



LISTENING SKILLS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: In the realm of language acquisition, listening skills play a fundamental role in the overall proficiency and communication abilities of learners. Mastering effective listening not only facilitates comprehension however enhances speaking, writing, and reading capabilities. This article delves into the significance of listening skills and explores their key characteristics in the context of language learning

Key words: listening skills, listening comprehension, visual aids , deep listening, active listening, passive listening

Introduction

Listening is a receptive skill that involves actively processing auditory stimuli to understand spoken language. It is a complex cognitive process that requires focus, attention, and interpretation. In language learning, developing proficient listening skills is essential for achieving fluency and communicative competence. Generally, listening is widely concerned as a crucial aspect of effective communication skills. Listeners must actively engage in attentive listening to enhance their abilities. When listening is approached consciously, it strengthens the communication bond between individuals. Acute listening is essential for grasping any language comprehensively. From the moment we are born, we begin listening and naturally acquire our mother tongue. Similarly, to foster strong connections with others, we must pay attention to their emotions and thoughts. It's important to reduce excessive listening to electronic devices and social media, and instead prioritize actively listening to the feelings and perspectives of our fellow human beings. Developing strong listening skills builds rapport and promotes understanding by connecting with others emotionally. Regularly practicing active listening enables individuals to contribute information, generate new ideas, and solve problems effectively. Overall, it facilitates better communication and helps overcome language and interpersonal barriers in life.

Literature review

To begin with, it is important to clarify the concept of listening. Glenn (1989, as cited in Purdy and Borisoff, 1997), there are more than 50 different approaches



and definitions of listening. This diversity of definitions indicates that despite the frequent use of the term in literature, there remains no consensus on its exact definition. For instance, Purdy & Borisoff (1997, p. 8) define listening in their publication "Listening in Everyday Life: A Personal and Professional Approach" as follows: "Listening is the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal) needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings. This definition is derived from a set of steps that an effective listener should adhere to while listening (Purdy, 1997). These steps include recognizing the need to listen, maintaining focused attention, being present in the moment to perceive the message, interpreting the meaning, attempting to remember key information, providing a response, and considering the relational context among participants during the listening process. Both the definition and the list of components emphasize the importance of each step involved in listening and highlight the complexity of this skill. Lindsay & Knight (2006) explain that listening, though receptive, requires active participation from the listener, involving reactions and some control over the material being heard. Sharma (2018) identifies participatory and non-participatory listening types, where participatory listening involves interaction, while non-participatory listening remains passive. Developing listening skills is crucial for both native and foreign language acquisition. Harmer (2015) suggests that listening skills acquired in one's mother tongue can be transferred to foreign language learning, although listening in a foreign language presents unique challenges not encountered in the mother tongue, making it a challenging skill for language learners to master.

It is undeniable that teaching listening requires more effort from the teacher compared to the learner. A key principle is that visual display of material is not necessary initially. Effective listening lessons involve activities before and after the main listening task to enhance comprehension and application. Permatasari (2013) and Brown (2007) stated that teachers should adhere following specific principles:

- Emphasize listening at the beginning stages of English instruction to familiarize students with the listening process.
- Use relevant learning materials that reflect real-life situations to highlight the importance of the content.
- Incorporate authentic language in listening exercises to challenge students and improve understanding.



- Diversify listening materials in terms of speakers' characteristics (gender, age, dialect, accent), topic, speed, noise level, and genre to maintain student interest and facilitate quick content capture.
- Regularly assess students' comprehension of listening tasks to reinforce their listening skills.
- Introduce language materials for listening comprehension without prior visual presentation, ensuring students engage with audio first

Due to these principles, teachers can effectively guide students in developing their listening skills. Additionally, teachers should always prompt students to listen with specific objectives in mind, helping them become more purposeful listeners.

Methodology

Obviously, developing listening skills requires a multifaceted approach that integrates various methodologies and techniques. The following methodologies are effective for developing and refining listening abilities in language learners:

Authentic listening materials: Utilizing authentic audio materials, such as podcasts, news broadcasts, and interviews, exposes learners to real-life language contexts. By engaging with authentic materials, students encounter varied accents, speech rates, and vocabulary usage, thereby improving comprehension and adaptation to natural language nuances

Listening comprehension exercises: Structured listening exercises, including dictation, gap-filling activities, and comprehension questions, serve as valuable tools for reinforcing listening skills and assessing comprehension proficiency. These exercises encourage focused listening, enabling students to develop critical listening strategies essential for effective language processing.

Interactive listening activities: Incorporating interactive activities like role-plays, debates, and discussions fosters active listener participation. These activities promote meaningful communication and enhance students' ability to respond adeptly to spoken language cues, encouraging language engagement beyond passive reception.

Language learning apps and tools: Leveraging technology through language learning apps and online platforms offers dynamic listening exercises, audio lessons, and pronunciation practice. These digital resources provide personalized learning experiences tailored to individual needs, facilitating self-paced listening practice and reinforcing comprehension skills.

Focused listening practice: Encouraging focused listening practices such as shadowing (repeating sentences immediately after hearing them) and intensive



listening (listening for specific information) enhances concentration and improves listening accuracy. By honing these skills, students refine their ability to discern and process spoken language nuances effectively. Incorporating these academic methodologies into language learning curricula empowers students to navigate diverse listening challenges, ultimately contributing to their overall linguistic proficiency and communicative competence. The integration of these strategies fosters active engagement with spoken language and cultivates essential listening skills vital for language acquisition and proficiency attainment.

