

EFFECTIVE WAYS IN LISTENING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

We cannot deny that listening has great portion quantitatively in every communication activity but gets bad result qualitatively. Listening skill should be learned and practiced. There are some sequences of listening, namely: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities. Sample practices of listening that can be tried and demonstrated are divided into some effective activities: developing cognitive strategies (listening for main idea: *listening task for narrated stories*, listening for details: *content listening cloze exercise*, and predicting: *paired storytelling*), developing listening with other skills (listening and speaking: *picture storytelling*, listening and pronunciation: *whispers*, and listening and vocabulary: *what's this film about*), listening to authentic material (*fast speech dictation*), using technology (*news items*), listening for academic purposes (*famous people*), and listening for fun (*scrambled song*).

Keywords: effective, listening skill, listening activities

A. Introduction

Education aims to build the students to have their knowledge, skills and positive attitude. A process of education and its learning can be effectively successful if the students totally change it into a better one. In process of language learning education, there should be a better improvement in some skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. The four language skills components are concerned one another and all should be learned by students who want to study a language. In a word, the students are called that they are competent when they master all of the four language skill components.

Listening plays an important role in the lives of people to be learned. It is the most basic and not only the first language arts skills developed but also the skill most frequently used in both the classroom and daily life. In the communication process, it is very important to do it first as not only for getting some advantages but also taking great space in communication. Some researchers have shown that more than 50% of the communication activity is listening. Alder in De Vito (2001) notes that the great place of listening composition 53%, 14% for writing, 16% for speaking and 17% for reading. De Vito (2001) gives his comparative description of listening activity that has been done both of the adults and students. It can be concluded that the adult have spent 45% for listening, 30% for speaking, 16% for reading and 9% for writing and the students spent 53% for listening, 17% for reading, 16% for speaking, and 14% for writing.

We cannot deny that listening has great portion quantitatively in every communication activity but gets bad result qualitatively and is not effectively successful. Listening skill should be learned and practiced. Some people think that it likes human breath naturally.

We do not need to learn, but we cannot get and do it without practicing. This will be understandable, if we pay fully attention to some students that ignore to do some practices then other language components. This condition is ironic when the fact says that 50% of human communication is totally for listening. Furthermore, the students need lots of practices to improve their listening skill.

B. Discussion

This article will discuss further about the difficulties of listening, the characteristics of effective listening, the sequences of listening activities, and some effective ways in listening learning.

1. Why is Listening Difficult?

Listening is considered as a difficult skill. Wilson (2007) groups the difficulties of listening into four general categories: the characteristics of message, delivery, listener, and environment.

a. Message

Some latest products of technology at a software company have fewer problems (for computers and people) involved in listening to connected speech. Other difficulties of message also include to unknown words, lexical density (short spaces of time between content words, forcing the listener to concentrate harder) and complex grammatical structures. Non-linguistic characteristics of the message include familiarity of the topic, text type, and cultural accessibility.

b. Delivery

Mode of delivery is a vital factor. It may be helpful to distinguish between reciprocal and nonreciprocal listening. Reciprocal listening

involves interaction between two or more people (conversation). Nonreciprocal listening describes a situation in which the listener has no opportunity to contribute to a dialogue, for example while watching television or listening to the radio. The listener has no influence over factors such as the speed at which the speaker talks, the vocabulary and grammar used, and no recourse to asking for repetition of a word if the speaker's pronunciation renders it incomprehensible. For all of the above reasons, nonreciprocal listening usually regarded as more difficult than reciprocal listening. Other characteristics of delivery include organisation (do the speakers ramble on, jumping from topic to topic), duration, and number of speakers (the more speakers, the more difficult it is to follow the conversation).

c. Listener

Some students get side tracked easily and simply lack the abilities to sustain concentration and have problems motivating themselves to listen. According to multiple intelligences theory, people possess different 'intelligences' such as: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. Besides the students' individual dispositions, there are the age factors (young learners and older learners). Some of these differences may include shorter attention spans, fewer cognitive abilities, difficulties concentrating on disembodied voices and the importance of visual stimuli and music for young learners. Whereas, the older learner, sometimes have difficulties with listening due primarily to physiological factors. These might include declining abilities in hearing in general or problems with short-term memory. Some

temporary characteristics might include anxiety (for example: in test conditions), tiredness, boredom or the listener having a cold (blocked sinuses affect the aural system).

