because they were achievable in bite size practice.'*

Teacher B also highlights a need for differentiation in the application of this, saying:

> *'In a way, I think the more able ones in my set maybe were finding it too easy because there was no challenge activity and they're so used in our lessons to having the challenge box that we can get on with. But because they were so quick, it wasn't really a negative impact, obviously.'*

Therefore, to best facilitate this development, teachers should be given more ownership over the use of these activities, selecting what is most appropriate to challenge and support their

classes. This is consistent with Goh's (2010) notion that the teacher should facilitate the acquisition of L2 listening skills rather than just asking students to complete a task by themselves, tailoring delivery based on the needs of their class.

Furthermore, teacher B highlights issues that may be felt more acutely by the current cohort when asked about general attitudes towards listening, stating:

> *'Before micro listening, or after micro listening in general? Before we did it, there were a bit scared, often scared because I think the impact of lockdown, we did a lot less listening practice when they were younger and now year 9 is, you know, drip feeding their GCSE content. They're a bit scared when it is a recording if the voice is very different to mine? If it goes too quickly, straight away, they you know, they in the beginning they were shouting at, can you pause? Can you make it slower? And then I had to teach them, don't shout out, you know. We'll play it again. So we play sometimes more than twice now. I think they are more positive about it. I think they sometimes see it more as a game and how many marks they can get'*

Although L2 listening anxiety is experienced by many language learning as discussed in the literature review, teacher B highlights that following successive extended period of school closure in the United Kingdom due to the Covid 19 pandemic, this may be a phenomenon which disproportionately affects our current cohorts of students, as shown by students calling out and panicking when confronted with a listening task. It is clear that L2 listening anxiety has been a significant issue for this group, however the responses from teacher B regarding the success in removing this anxiety through the use of micro-listening interventions suggests promising implications for classroom practitioners faced with similar issues.

4.3.3. Summary

To summarise, the results from the questionnaire, student and teacher interviews suggest that self-efficacy was positively impacted across the proficiency spectrum, with L2 listening

anxiety being significantly reduced. This was influenced by the low-stakes nature of the micro-skills intervention as opposed to examination-style practice to which students had been more accustomed, as well as the more regular opportunities for listening success built into these teaching sequences.

5. Conclusion and implications

5.1. General conclusions in response to the research questions

This piece of practitioner research raises interesting implications for classroom practice regarding L2 listening. As discussed in the literature review, the role of bottom-up and top-down processes in the field of L2 listening has been the focus of much research (Kissling, 2018; Manihuruk & Sidabutar, 2022; Yeldham, 2018), however much of this has been conducted in the context of teaching English as a foreign language, meaning that there are therefore barriers to the generalisation of the findings to the average languages classroom in a British secondary school, such as varying levels of learner motivation and the role of 'integrativeness' in this motivation (Gardner, 1985). Furthermore, due to inherent differences particular to listening such as speed of speech, research cannot be automatically generalised from L2 reading, which is often viewed as the fellow 'receptive' skill, where students are understanding language as opposed to producing it (Chang, 2009; Cheng & Matthews, 2018; Hatami, 2017). Finally, differences between languages themselves may cause issues in generalising research findings, such as varying phonic systems, alphabets, scripts and pre-existing languages known by the listener (Medina et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important for practitioner research to be conducted within the particular school context to assess the impact of the intervention.

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods were implemented in the study to provide a wider breadth of understanding, and these were used to address the chosen research questions. The aim of this was to provide an insight into both the wider attitude towards the

intervention across the cohort while also providing a clearer understanding of individuals' experiences.

Results from both the quantitative and qualitive methods suggested that explicit bottom-up instruction can improve L2 listening comprehension, as shown by the improvements between the pre- and post-intervention listening tests, thereby supporting many of the research findings discussed in the literature review. Student perspectives on their own ability in L2 listening also improved following this intervention, however, as discussed in the findings, confidence does not necessarily equate to proficiency.

Furthermore, the results may suggest that lower- to mid-proficiency learners experience greater improvements in their L2 listening comprehension compared to their high-proficiency peers, however methodological issues with the ceiling effect may have affected the validity of these findings. If a similar study were to be carried out, a wider range of marks would help to mitigate this, as well as more difficult questions to avoid too many students from achieving full marks. Results from the interview do suggest that lower- to mid- proficiency listeners gain a more nuanced understanding of what they are finding difficult, as well as displaying more coping strategies when faced with difficult language.

The most significant and clear impact observed throughout this research was that on student self-efficacy in L2 listening. This can be seen through the results from interviews with both students and teachers, where students expressed their positive experiences with the intervention and teachers noted the improved motivation displayed by students in listening tasks. Furthermore, the majority of students who responded to the questionnaire ranked their experience as either 'positive' or 'very positive', once more underlining this success. Some students experienced significant improvements between the pre- and post-intervention listening test, which may in fact be due to improved self-efficacy rather than improved L2

listening comprehension given that several students gave up during the initial test, but persevered in the post-intervention test, as noted by the class teacher. In the teacher interviews, there were also noted improvements in engagement and attitude towards listening since intervention, once more highlighting the positive impact that this intervention had on student self-efficacy and motivation.

