

# Teaching Listening Skills to English as a Foreign Language Students through Effective Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to teach listening so that EFL learners can develop a level of listening ability that is useful in the real world, not just in the classroom. It asserts that if teachers know the processes involved in listening comprehension and some feature of spoken English, it can provide students with appropriate advice and effective listening practice. Conversation will take place when we can understand what speaker says. Listening is an important input. EFL students who are learning English face problems in listening due to anxiety and lack of strategies to deal with listening. This paper is intended to reduce listening difficulties and improve their listening skill effectively for EFL learning through effective strategies and skills. In this paper, some effective listening strategies, skills and the use of new techniques are presented. The main aim of this study is that it can be helpful to share and teach listening strategies to EFL learners as it can give more confidence to try new ways to enhance their listening skill.

**Key Words:** English as a Foreign Language, Listening, Skill, effective, Strategies

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## I. INTRODUCTION:

Listening is an important skill for the person who is learning English because in verbal communication we cannot communicate with each other without listening to the speaker's utterances and understanding them. In addition, everyone wants to listen to what English speakers are saying at a natural speed and understand it. Everyone wishes to understand English films, TV programs, music, and announcements. In other words, the purpose of learning English is to communicate in the real world. However, listening is a very demanding and challenging skill for the learners to master. In this paper, I would like to discuss teaching methods in which the process of listening is emphasized, and skills and strategies for effective listening are fostered. I will explain the English teaching situation in EFL class and point out some problems in terms of teaching listening. Moreover, I will discuss the listening process for comprehension which teachers should know in order to teach listening effectively. EFL students have difficulties in tackling.

Researchers have found that learners need to use learning strategies and skills effectively to understand the aural information. These strategies are usually developed in order to help students in different academic areas. It is claimed that by using instructional techniques as one of the most effective solutions for learners who are dealing with some learning difficulties, strategy instruction is a good answer and often vital to students' success (Beckman, 2002; Reid & Lienemann, 2006). Concerning with listening skill, EFL

learners know the different types of listening support to develop listening skill. The teachers need to encourage the students to practise by using the effective strategies mentioned in this research.

## II. LITERATUREREVIEW

Listening, together with speaking, reading and writing is one of the four skills in language learning. Undeniably, listening is very important—we have to listen to many spoken words in everyday life; conversations will take place only when we can understand what our conversation partner says; although input (listening and reading) alone is not sufficient for acquisition, input is absolutely necessary for EFL learning. Though my students have been having listening lessons for years, I find that their listening abilities are poor. Listening is the most important and fundamental of the four skills in language learning although these skills are least stressed skills in the classroom. In general, the weakness of students' emphasis and the time limitation lead the students to be late in developing these skills.

Learners can find various kinds of difficulties in learning English, just as they do in their native language. Learners will gain benefits from different learning strategies and skills. After making practice and use, the students will know how and when to use learning strategies to tackle their language problems. So, to develop the listening skill, the right guidance should be given to the students.

### A. Nature of Listening

Listening is the cognitive process whereby we attach meanings to aural signals. It is the active intellectual of decoding, understanding, interpreting and evaluating messages. It is a particular way of communication just as important as the others like speaking, reading, and writing. Today's world is changing into global village and where communication is highly developed, the need to improve our listening power is high.

When we listen, we focus on importance to what we recognize and what we want to hear. In other words, we select what information is important to listen to, in order to be able to understand the message someone is giving us in order to respond (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002). According to Rivers (1981), listening is a creative skill. Lindsay and Knight (2006) claim that people have different purposes when they listen. To learn a new language, for instance, it is important to define what listening purpose learners have - listening for specific details, listening for general meaning or idea - to help learners organize their thoughts and use intelligent guessing to ensure learners meet their listening purpose.

Listening is the major skill that enables learners to use their other skills. If a learner is able to understand what they hear they won't have problems in speaking. Listening is necessary because of providing input for the learner. Furthermore, if learners do not comprehend the input they receive, the learning process simply cannot begin. Language learning depends on listening.