d. Environment

Environmental conditions which may affect listening performances include the temperature of the room (hot rooms induce sleep), background noise (heavy traffic, for example) or defective equipment which affects the clarity of a recording. And also related to memory is the process of activating the listener's prior knowledge, a technique that can help to reduce the memory load. We describe this process as activating schemata (a mental mode based on a typical situation).

2. The Characteristics of Effective Listening

We might define the important characteristics of effective listening as good listeners as those with sensitivity to context, language and nuance, who do not view listening as the pause before they talk. According to Robert Conklin in Wilson (2007), in face-to-face conversation, they may do some or all things, such as: use attentive body language – for example nodding frequently, look the speaker in the eye, use expressions to show they are paying attention, ask questions if they do not understand something, try to predict what the speaker is going to say next and note the meaning of silences. Good listeners also become aware of irony and other tones of voice. They listen between the words rather than taking every utterance at face value, and recognise shifts in intonation (the way the voice pitch rises and falls). Good listeners are strategic, they are organised, and they have a plan to achieve the task.

3. The Sequences of Listening Activities

Listening sequences should usually be divided into three parts, namely: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening.

a. Pre-Listening Activity

It helps the students to prepare for what they are going to hear, and this gives them a greater chance of success in any given task. The stages are activating schemata and setting up a reason. Activating schemata is to help students to predict the content of the listening passage, continued by setting up a reason to listen. There is misinformation gap that needs to be filled or an opinion gap or pre-set questions, or perhaps the students have asked questions based on things they would hope to hear.

b. While-Listening Activity

The ideal input of the students when hearing is only once. Some activities explain in some points, such as: listening for gist (listen and grasp for the gist-the main idea), listening for detail (highlight the need to listen for details in specific situation), inferring (make deductions by going beyond what is actually stated), participating actively (active participation might include transferring what is heard from one medium to another using skill such as drawing, or tracing a route on a map). The similar activities like listen and describe, interrupted storytelling, truth or lie and information transfer), note-taking (pick out the important points in a talk or lecture because they cannot write down everything they hear), dictation (dictating material to be recorded or taken down in writing), listen and do (listen, understand, command and do to what have been listened).

c. Post-Listening Activity

There are some post-listening activities such as: reflecting (ensure a successful process and as much as a successful product and reflect on their listening experience without the pressure of having to process real-time speech or do a task), checking and summarising (give the students confidence and bring out any conflicting interpretations of the input), discussion (students feel motivated to listen because they see their own idea and situations reflected in the input, and hear views that confirm or challenge their own), creative responses (give students an opportunity to develop their creative thinking and expression in response to the study of a particular piece of literature), critical responses (an awareness of the speaker's viewpoint, biases and prejudices and provide a thorough explanation of your understanding of an essay or story), information exchange (communicative activities for two or more students and great way of combining content and language teaching effectively and providing an opportunity for purposeful communication with students), problem solving (pose a problem and use a listening passage to help solve it), deconstructing the listening text (examine listening texts for their salient features – grammar, vocabulary, cohesive devices, discourse markers, pronunciation – to a certain extent we need to pull them apart), and reconstructing the listening text (reconstruct the text by dealing with many aspects of language: grammar, vocabulary and discourse features of spoken English).

4. Some Effective Ways in Learning Listening

This part focuses on effective ways that could be done by the students to improve their listening

skills in some activities. Nunan (2002) says that there are some new ways as follows:

a. Developing Cognitive Strategies

It includes listening for the main idea, listening for detailed, and predicting

1) Listening for the Main Idea

The example is “Listening Task for Narrated Stories”, which follows the procedure below:

- a) Select an interesting listening passage and write key words and phrases on pieces of card. Make enough sets of cards for groups of three.
- b) Pre-teach the new vocabulary that appears on the cards.
- c) Tell students that they are going to listen to a story and those key words and phrases from the story are on the cards. Distribute sets to groups of three.
- d) In groups, have students sequence the cards to make the skeleton of a story. Ask a spokesperson from each group to tell the story to the rest of the class.
- e) Play the story to the students, who recorded correctly and ask whether any group had the correct order before listening to the story from the tape.