5.2. Implications for classroom practice

There are therefore interesting implications for classroom practice. One that may be overlooked in L2 listening instruction is building in regular opportunities for success throughout teaching sequences. Given that listeners are constantly appraising their own performance (Dörnyei, 2003), these are vital in the development of a 'growth mindset' within listening, while also preventing lower proficiency listeners from developing 'learned helplessness' from experiencing repeated failure in listening tasks (Dweck, 1986). This will therefore be a key focus in curriculum planning for not only my own lessons, but for the languages department as a whole.

Building on this, students tend to view L2 listening tasks as performative, often equating their capabilities in this macro-skill to the score which they achieve in an exam-style task as opposed to the amount of language which has been successfully decoded and understood. Therefore, we will attempt to realign this to a more formative attitude towards L2 listening, through the inclusion of more frequent micro-skill, bottom-up or top-down process instruction, for example. This should therefore reduce the impact of performance anxiety and prevent students from viewing all listening tasks as some form of test. However, the performative aspect of L2 listening would need to be reintroduced at some point, as this

forms part of many internal assessments as well as standardised examinations such as at GCSE, and students need to be effectively prepared for this. There will therefore need to be a balance between purely formative listening practice and explicit exam preparation given the nature of the current GCSE specification.

Evidence from this study also suggests that bottom-up instruction supports L2 listening comprehension and self-efficacy, and we will therefore embed this into our curriculum across year groups to better facilitate this key development. Although this study did not explicitly deal with the role of top-down processing and the impact of this on high proficiency listeners' understanding, this too would be something to consider to ensure that all students are making as much progress as possible in their L2 listening development.

One final implication of this study is that any similar intervention should be tailored towards the specific group rather than a generalised programme to follow. This therefore requires greater teacher agency in the planning of these tasks in order to most effectively facilitate the development of these bottom-up processes, as opposed to this study where I planned all activities and teachers simply carried them out in the classroom. Ideally, these activities would be chosen and tailored by the classroom teacher to support their students, however this remains a complex issue given that the individual areas of strength and difficulty experienced by each student may differ enormously even in a class which is set on proficiency, and many of the languages classrooms in the UK do not have a homogenous level of proficiency.

5.3. Limitations

There are several limitations to this practitioner research which may have affected the validity of the results found. For example, it is important to consider that as several students attained full marks in the post test, it is possible that the ceiling effect has impacted the validity of this measure, where students may have achieved a higher number of marks, but were limited by the number of marks available. This was unexpected given that the recordings came from a previous GCSE paper, but the level of difficulty may need to be adjusted if this were to be replicated again. Furthermore, given that the post-intervention task took place several months after the pre-intervention benchmark test, we cannot determine if this improvement is caused by the intervention or the increased curriculum time which students have been exposed to over this period. Moreover, due to the timing of the final interview being immediately after the whole-school assessment week, some students were absent or not willing to come for the final interview. Additionally, given that nearly all students improved their scores in the second set of tasks, it is difficult to determine if both tasks were of identical difficulty, despite the questions selected coming from past papers within the same specification with similar grade boundaries. The inclusion of a control group may have mitigated these concerns and allow us to see the impact of the intervention more decisively. Finally, I was not able to get a volunteer from the very bottom end of the proficiency levels, which would have strengthened my data as their perception of languages may have been less enthusiastic than those who were very keen to participate. Therefore, those who answered the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the interview were predominantly from the higher levels of listening proficiency.

5.4. Collaboration

The collaboration element of the research worked very effectively, with high levels of engagement from the other teachers of year 9 Spanish. Through both the recorded interviews and informal discussions following the intervention, all teachers found it to be a very positive experience, and will continue to include these styles of low-stakes, formative listening in their practice with other year groups. Furthermore, similar approaches will be implemented in French and German lessons given the positive impact that these sessions had on L2 listening comprehension and particularly self-efficacy. However, as discussed earlier, teachers will take more agency in the design of these tasks depending on the needs of their class, rather than following a pre-determined set of activities to best facilitate L2 listening development.

5.5. Implications for future research

There is also scope for future research following this study. For example, further research would need to be conducted to determine the impact of this intervention on students of varying initial L2 listening proficiency levels, as well as on a larger scale, as discussed in the findings of this study. Additionally, despite teaching Spanish, French and German in the school, this study was conducted only with students of Spanish, and the impact of this intervention may differ across languages even within the same school context. Furthermore, as arose in the student interviews, students who already speak a second language at home

often display higher levels of listening proficiency compared to their peers. Future research could therefore focus on the role that this language knowledge plays in language acquisition, the application of bottom-up and top-down processes or how this varies for learners whose second language is from the same language family, such as French and Spanish as 'romance languages'. Finally, some research alludes to the role of gender in self-efficacy (Marshman et al., 2018; Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020; Schnell et al., 2015), and although this study did not investigate this, it would therefore be interesting to see the importance of this in the context of L2 listening.