Listening skills encompass a variety of listening types:

- Active listening- Actively engaging in listening leads to optimal knowledge acquisition. Active participation encourages response, discussion, and feedback, which in turn motivates both the speaker and listener to discern effective presentation techniques. Attitude, attention, and adaptability are key in active listening, often described by the "triple A's" – attitude, attention, and adjustment.

- Passive listening- Passive listening is characterized by one-way communication where the listener receives information without active engagement or participation. In today's digital age, many individuals exhibit passive listening behaviors during activities like watching TV, listening to radio broadcasts, or attending lectures without active interaction

- Deep listening- Deep listening requires focused attention to both verbal and non-verbal cues to fully comprehend the underlying message. It involves tuning into the speaker's emotions, intentions, and subtle nuances, which can lead to a deeper understanding of complex topics

- Absolute listening- Absolute listening refers to concentrated listening in a distraction-free environment, such as a classroom or lecture hall.

- Critical listening- Critical listening involves analyzing and evaluating the content, context, and credibility of the information presented. It requires listening carefully to assess the validity, logic, and effectiveness of the speaker's message

- Therapeutic listening- Therapeutic listening emphasizes creating a supportive and empathetic environment through attentive listening. It fosters emotional connection and problem-solving among individuals seeking mutual understanding

- Broad-spectrum listening- Broad-spectrum listening enhances overall understanding by encompassing various listening approaches and skills. It enables individuals to comprehend diverse perspectives and provide insightful feedback



- Focused listening - The listeners must engage with deep and genuine attention to the content they are listening to. By focusing intently, they can discern the inner emotions conveyed by the speaker. This heightened awareness allows them to offer optimal comfort and support to others, contributing to a more content and fulfilled life.

Each type of listening plays a distinct role in effective communication and contributes to the development of essential interpersonal skills. Practicing these listening skills can lead to improved relationships, enhanced learning outcomes, and increased empathy in various personal and professional contexts.

Results

Listening offers significant advantages to those who actively engage in it. Good attitudes among listeners garner respect and contribute to heightened self-esteem and confidence. Actively listening enables individuals to acquire substantial information and fosters the development of stronger relationships. Moreover, listening skills not only aid in language development but also promote overall life improvement. They are essential life skills that contribute to effective decision-making, problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, communication, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, assertiveness, emotional balance, and stress management. A proficient listener not only hears words but also discerns unspoken messages. Failing to listen impedes empathy and understanding, leading to misunderstandings and ineffective decisions. Passive listening can breed narrow-mindedness and arrogance, contributing to societal discord. In summary, embracing listening as a means to learn and enrich life is crucial. A skilled communicator benefits greatly from being a proficient listener. Ultimately, being an adept listener is key to thriving in the world. By actively listening to others, we provide comfort and endurance in life. The motto "If you listen, you will glisten" encapsulates the transformative power of listening.

Discussion

In terms of developing listening comprehension of learners, teachers should develop effective strategies. Hamouda (2013) suggests several helpful ideas:

- Adapting and Improving Listening Skills: Provide students with key vocabulary before listening to help activate their understanding. Encourage students to guess word meanings from context before explanations.
- Using Different Input: Expose learners to various listening sources like lectures, radio news, films, and songs to broaden their exposure.



- Using Visual Aids: Employ visuals related to listening topics to aid students in active imagination and comprehension, especially useful for overcoming vocabulary challenges.
- Accents: Introduce students to different native accents to prepare them for real-world listening experiences.
- Pronunciation: Assist students in mastering native speaker pronunciation to enhance their listening comprehension.
- Connected Speech: Educate students about features like weak forms and contractions in spoken language to reduce confusion in authentic listening contexts.
- Activating Prior Knowledge: Encourage students to discuss their existing knowledge related to the listening material to enhance comprehension and prediction.
- Arousing Interest: Foster student interest by relating listening content to their lives, creating a conducive listening environment.
- Encouraging Prediction: Prompt students to predict content and language features before listening to boost confidence and readiness.
- Using a Slow Speech Rate: Teachers should moderate their speech rate to facilitate comprehension for learners.
- Gathering Feedback: Continuously seek and provide feedback to bridge understanding gaps and improve listening skills.
- Improving Learning Environment: Enhance listening laboratories and resources to motivate students and provide equal learning opportunities.

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be clearly seen that effective listening is not merely the passive reception of sound but a complex and dynamic cognitive process. Mastering diverse listening skills, namely active, passive, deep, absolute, critical, therapeutic, broad-spectrum, and focused listening, is vital for language acquisition and proficiency. Each type of listening offers unique benefits and challenges, contributing to enhanced comprehension, communication abilities, and interpersonal relationships. With the help of authentic listening materials, structured exercises, interactive activities, and digital tools, language learners can develop and refine their listening abilities in real-life contexts. These methodologies promote engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking skills essential for effective language processing. The multifaceted nature of listening skills underscores their significance in language learning and overall communicative competence. By integrating these



diverse listening strategies into language curricula, educators can empower students to navigate linguistic challenges and foster meaningful engagement with spoken language. Ultimately, mastering listening skills enhances language proficiency and promotes effective communication in both personal and professional settings, facilitating cultural understanding and global communication.

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