

THE FUNCTIONAL WAYS TO DEVELOP LISTENING SKILLS IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide some functional ways for developing listening skill of students at the University of Computer Studies who want to be confident, interested and improve their listening skill. It also intends to guide the language teachers to take effective techniques in their teaching specifically and thus facilitate their students to triumph over their listening problem. For this purpose, firstly data was gathered from Language teachers of University of Computer Studies (Pang Long) in order to know about the improvement of listening skill of their students. And this study attempts to examine the listening problems of first year computer science and technology students, total 80 were selected for the study. Data was collected by means of questionnaires and interviews. Listening is one of the main supporting skills not only in daily life but also in classroom settings. It is fundamental in the language classroom because it makes a very positive contribution to the students. Thus, a language teacher also needs to help students understand using the efficient ways and authentic materials. There are many effective ways and the functional materials that can make students develop listening skill. The objective of the study is to help the English language teachers and students to overcome the difficulties by showing functional ways for developing English language listening skill in the language classroom.

KEYWORDS

the functional ways , the importance of listening skill , effective techniques, improve

1. INTRODUCTION

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) books, Cambridge University press are prescribed as a supporting subject in every computer university where all the students have to learn not only receptive skill but also productive skill. Among these skills, listening is one of the hardest skills in learning IELTS. It is widely used in assessing the language ability of students who want to study or work in the foreign country where English is the language of communication. It consists of four components: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Listening plays as an important role not only in daily life but also in classroom settings. It is fundamental in the language classroom because it makes a very positive contribution to the students. If they understand the importance of listening, they will reach at the right level and any learning simply can start in their life. When learning a new language, students need to develop their reading skills and listening skills first and then acquire speaking skills and writing skills. All these skills are important and they are connected with each other because they all play a supporting role with developing other skills. For example, reading skills is a supporting factor to the development of writing, whereas listening can also progress speaking fluency.

Although students seem to read and translate their reading passage easily, they are difficult to listen in English because they cannot catch on the native accent, intonation and tone etc. Most of the students are less pay attention to learn idiomatic language which may cause an unsuccessful interaction [12]. Therefore, they need to learn more and more to improve their listening skill. The more they listen to foreign language conversations and music, the more they get many benefits. When the teachers teach students to interest listening, they need to use greatly the prepared topics that interest them and a new approach

to teach. The following ideas are to use the effective learning or teaching listening skill for the teachers and students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Reasons for Listening

Listening is one of the main methods in learning other language for a very long time. It is the essential part of the four skills. Listening includes intonation, stress and pronunciation, tones of voices and accent of the speaker. Hence, only if students can listen to the foreign language first, they will know and translate it. Besides, students have to know why listening is important for them. Language teachers also make them understand and interest the importance of listening. There are many reasons to develop students' listening ability. Most of the students want to understand what people are saying to them in English especially face-to-face, CDs or other recorded media, on TV, in cinemas, or online. Nowadays, there are many educational sites from the internet where students can learn many listening lessons and download free materials.

Listening can improve the students' pronunciation. Thus the more they hear, the more they understand. And they can absorb appropriate pitch and intonation, stress and accent of the speaker. And Listening tests are also important to get good pronunciation, for example the more students listen, the better the spoken words they get. When they understand speech, they can speak and practise themselves. Indeed, the successful spoken communication depends not just on our ability to speak, but also on the effectiveness of the way we listen.

2.2. Types of Listening

There are different types of listening. Depending on the different situation, teachers can choose different types of listening they prefer for their lecture. In the language classroom, teachers can use the direct or bilingual, audio-lingual, interactive communicative language approaches etc. Besides, they can make students improve their listening abilities and gain valuable input through a combination of extensive and intensive listening.

2.2.1. Extensive Listening

Extensive listening refers to getting general understanding while listening to a conversation or a story we hear. Students can practise to improve their listening ability from their surroundings or a lot of material such as English language films with subtitles and songs with lyrics. They can learn accent of the native speaker watching movies and listening to music. If they hear the English dialogue in movies, the subtitles will help them understand and translate. To some extent they will absorb the language they hear and know the usage of spoken language.

