

DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILL AMONG THE STUDENTS THROUGH ACTIVITY BASED TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Language learning is a skill. A skill can be acquired through practice which makes it a habit. The more one practices, the better proficiency one would be able to gain. Therefore, attempts should be made to provide adequate opportunities to practice the language and gain mastery over the language for use both inside and outside the classroom. But English is taught largely in our country to prepare for exams and not for life. English Language Skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing are neglected or one given importance at the cost of the other. In most institutions of higher education, English teaching is grammar- centric or purely connected to teaching literature and done in a mechanical and often abstract manner. Most language tests and examinations evaluate student's memory and rote skills and not their critical thinking, critical reading and productive skills. Most teachers teaching in higher educational institutions have not been trained to teach English as a skill. Learning a language means learning a skill and therefore, English must be taught as a skill. English classroom must become a place where learners practice the language and not just listen to the teacher passively. The classroom should be like a playground where students can play with the language and thus a more holistic, integrated and relevant instruction can be provided and proficiency in the English language skills must be attained.

INTRODUCTION

According to the behaviourist theory, the acquisition of language learning is explained in terms of conditioning. Ever since his or her birth, the child begins to hear a large number of sounds from her mother, father and other members of the family. In the process of listening, he or she learns to associate these words to the situations. Therefore, the child's pace of language acquisition depends upon his or her being exposed to the process of conditioning through listening. In the case of L1 acquisition, the child uses or practices the language repeatedly. Learning the second language too entails the task of using or practicing the language repeatedly.

The pace of learning English depends upon the extent to which the learner practices it. Keeping in view the importance of practice, the teachers of English are required to adopt the relevant techniques in the classroom. In teaching English Language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing the teacher need to make use of relevant and interesting situations for teaching various skills and language items. Thus unlike the learning of mother tongue, second language learning does not take place unless the learner consciously puts in efforts to produce response to the stimulus. Therefore, the teaching materials and methods of second language need to give primacy to the practice in listening and speaking of the target language. The teaching of reading and writing skills can be initiated at a later stage.

Listening skill is the basic skill among the LSRW skills and the mastery of other skills namely speaking, Reading, and Writing will largely depend on good foundation in listening skill. The major problem in our educational institutions is that we teach English as a subject and not as a skill. Teaching is mostly done in subject oriented and grammar centric. As teachers we talk and talk and leave little space for making our students to listening. Now time has arrived to teach listening skill by incorporating activity based and skill oriented approach and let the students enjoy learning and thus making learning an enjoyable activity.

Teaching is a scientific activity. It is scientific in the sense that through teaching we bring behavioural changes among the students, thereby they can stand on their own legs and guide their future learning independently without much trouble. Classroom teaching provides innumerable opportunities to the teachers to develop listening skill among the students and teachers need to channelize their energy in a productive way by giving enough time to students to listen. But unfortunately, teaching is all about talking and very less listening. We need to give more time to students to listen.

PRE-REQUISITES FOR AN ENGLISH TEACHER

The responsibility of a second language English teacher is greater than that of other subject teachers, since the teacher himself/herself is from different linguistic background other than English. Thus the teachers who are teaching English should have to attain some extra skills in order to make their teaching and students learning effective and productive. Before entering the class you should have to check and made aware of yourself about these aspects as a prior condition for being an English Teacher. They are -

1. Have a passion towards teaching and tries to contribute his learning to the overall development of the students.
2. Teacher is an ever student and learner and it is life long process.
3. Be a role model always to your students and other teachers.
4. Always prepare to change your strategies accordingly and be open minded and positive.
5. Recognize that your class is made of heterogeneous group in terms intelligence levels, emotional intelligence, aptitude and attitudes.
6. Recognize the limitations of students with open mind.
7. Prepare to learn new strategies of English Language Teaching by exposing yourself in conferences, seminars and workshops and also through training.
8. Teaching is being a noble profession, be proud of being a teacher and spread and share the knowledge but not egos.