2) Listening for Detailed

The example is “Content Listening Cloze Exercise”, which follows the procedure below:

- a) Select or write a passage and delete some content, or information, words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and, in some

cases, adverbs). The passage length and number of deletions are determined by the proficiency level:

Proficiency level	Approximate Word Count	Number of Deletions
Beginning	50-65	8-12
Intermediate	75-90	14-16
Advanced	100-120	18-20

- b) Place the cloze passage face down on each student's desk. Permit no note-taking during listening. Explain the topic of the passage, if necessary.
 - c) Read the passage at normal speed two times and tell the students to turn the paper over and complete the passage by writing one word in each blank space. Allow about 10 minutes for completion.
 - d) Elicit answers from the students, writing all acceptable responses on the board or overhead projector. Self-checking and discussion provide valuable immediate feedback.
- 3) Predicting
- The example is "Paired Storytelling", which follows the procedure below:
- a) Pair off students and provide a general introduction to the topic.
 - b) Divide the taped story or dialogue into two segments. Give the first half to one student in each pair and the second half to the other one. They will then listen to

their own story segments without taking any notes.

- c) Have the students listen to the same segments for the second time and jot down the key concepts found in the sections. Each student is to list the key words/phrases in the order in which they appear in the text.
- d) Have the students in the pair exchange their lists. Give them a few moments to reflect on the list of clues and relate them to the story part they have heard.
- e) Have each student develop and write his own version of the story's missing part. The student who has listened to the first half tries to predict what will happen next by recalling the part she has listened to, using the clues about the other part, and continuing to develop the story. The one who has listened to the latter part guesses what has happened before.
- f) When they have finished, have the students read their own versions to each other.
- g) Let everybody listen to the other tape segment and ask them to compare it with their own stories.
- h) Conclude with a discussion of the whole story. Either in pairs or with the whole class.

b. Developing Listening with other Skills

It covers listening and speaking, listening and pronunciation, as well as listening and vocabulary.

1) Listening and Speaking

The example is “Picture Storytelling”, which follows the procedure below:

- a) Affix the pictures or photographs to the board. Make sure that all the students can see what the pictures are about.
- b) Elicit some relevant vocabulary about the pictures from the students. For people you must ask, “What does she look like?” “What kind of person is she?” “What’s her job?” “What’s hobbies does she have?” For buildings you must ask, “What kind of building is this?” “Who works in it?” “How could you describe it?”
- c) Form the students into groups of four or five. Have them create a story together using the pictures for ideas. They should not write anything down but create the story orally. Have the students practice telling the story to each other until they feel that they know it well.
- d) Re-form the students into different groups so that one student from each of the old groups is in the new group. Inform the students that they have to retell their stories to each other.
- e) Take a vote to find out which story the students liked the most and why.

2) Listening and Pronunciation

The example is “Whispers”, which follows the procedure below:

- a) Arrange the students into rows of 8-10 students.

- b) Whisper a word, phrase, or sentences to the first person in the row.
- c) That person whispers whatever was heard to the next person and so on until the message reached the last person in the row.
- d) When the message reaches the last person, have that students say the message out loud so that everyone can check whether the message got through.