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1- Pre-intervention questionnaire

How confident are you: *

	Really not confident	Not confident	Moderately confident	Confident	Really confident	I don't know
in understanding different speakers' voices, e.g. different speakers in recordings	○	○	○	○	○	○
In recognising individual letters and sounds in listening, e.g. recognising the letter 'i' in Spanish (sounds like 'ee')	○	○	○	○	○	○
In matching the individual sounds to words, e.g. ideal (ee-day-al)	○	○	○	○	○	○
In recognising where one word ends and another begins, e.g. mi-pareja-ideal	○	○	○	○	○	○
In understanding the 'gist' of a listening when one or two words are unknown, e.g. understanding the general meaning	○	○	○	○	○	○
In understanding longer sentences in listening, e.g. following the 'gist' of a longer sentence.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix 2- Post-intervention questionnaire

How confident are you: *

	Really not confident	Not confident	Moderately confident	Confident	Really confident	I don't know
in understanding different speakers' voices, e.g. different speakers in recordings	○	○	○	○	○	○
In recognising individual letters and sounds in listening, e.g. recognising the letter 'i' in Spanish (sounds like 'ee')	○	○	○	○	○	○
In matching the individual sounds to words, e.g. ideal (ee-day-al)	○	○	○	○	○	○
In recognising where one word ends and another begins, e.g. mi-pareja-ideal	○	○	○	○	○	○
In understanding the 'gist' of a listening when one or two words are unknown, e.g. understanding the general meaning	○	○	○	○	○	○
In understanding longer sentences in listening, e.g. following the 'gist' of a longer sentence.	○	○	○	○	○	○

How would you describe your experience of Micro-listening activities in lessons? E.g. Tick the words in the order they appear/sudden stop/spot the error *

- ○ Very positive
- ○ Positive
- ○ Neither positive nor negative
- ○ Negative
- ○ Very negative

Appendix 3- Listening task scores before and after intervention

Student	Pre-intervention score	Post-intervention score score	Difference
1	7	17	10
2	6	15	9
3	12	20	8
4	11	19	8
5	10	18	8
6	9	17	8
7	13	20	7
8	13	20	7
9	12	19	7
10	14	20	6
11	14	20	6
12	13	19	6
13	13	19	6
14	6	12	6
15	15	20	5
16	15	20	5
17	15	20	5
18	15	20	5
19	15	20	5
20	15	20	5
21	14	19	5
22	14	19	5
23	14	19	5
24	13	18	5
25	12	17	5
26	12	17	5
27	4	9	5
28	16	20	4
29	16	20	4
30	16	20	4
31	16	20	4
32	15	19	4
33	15	19	4
34	15	19	4
35	14	18	4
36	13	17	4
37	11	15	4
38	17	20	3
39	17	20	3
40	17	20	3

41	16	19	3
42	16	19	3
43	16	19	3
44	16	19	3
45	16	19	3
46	15	18	3
47	15	18	3
48	15	18	3
49	15	18	3
50	15	18	3
51	15	18	3
52	14	17	3
53	13	16	3
54	18	20	2
55	18	20	2
56	18	20	2
57	17	19	2
58	16	18	2
59	15	17	2
60	15	17	2
61	15	17	2
62	14	16	2
63	12	14	2
64	19	20	1
65	18	19	1
66	18	19	1
67	17	18	1
68	17	18	1
69	15	16	1
70	14	15	1
71	7	8	1
72	20	20	0
73	20	20	0
74	17	17	0
75	16	16	0
76	15	15	0
77	15	14	-1

Appendix 4- Pre-intervention student interview questions

- What is your opinion of listening in Spanish compared to the other three skills of reading, speaking and writing?
- Would you rather have a listening that is too easy or too difficult? Why?
- What do you find easiest and most challenging when doing a listening task?
- What effect does listening have on your confidence in Spanish?
- What do you do when you are finding a listening task challenging?
- How can a student improve their listening skills?

Appendix 5- Post-intervention student interview questions

- Did you notice a difference in difficulty between the listening activity at the beginning of January and the one from May?
- What did you find the most and least useful parts of the intervention?
- Would you like to continue doing these activities in Spanish lessons?
- Do you think that your attitude towards listening activities has been affected following the intervention?
- How do you feel when you are finding a listening activity hard?
- How can a student improve their listening skills?

Appendix 6- Post-intervention questionnaire for teachers

- What do you think was the impact of the listening intervention?
- How do you normally teach listening? What do you find works?
- Do you focus more on bottom-up or top-down comprehension in listening?
- What are students' attitudes towards listening in your lessons?