TYPES OF LISTENING

1. **Interactive:** In this type of listening, the students listen to the teacher and respond.
2. **Non- interactive:** In this type of listening, the students listen to a recorded material and do the required activity as guided by the teacher in the classroom.
3. **Self- talk:** In this type of listening the students listen to each other in conversation.

GUIDELINES FOR A LISTENING LESSON:

1. Be clear about your goals in teaching a lesson for listening and organize the lesson well.
2. Plan for a careful step by step progression in the material and give direction to the students as to what they should listen for, where to listen, when to listen and how to listen.
3. Always begin your activity in the class with an icebreaker or warm-up activity to create interest and come out of their distractions.
4. Split the class into a group of 5 students or 3 students each according to the class strength
5. Insist on active overt student participation in order to motivate all the students in the classroom and get involved in teaching and learning practice.
6. They should be provided with handouts of activities in advance when we are planning some activity based listening lesson.

7. We have to make our lectures concise and precise, so that the teacher should limit their teaching to one or two topic/s per class rather than too many concepts or topics should in one class.
8. We must use very elaborate pronunciation so that sound distinction can be attentively focused on.
9. Avoid disturbances between and during a listening lesson to draw maximum advantage of a listening lesson.
10. Grade the listening lesson according to the class and age of the students. It is a very important aspect of a listening lesson. In order to make our listening lesson interesting and workable to the students, it should be graded according to the age and class.

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR A LISTENING LESSON

When we are planning for a listening lesson, we should take the following factors into account. These factors and criteria's are -

- i. The time available for conducting a listening activity in the classroom
- ii. The material available at the disposal of the teacher
- iii. The ability of the class should be taken into consideration
- iv. The interests of the class also should be taken care off.
- v. The nature and context of a listening text should be graded and according to the class and age

THE BASIC FRAMEWORK OF A LISTENING LESSON:

I. PRE- LISTENING STAGE:

During this stage we help our students to listen. We need to make aware of the listening activity that they are going to do and the procedure and the things they need to concentrate on in order to complete the task. At pre-listening stage teachers need to

1. Allow students to know the kind of text and purpose for listening in advance.
2. Give students a purpose for listening, which can include one or more of the following: -
 - To get general information about the topic after listening.
 - To get specific information about the topic after listening.

- To accomplish a task like colouring the diagrams by listening, drawing the pictures by listening, marking true or false by listening etc.
- 3. Inform about some kind of responses from the listener such as taking notes, answering questions, making a group discussion.
- 4. Give students more than one chance to listen, each time with a different purpose.

The main aim of a pre - listening stage is -

- (a) **Setting the context:** We can set the context with icebreakers. Icebreakers are fun filled and inject a needy energy into the group, with that comes the motivation to tackle any listening activity. The students need to know about the kind of listening activity that is they are going to listen and the kind of expectations of the teacher.
- (b) **Generating interest:** We need to create interest among the students by bringing the point to the students that when you listen attentively you can able to do this listening activity individually or working in groups too. We have to make sure that the task is understood by giving clear description of the task. We can also create interest by dividing the class into groups or guiding them to work in pairs, depending on the class strength and the availability of time with the teacher.
- (c) **Activating current knowledge:** Teachers need to activate and generate current knowledge of the content that the learners possess by asking them relevant questions about the topic and thereby activating their current knowledge. This in turn increases their curiosity about the topic that the learners need to know in the course of listening. These kind of activities at the pre-listening stage helps the teacher -
 - to motivate the students by contextualization of the given topic
 - to find out what students already know about the topic.
 - to prepare students for the vocabulary and language structures in the text.
 - to mitigate the anxiety which comes from listening in a foreign language, by providing a clear context.
 - to offer opportunities for discussion and more interaction among the students.

II. WHILE LISTENING STAGE

In this stage we help our students to focus their attention on the listening text and guide their understanding of the listening material.

- Students interact directly with the text or listening a number of times, each time gaining a more detailed understanding.
- Each listening/ reading has an interactive task requiring some kind of response from the students.
- Tasks move from general to specific understanding – from getting the main idea to looking for specific information.
- Allow time for students to ask questions, clarify vocabulary and move toward a deeper understanding of the listening.