2.2.2. Intensive Listening

Intensive listening refers to getting specific information from what we are listening to. It is different from extensive listening because students have to listen definitely in order to work on listening skills, and study the way in which English is spoken. It usually takes place in language classrooms or lab. If the teacher uses intensive listening method for the students, the students must pay attention to the lesson the teacher chose because they have to answer the specific information the teacher needs from the text for specific purpose such as finding name, address and number etc. In a teaching session, the teachers should consider what types of listening they want to use that need to be appropriate to their students' need and level. [4]

2.3. Preparing Listening Activities To Be Interested

The majority of the language teachers from Computer Universities use the functional materials that computer is connected with speaker boxes or earphones, and projector when they want their students to practise listening skills. Hence, they have to construct listening lessons. The basic plan on which the teachers can create a listening lesson that can be divided into three main stages: (1) pre-listening, (2) while listening and (3) post-listening.

2.3.1. Pre-listening

Pre-listening activities are anticipating for listening tasks before the students try to listen to any texts or listening lessons. Discussion, questions and answer session, true or false statements, learning vocabulary and prediction tasks are involved in these activities.

To do the task, the teachers set some time to the students for looking at the questions, before each listening section. Thus the students must use time the teacher set to look through the questions and find an idea of what they are going to be listening for and when it is a gap filling exercise within the allocated time. After that they can predict the types of thing they need to be listening for. Therefore, this will help them to develop their listening ability.

2.3.2. While-Listening

While-listening is to predict the specific information from their listening lessons while they are listening. There are many while-listening activities that students can do. Firstly, they need to focus their attention on the listening text while they are listening. And the teachers also guide them to get their understanding of it. In this session, the teachers need to observe students' comprehension for example whether they understand it or not. Most of the students are not sufficient in listening to a track for the first time. They can be nervous and cannot tune in the accents and the speed at which the people are speaking. If the students listen to a text for the second time, they will know more detailed understanding of it. But the teacher should not permit to listen on to each lesson repeatedly. At the third times, the students will check their own answers from the second task. By doing this, it will lead students towards some more subtle understanding of the text.

2.3.3. Post-listening

In post-listening activities, students can take advantages of the knowledge from what they have listened from the text into their existing knowledge. The students can gain the development of other skills such as speaking or writing [10]. Because in this activity, if the students listen to an interview with a famous sportsman about sports, for example, teacher can ask them to make discussion and present their point of views in class. And then, the teacher can check students' understanding and ask them to summarise the main points of the information they heard, this can be a verbal explanation or in writing.

2.4. Doing Homework with the Help of Multimedia

There are so many multimedia to teach or learn practical listening test and exercises especially YouTube and other educational sites from the Internet. If it is used gainfully, everything they want is priceless. Nowadays, students are more paying attention to mobile phone than the others. They use it to play game, listening music and spend their time using social media (Facebook) fruitlessly. All the teachers notice these facts so that they need to use some techniques or ways to lessen wasting students' study time. Thus, the teachers can give homework them using audio-lingual approach. They can use a question paper sheets and

audio CD track or mp3 concerning listening exercises. The students have to take audio listening test exercises teacher gives with their mobile phone as a homework task. By doing so, students must pay attention to their homework with their mobile phone instead of listening music. Nevertheless, listening music is also the best way to improve listening skill. If the students listen to English songs more and more, they will understand and absorb the foreign speakers' usages.

As every Computer University has language laboratory room, it is easy to practise and develop students' listening skill. Students are taught by audio CDs track as well as projector to enhance listening ability. Teachers can also give lecture and time answers to questions using effective videos such as Cambridge University press online class. Thus, the teacher has to make lecture notes including questions before the class. After listening to the audio or studying the video clips, the teacher can ask many questions what they heard or noticed in their lessons. And then the teacher needs to explain and correct for their wrong answers when their feedbacks are wrong. Using this situation the teacher can give homework and ask them to find and absorb the meaning of the words and which word is used in this condition etc. Students have to study the native speakers' accent, the usage of their language and phrases from their course book dialogues (CDs) and online class lessons. Therefore, they can learn not only listening and but also speaking.

2.5. Tackling The Students' Difficulties In The Language Classroom

Listening to a foreign language is a very difficult and challenging activity. It is not easy to understand the whole conversation when the students listen. When they entered the language lab room, they prepared to listen to the test best but they found that the situation was more complex than they expected when they faced with a long conversation. Hence the teacher should choose a short conversation such as telephone conversation or the inquiring information about something when the students listen to a text for the first time. After only that the teacher should teach them from the short conversation to the long conversation step by step.

It is very important that students should have thinking time between listening test one and two. The teacher needs to give them to take a break for 10 minutes and to consider their answers whether right or wrong between listening times. This gives them the chance not only to have a break from the listening, but also to check their understanding with their classmates and then review before listening again. If students are to get the greatest benefit from a listening then teachers need to replay the audio track two or more times. They will understand more than they heard before. As the researcher John Field suggested that students get far more benefit from a lot of listening than they do from a long pre- listening phase followed by only one or two exposures to the listening text [3].