### B. Listening process

According to Rubin (1995), "for EFL learners, listening is the skill that makes the heaviest processing demands because learners must store information in short term memory at the same time as they are working to understand the information". Furthermore, as she explains, "Whereas in reading learners can go over the text at leisure, they generally don't have the opportunity to do so in listening). According to O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989), "listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constitutes meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge.... It is clear that we cannot see and observe the cognitive process of listening. However, understanding the listening process can help us to reconsider the methods of teaching listening. For this purpose, there are two key components for clarifying the listening process: bottom-up and top-down processing. Listening is an active process for constructing meaning in which two kinds of processes are: bottom-up and top-down processing. According to Richards (1990), these two are as follows:

**1. Bottom-up processing:** Bottom-up processing helps students recognize lexical and pronunciation features to understand the text. Because of their direct focus on language forms at the word and sentence levels, bottom-up exercises are particularly beneficial for students who need to expand their language repertoire. As they become more aware of linguistic features of the input, the speed and accuracy of perceiving and processing aural input will increase. To develop bottom-up processing, students could be asked to: distinguish individual sounds, word boundaries, and, stressed syllables, identify grammatical forms and

functions, recognize contractions and connected speech, recognize linking words.

**2. Top-down processing:** Top-down processing relies on prior knowledge and experience to build the meaning of a listening text using the information provided by sounds and words. To arrive at a meaning of a text, the listener draws on her knowledge of the context topic, speakers, situation, and matching it to the aural input. Top-down listening skills include: listening for gist, main ideas, topic, and setting of the text, listening for specific information, sequencing the information, prediction, guessing, inferencing.

### C. Identifying Different Types of Listening

There are seven main types of listening. They are selective listening, intensive listening, interactive listening, discriminative listening, listening for comprehension, critical listening and appreciative listening. Each type helps students to enhance a range of skills and strategies.

**1. Selective listening:** It means the informational input to tasks which aims to help students derive specific information from texts, even when the texts themselves are well beyond the student's current level of linguistic and content knowledge.

**2. Intensive listening:** It is the formal input to tasks which aims at focusing learner's attention on features of the language system once text meaning has been established to some content.

**3. Interactive listening:** It refers to developing appropriate responses and focuses on helping listeners develop awareness of differences in cultural styles of listener feedback, and options for providing such feedback. Awareness of listener options and strategies can increase the learners' effectiveness and ease in participating in collaborative discourses.

**4. Discriminative listening:** It serves as the base for all other purposes of listening behaviors and indicates distinguishing behaviors for the auditory and for identifying the auditory and the visual messages.

**5. Listening for comprehension:** It is relevant to the understanding of the information with avoiding critical judgment to the message through assigning the meaning intended by a speaker instead of assigning his/her own meaning.

**6. Critical listening:** It is identified as evaluating what is being said and discriminating and comprehending the message to form judgment about the message in order to accept or reject the persuasive appeals.

**7. Appreciative listening:** It is to enjoy or gain a sensory impression from the material

### D. Effective Teaching Listening Strategies

Language learning depends on listening. Listening provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken language. Instructors guide learners how they can adapt their listening behavior to deal with a variety of situations, types of input, and listening purposes. Listening strategies can be classified as follows: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, socio-affective strategies.

### 1. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are problem-solving techniques that learners use to handle the learning tasks and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge or skill (Derry & Murphy, 1986). Cognitive strategies are related to a learning task and involve direct manipulation or transformation of the learning materials (Brown and Palincsar, 1982; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Language learners use cognitive strategies to help them process, store and recall new information. Among the cognitive strategies, four strategies will be analyzed as follows:

The first cognitive strategy is used when the listeners are trying to comprehend the input task without translating. This strategy, therefore, directs the listener's attention to the meaning and structure of the target language.