During this stage, we ask our students to focus on certain aspects of the sub skills of listening which need to be assessed during a listening lesson. These sub-skills are:

- 1. Listening for Specific Information:** In this type of listening, the listener listens to get the main idea rather than concentrating on all the details.

For Example: In this type of listening, the teacher can play a 5 minute audio clip of an interview of a famous cricket star of India and request the students to listen carefully and answer the specific questions like –

- a. In how many balls does he score his first century?
- b. Where did he play his first international match?
- c. Who is the captain of the team when he played his first international match?

- 2. Listening for General Understanding:** In this type of listening, the listener looks for a general understanding of the text rather than to a specific information.

For example: In this type of listening the teacher asks the students to listen to a text about some famous national leader of India and his childhood details and ask the students to listen and answer the questions. In this type of listening students are tested with general understanding type of questions.

- a. Where was she studied?
- b. Who are his brothers?
- c. What is his favourite colour?
- d. Where does he study?

- 3. Predictive Listening:** In this type of listening the teacher narrates a part of the story and asks the learners to predict the rest.

For example, five monkeys used to live on a tree on the bank of a river. A crocodile lived in the same river. Every day the monkeys used to tease the crocodile by swinging very close to it saying, Are you not hungry? Come and have a bite. Why don't you catch us uncle crocodile? and so on. Finally one day..... (Predict)

- 4. Inferential Listening:** In this type of listening a proficient listener should be able to infer information that is not directly stated in the speaker's words. The ability to guess unfamiliar words or phrases is a very important part of good listening. According to the context, the meaning or sense of the words and phrases should be guessed or imagined.
- 5. Intensive Listening:** Intensive listening involves more detailed study or analysis of the text for specific information.

For Example: In this type of listening activity the teacher will ask the students to listen a audio clip and fill in the table with appropriate information.

Town	
Brothers/Sisters	
Children	
Interests	
Hobbies	

- 6. Evaluative listening:** In this type of listening, the listener tries to perform an assessment of the given text based on his or her listening. In this type of evaluative listening the teacher tests the assertive behaviours of the students by making them listen an audio clip and thereby testing their evaluative listening by asking questions like –

- a) Do you think why? Why?
- b) Do you agree that.....? Why?
- c) What is your opinion of...? Why?
- d) Which is the best ...? Why? Etc.,

III. POST- LISTENING STAGE

During which we help our students to integrate what they have learnt from the text into their existing knowledge. The post-listening stage requires the analysis of the students understanding of the text.

- a) Evaluate students comprehension in a particular task or area
- b) Evaluate overall progress of the students in listening and in particular types of listening tasks.
- c) Decide if the strategies used were appropriate for the purpose or not, decide the suitability of the activity in terms of class and age.
- d) Modify strategies if necessary since this stage is like a feedback stage for the teacher to evaluate the listening activities of the students.
- e) Based on the feedback, the teacher should decide, whether to enter the text from the top down or from the bottom up strategy.

CONCLUSION

Speaking ability of the students depend considerably upon his/her listening ability. The learner who gets a lot of practice in listening becomes good in the spoken aspect of the language. So the teacher should give due importance to listening skill. The ability to speak fluently and accurately is considered a passport to success. Thus we can say that speaking and listening are inter related. Without the one, the other cannot take place. In learning a language all the four skills of a language work in a collective way rather than independently. For convenience sake we divide each skill and teach each skill independently. Unlike the learning of a mother tongue, second language learning does not take place unless the learner consciously puts in efforts to produce the desired response to the stimulus. Therefore, the teaching materials and methods of a second language need to give primacy to the practice in listening and speaking of the target language. The teaching of reading and writing skills can be initiated at a later stage after getting sufficient grounding in the listening and the speaking skills. Thus the ability to listen and respond to an activity is the basis for language learning and it is the basic requirement for the attainment of other skills in years to come when the students moves from one grade to the other.

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