3. METHODOLOGY

This research used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and questions and answers session to collect information. It intended to develop students' listening ability in their academic year. The mentioned ways above are very fruitful to gain the effective learning or teaching listening skill for the students as well as teachers.

3.1. Data Analysis

Data was collected from language teachers, total 5 of University of Computer Studies (Pang Long) in order to know about the improvement of listening skill of their students. And this study attempted to examine the listening problems of first year computer science and

technology students, total 80 were selected for the study. Data was gathered by means of questionnaires and interviews. Actually this activity may be the students' first experience in this university because they are first year students. In order to investigate the interview to the language teachers and the questionnaire to the students, the teachers' outlook and the students' difficulties concerning learning listening skill are found out.

3.2. Research Questions for the language teachers

This research was based on interview of language teachers who have over two years teaching experience with professional development approaches in their academic lives. The research designed to find out answers to the research questions as follows:

1. What are your students' attitudes towards listening test in English?
2. There are four main language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Which one do you think is the difficult to teach your students?
3. How many times do you make a listening test?
4. Do you think learning or teaching listening skills once a week is an enough time for your students?
5. Which methods or approaches did you use in your language classroom?
6. How do you handle when your students face with difficulty concerning listening skill?

3.3. Research Questions for the students

The aim of this research is investigating students' attitude on their listening ability. The first year students, total 80 were selected to answer the research questions at the University of Computer Studies (Pang Long). The research designed to find out answers to the research questions as follows:

1. There are four main language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Which one do you think is the most difficult for you? Why?
2. Did the listening activities help your listening skills? Which activities is the easiest for you?
3. What factors make you delay your learning listening skills?
4. Do you prefer listening lessons or studying video clips?
5. Do you think that some techniques taught before listening test can help you to understand more? Why?

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

In this paper, two research tools were used to investigate the research questions: survey questions for the students and the language teachers at the University of Computer Studies (Pang Long). The survey questions for the language teachers involved five optional questions and one Yes / No type of question. And the survey questions for the students consisted of four optional questions and one Yes / No type of question.

3.5. Analysis of Students Data

According to the answers from the teachers and students, conception of learning listening and needs were discovered. The first question of the survey for the students was

“There are four main language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Which one do you think is the most difficult for you? Why?” For this question, when the students were questioned on four skills, they assumed that listening is harder than the others. The 60 % of the students are weak in listening and 25% of the students chose speaking skill as the hardest. The 15 % of the students accepted that they are not sufficient in all. The breakdown of these percentages for the first question can be seen in Figures 1.

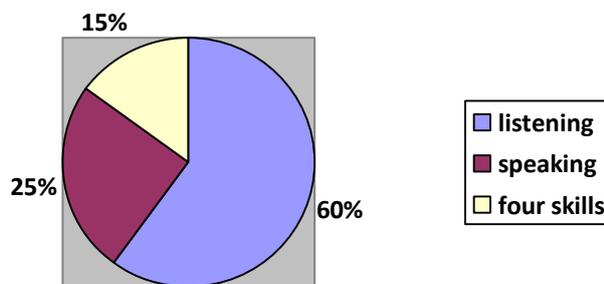


Figure 1: The Percentages of Students' Response

For the second question, “Did the listening activities help your listening skills? Which activities is the easiest for you? All the students (100%) accepted that listening tasks they did help them to develop their listening skills. When they did listening test in language lab, they preferred listening to a short telephone conversation. Because they can easily find the answers such as number, name, and address etc.

The third question of the survey for the students was “What factors make you delay your learning listening skills? For this question, 77% of the students answered that they are difficult to listen in English because they cannot catch on the native accent, intonation and tone. And they had no pre-existing knowledge about language learning. The 23% of students accepted that practising is the best experience for them. Thus, most of them attended English language classes to improve their language skills when they had free time. The breakdown of these percentages for the third question can be seen in Figures 2.