The second cognitive strategy is focusing on the main words to understand the new words. The listener creates meaning by using his/ her knowledge of words from the target language to sentences. This strategy is very useful, especially for beginning listeners, who rely on their small vocabulary repertoire to build their comprehension.

The third cognitive strategy is depending on the main idea to comprehend the whole text. This strategy helps the listeners locate the theme first and details later on. One of the techniques that this strategy involves is skimming. The learner who uses this strategy locates the main idea quickly and understands the aural language input very rapidly. The fourth cognitive strategy is guessing the meaning by relying on any clues (contextual or linguistic). Listeners use this strategy when they do not know all the words, or they do not understand the overall meaning of the sentence. Both native and non-native speakers use this strategy either when they have not listened well enough or when the meaning is not clear.

### 2. Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies are management techniques employed by learners to have control over their learning through planning, monitoring, evaluating, and modifying (Rubin, 1987). For example, for metacognitive planning strategies, listeners would clarify the objectives of an anticipated listening activity and attend to particular aspects of the aural language input or situational details that facilitate the comprehension of aural input.

According to Oxford (1990), the conscious use of metacognitive strategies helps learners get back their focus when they lose it. However, learners do not use metacognitive strategies very frequently despite the importance of self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Baker and Brown (1984) identified two types of metacognitive ability: knowledge of cognition (i.e., knowing what) and regulation of cognition (i.e., knowing how). The first type is concerned with the learners' awareness of what is going on, and the second type relates to what learners should do to listen effectively. Empirical studies have found that an important distinction between skilled and less skilled EFL listeners lies in their use of metacognitive strategies (e.g., Bacon, 1992; Goh, 1998, 2000; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Vandergrift, 1998, 2003). According to O'Malley et al. (1989), skilled listeners use more repair strategies redirect their attention back to the task when there is a comprehension

breakdown, whereas less skilled listeners give up and stop listening. Vandergrift (2003) found that skilled listeners used twice as many metacognitive strategies as their less-skilled counterparts. Among the metacognitive strategies, two strategies will be analyzed here. Focusing on what the speaker is saying is a strategy that enables the listener to focus on the speaker's message without being distracted by any distractors.

This strategy is very useful in participating in the classroom, watching TV, listening to the radio, or talking to other people. The second metacognitive strategy is deciding in advance what to pay attention to. Listeners employ selective attention as a technique to facilitate the comprehension process. For example, some listeners choose to focus on pronunciation and accents as a way to understand the spoken language with different accents. However, focusing too much on accents can have a negative impact on comprehension because it can be a distracter, leading to misunderstanding.

### 3. Socio-affective Strategies

The last category of strategies is socio-affective, which includes the attempts to create and promote positive emotional reactions and attitudes towards language learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987). Vandergrift (2003) defined socio-affective strategies as the techniques, listeners employ to collaborate with others, to verify understanding, or to lower anxiety. According to Gardner & MacIntyre (1992, 1993), the affective strategies used to control learning experiences are very important because the learning context and learners' social-psychological factors (i.e., how learners feel about the learning are directly related. Aneiro (1989) found a significant correlation between low anxiety and high listening performance, which suggests that using affective strategies could facilitate and enhance listening. O'Malley & Chamot (1987) found that among the four strategies of management, cognitive strategies, social strategies, affective strategies in listening comprehension, social and affective strategies influenced the learning context immediately.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study is carried out with two groups. The experimental group received effective skill, strategies and new techniques of listening and control group received regular instructions. The materials which are used are "English Unlimited B1 Pre-intermediate Coursebook" and other useful materials. These materials covered skills and strategies. The students of each group produce pre-test and post-test. Students studied with their teaching method which they are given. After each group had done their test, they were asked to answer the questionnaires. After that, students were interviewed. This interview provides data.