3) Listening and Vocabulary

The example is “What’s the Film about?” which follows the procedure below:

- a) From the first 5 minutes of the film, select 10 items that will challenge the students. The items could be words, phrases, grammatical structures, or a mixture.
- b) Play the first 5 minutes of the film with the sound only (cover the monitor screen with a cloth). Have students try to define the items.
- c) Have students in groups try to refine their definitions.
- d) Play the film again, this time with the sound and image.
- e) Have the class discuss definitions.
- f) Play the film again to illustrate points where necessary.
- g) Ask students what they think the film is about and give a brief synopsis of the film.

c. Listening to Authentic Material

The example is “Fast Speech Dictation”, which follows the procedure below:

- 1) Before class, read through the sentences and underline words that are omitted or altered in reduced speech. Practice saying the sentences so that you will be sure to read them the same way each time you repeat them to the class.
- 2) Write the sentence numbers on the board. Besides each sentence, write the number of words in the sentence.
- 3) Divide the students into pairs. Have them seat close enough to see each other’s papers.
- 4) Give the students the following instruction.
- 5) Read sentence 1 once at normal speed. If this is the first time you have done a fast speech dictation, the students may be little shocked. Do not repeat the sentence unless requested to do so by a students. If required, continue repeating the sentence, maybe 10 to 15 times, until all the students seem satisfied. Encourage students to compare and discuss their sentence with the partner.
- 6) Work through the other sentences in the same manner.
- 7) When you have finished, ask the students if they would like any of the sentences repeated.
- 8) Divide the chalkboard into 10 squares and number them.
- 9) Assign sentences to different pairs. Ask them to come up to the board and write their sentences in the appropriate squares. Have all the pairs do this at the same time. (Be sure to have enough chalk on hand).

- 10) Correct the sentences. Underline words or letters that are reduced or omitted in fast speech. Praise students who made educated guesses even though they might have been wrong.
- 11) To wrap up, erase the board, ask the students to turn over their papers, and read the sentences one final time.

d. Using Technology

The example is “News Items”, which follows the procedure below:

- 1) Distribute the headline worksheet to the students. Ask them to look at the headlines and make predictions about what they will hear in the news item (this can be done in pairs, groups, or as a whole-class activity).
- 2) Tell the students to number the news items (1, 2, 3 ...) as they hear them on the news report. Play the tape and then check the answers with the class.
- 3) Distribute the true/false worksheet and ask the students to read over the statements.
- 4) Play the tape a second time and ask the students to write T or F next to the statements. Check the answers around the class. It is useful to write some ambiguous statement that can be either true or false so that there is some discussion about the correct answer. Listen to the tape again to, check the answers.
- 5) Tell the students to listen to the tape on more time. This time they should try to make their own notes.

- 6) Arrange the students into groups to discuss their notes and perhaps produce their own version of the news.

e. Listening for Academic Purposes

The example is “Famous People”, which follows the procedure below:

- 1) Elicit from the students what they already know about the personality you are going to present.
- 2) Give out copies of the table and explain the procedure.

Year	Event	Place
1862
...	wrote first novel	...
...	...	Paris

- 3) Play the tape while students fill in column 1.
- 4) Play again the tape again as students’ complete column 2.
- 5) Play the tape a third time while students finish column 3 and check their work.

f. Listening for Fun

The example is “Scrambled Song”, which follows the procedure below:

- 1) Choose a song based on a structure (e.g., the simple past, the future, conditionals), a function (e.g., greeting and leave taking), a lexical field, melody, phonetics, or popularity with class members.
- 2) Write each line of the song on paper or cards.
- 3) Briefly tell the class the story line of the song and pre-teach any vocabulary that is critical for understanding the gist of the song.

- 4) Give each student a card with a line from the song. Start the tape and have the students put the lines in order by taping the cards on the board, forming a circle or line, or laying the card on a table or on the floor.
- 5) Play the song a second time, allowing students to switch the order of the cards. Alert students to connecting words and rhymes.

C. Conclusion

Listening effectively seems difficult because people vary in their communication skills and in how clearly they express themselves, and often have different needs, wants and purposes for interacting. Students are often asked to listen to tapes or to their teacher talking, but it can be just as useful to encourage them to listen to each other in more active way. Learning to listen to each other more carefully can build their ability and confidence in real-life situation. There are still lots of effective ways in developing listening activities. Some sample activities that have been presented above contain detail procedures for practising listening comprehension. Hopefully, those activities can be useful and useable in wider variety of contexts and situations.

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