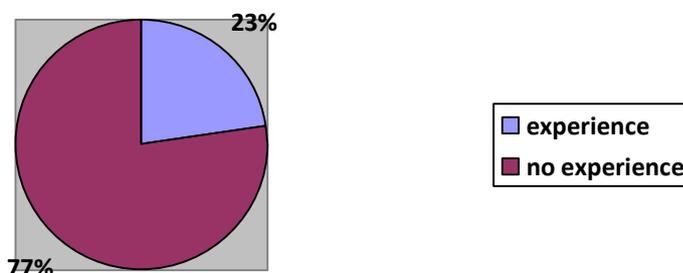


Figure 2 : The Percentages of Students' Response

For yes or no question, “*Do you prefer listening lessons or studying video clips?*” All students’ answer was the same. They prefer studying video clips to listening lessons. Because they can guess what they are talking about watching video clips. The last question was “*Do you think that some techniques taught before listening test can help you to understand more? Why?*” All the students (100%) accepted that some techniques taught before listening test can help them to understand more. Before they listened to the track, some techniques the teacher said that made them easy to find out their answers.

3.5. Analysis of Teachers Data

According to the language teachers’ feedbacks, conception of teaching listening and attitude toward their students’ listening ability were found out. The teacher acts as a facilitator of learning listening. For the first question of questionnaires for the teachers was “*What are your students’ attitudes towards listening test in English?*” The teacher assumed that they are not satisfied with their students. Although students could read and translate their reading passage easily, they were difficult to listen in English because of not knowing the native accent and not making practice to improve their skills. Thus, they need to fill the students’ needs. They also accepted that the listening tasks for the students are the most important thing in their academic life.

For the second question, “*There are four main language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Which one do you think is the difficult to teach your students?*” The experienced teachers assumed that listening is difficult to teach them. For the third question of the survey for the language teachers was “*How many times do you make a listening test?*” The teachers answered that students were always trained to develop their listening skill once a week and examined the listening task once a month in the language classroom. For this question, “*Do you think learning or teaching listening skills once a week is an enough time for your students?*” All the teachers (100%) accepted that it is not enough time once a week to improve students’ listening skills. The students need to practise more and more. Although the students seemed eager to learn the target language, they did not have much time to study it because of their specialised subjects.

For the fifth question, “*Which methods or approaches did you use in your language classroom?*” Every teacher owns their personal teaching style. It cannot be the same on each. Most of the language teachers used either direct or bilingual approach or interactive communicative approach in their language classroom. Sometimes they used the mentioned ways above depending on the situation. The teachers answered completely for the last question “*How do you handle when your students face with difficulty concerning listening skill?*” When the students listened to a track, they encountered many difficulties such as the native of accent, tone etc. Moreover, they would not guess the concept of meaning or what it means, if they encountered unknown words or long conversation in listening tests. After that they got nervous and bored during the lessons. The teachers also responded that if students did not catch on to the listening lessons, they could not answer comprehension questions and then they lost students’ interest. Therefore, the teachers had to explain them to understand it so that students could answer the questions independently.

3.6. Findings and Discussion

The findings were based on the questionnaire and interview about learning listening. The majority of students were more fearful listening to the test from their text than speaking in English. And they got difficulty to listen in English because they could not catch on the

native accent, intonation and tone etc. Thus, they need to practise more and more. Although the students were eager to listen to the test, some factors made them delay their learning listening skill. The language teachers always tried to get the students' interest using some useful techniques that are searched. Thus, the teacher should try to choose listening lessons that the students will find interesting and design tasks that will arouse students' concentration and curiosity. Nonetheless, only the students can make themselves improve listening as practicing is the best experience. The students preferred listening music to listening conversations in the classroom. When they listened to a long conversation such as interviews about something, they felt nervous and lost their interest and bored. Therefore, the teacher should teach them from the short conversation to the long conversation step by step. Besides, the teacher should use English songs to practise listening. And then, the teachers have to explain and discuss with them about songs. The teachers also need to explain the importance of listening in learning language, and advise them what kind of listening lessons they should do. The most important thing the teachers have to do is motivation. Only the teachers can motivate and persuade their students to work harder. Students should be trained to develop their listening skill at least twice a week and examined the listening task twice a month in the language classroom.

4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to concentrate on listening comprehension and the importance of listening skill in language classroom. It is one of the most important things for the Computer University students who learn IELTS course. If they go to other country for their further studies, firstly they will be assessed with four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). Thus, they need to learn not only receptive skills but also productive skills. There are so many effective ways and the functional materials that can make students improve listening skill. The more they practise, the more they get many benefits to improve their skill. The teachers also need to boost the students' confidence when they learn listening. As English language is not mother tongue for both the teachers and the students, they can face with many difficulties at the first time. But only if they use some functional techniques for their listening skill, they will become successful and efficient persons in listening.

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