### A. Participants

The participants consisted of 100 students studying in the second year at University of Technology (Thanlyin) in 2018-2019 academic year. The number of participants are 35 Electronic Engineering students, 35 Mechatronic Engineering students and 30 Civil Engineering students. They have been studying English since primary school. The questionnaire consisted of 7 questions and it was given to all students in order to know their opinions. Then, survey approach was carried out as classroom observation while students were learning listening skill.

## B. Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and survey period took place from December 2018 to September 2019. All students answered all questions. These answers were expressed by using table. There are 7 questions which are given to intermediate level students in order to know the students' opinions. The questions are as follows:

1. I like listening to English.
2. My listening ability improved as a result of this class.
3. My listening ability improves as a result of listening materials (video, worksheet, power points, text books, Bluetooth speaker, etc.) used in this class.
4. Choosing or writing answers in textbooks helps my listening ability.
5. My listening ability improved as a result of listening practices and activities in class.
6. Listening strategies and skills are important in English classes.
7. The listening strategy and skill training in this class helped to improve my English listening ability.

**Table I Results of questionnaire distribute to students and percent of their data**

No	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
1	I like listening to English.	95%	3%	2%
2	My listening ability improved as a result of this class.	90 %	10 %	0%
3	My listening ability improves as a result of listening materials (video, worksheet, power points, text books, Bluetooth speaker, etc.) used in this class.	92%	8%	0%
4	Choosing or writing answers in textbooks helps my listening ability.	95%	5%	0%
5	My listening ability improved as a result of listening practices and activities in class.	93%	7%	0%
6	Listening strategies and skills are important in English classes.	92%	5%	3%
7	The listening strategy and skill training in this class helped to improve my English listening ability.	93%	7%	0%

And, I searched the effective ideas to develop the listening skills, concerning with what type of strategies and activities should be effectively used, based on the students' questionnaires. Moreover, the teacher needs to explain how to handle listening strategies and techniques and to help students improving their listening skill.

## IV. FINDINGS

According to survey, the listening is one of important skills which are needed for EFL learners at intermediate level. However, the students have been studying these skills, and they still face with the difficulties in listening. According to response, they think that some students are fair in the listening skill and most are weak in it. It is noticed that they need to teach the effective approaches to improving the students' listening skill.

According to the data collected from the survey, over 90 percent of students gave the some response like this. They are admitted that they liked listening to English and their listening ability improved as a result of their teachers' class. They thought that their listening ability improved as a result of listening materials (vedio, worksheet, power points, textbooks, Bluetooth speaker, etc) used in their class. They also confirmed that choosing or writing answer in textbooks helped their listening ability .They accepted that their listening ability improved as a result of listening practices and activities in class. They described that listening strategies and skills are important in English classes and the listening strategy and skill training in their class helped to improve their listening ability. To sum up, the teacher should encourage and help them become an effective communicator with listening strategies and new techniques. And students should be trained to improve their listening skill by giving listening practice a lot and strategies and new techniques. By doing so, students' listening skill will develop in some way.

## V. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research paper hopes that using strategies and new techniques for developing the listening skill to tackle various kinds of texts both inside and outside the class will have been successful in listening class. Learning to develop the listening skill intended to help students to be more fluent and to create more effective learning environment. The teachers need to practice the students by using effective strategies and activities. Moreover, the teachers need to help the students to become good communicators as they are not in habits of listening in English in their own. This research advises that the students can have self-confidence in understanding themselves and can enhance their listening skills accurately and fluently by training them systematically in class.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research paper is to improve students' listening ability which will be useful in the real world, not only in the classroom. It is believed that if teachers know the process involved in listening comprehension, they can give students with appropriate advice and effective listening practice. Students should try to make the practice more and more while learning the lessons. They should also speak and listen to as much English as they can. It is sure that this paper can provide the students to improve listening skills. Thus, it is hoped that after applying the listening strategies and new techniques, the students' listening skill will develop. To sum up, the students will be fluent in listening skills by studying this research paper.

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