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Enhancing Listening Skills of the Learners of English in Government High Schools of
Mahaboobnagar District

Abstract

Listening is an important language skill and yet the most neglected skill in the classroom. It is neglected because teachers do not recognise the importance of listening as they are of the opinion that learners acquire this skill on their own without any special training. However, this is a wrong opinion. Learners need special training in listening skills in the target language, in this case English. Unlike mother tongue, these learners do not get opportunities to listen to English outside their classrooms. Hence, special attention has to be given by the teachers to improve listening skills of their students in English. Once teachers recognize the importance of listening skills, they can design various activities to enhance listening skills of their learners. This article focussed on the ways of enhancing listening skills in English among government high school learners of Mahaboobnagar district. A structured questionnaire was administered to 100 randomly chosen government high school students. A pre-test, intervention programme, and a post-test were conducted to make the study more authentic.

Key Words: Listening skills, questionnaire, pre-test, intervention programme, post-test.

1. Introduction

Listening is the basic skill that helps individuals to learn language. Any kid listens to its mother tongue first; speaking, reading and writing come much later. Individual's command on language depends on one's listening skill. Since many learners of English in India in general and Mahaboobnagar district in particular do not get an opportunity to listen to English outside their classrooms, the teachers of English have to put in an extra effort in improving listening skills of their students. Though one exercise in each unit is included in the English textbooks of 8th, 9th, and 10th classes, it is not sufficient to enhance listening skills of the learners of English in government high schools of Mahaboobnagar district. Teachers have to design more number of listening activities to improve listening skills of their students.

Since listening skill is an active process, which not only consists of features such as stress, rhythm, intonation but also involves background, general situational, language specific situational and linguistic knowledge, all of which make it hard for the student to develop. (p.8 http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/56495/8/08_chapter%201.pdf)

2. Literature Review

Howatt and Dakin as cited in Dinakar. P (2016 p. 31) said,

Listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and vocabulary and grasping his meaning.

According to Brown as cited in Dinakar.P (2016 p. 34)

Listening ability lies at the heart of every growth, from birth through the years of formal education. The better those learning skills are developed, the more productive are our learning efforts.

2.1 Kinds of Listening

According to Wohin and Coakly as cited in Dinakar.P (2016 p. 32) there are five kinds of listening:

1. Discriminative listening: it makes the listener sensitive to arguments and language, which enables the individuals to distinguish between different ideas and facts.
2. Comprehensive listening: it makes the individual understand what he listened.
3. Critical listening: it makes the listener to evaluate what he listened so that he can accept or reject the information.
4. Appreciative listening: it helps the listener to enjoy and appreciate the effectiveness or beauty in the message.
5. Therapeutic listening: it makes the individual to simply listen without making any evaluation or comments.

2.2 Strategies of Listening

Buck as cited in Richards (2008 p.11) identified two strategies of listening:

1. Cognitive Strategies:
 - a. Comprehension processes - associated with the processing of linguistic and non-linguistic input
 - b. Storing and memory processes - associated with the storing of linguistic and non-linguistic input in working memory or long-term memory
 - c. Using or retrieval processes - associated with accessing memory to be readied for output
2. Metacognitive Strategies:
 - a. Assessing the situation - taking stock of conditions surrounding a language task by assessing one's own knowledge, one's available internal and external resources and the constraints of the situation before engaging in a task.
 - b. Monitoring - determining the effectiveness of one's own or other's performance while engaged in a task

- c. Self-evaluating - determining the effectiveness of one's own or other's performance after engaging in the activity.
- d. Self-testing - testing oneself to determine the effectiveness of one's own language use or the lack thereof.

According to Thompson (2013 p.232) the Integrative Listening Process Model works on the basis of the following five distinctive components:

- i) receive
- ii) comprehend
- iii) interpret
- iv) evaluate
- iv) respond

The main purpose of listening skill in English is to communicate in English in real life situations. Listening skill plays a vital role in effective communication in English. Hence, the development of listening skill is very important.

3. Aim of the Research

The present study aimed at developing listening skills of the government high school learners of English in Mahaboobnagar district.

4. Statement of the Problem

Learners of English in the government high schools of Mahaboobnagar district lack proper listening skills in English. If the learners are good at listening skills, they can perform well in academics as well as in their professional and personal lives.

5. Hypotheses

1. Listening skills in English in the government high schools of Mahaboobnagar district are given least priority.
2. Teachers of English in the government high schools of Mahaboobnagar district are not using innovative activities to improve listening skills in English of their students.

6. Objectives

1. To study the importance given to listening skills in English in the government high schools of Mahaboobnagar district.
2. To conduct an intervention programme to improve listening skills of the government high school students of Mahaboobnagar district.

7. Research Methodology

A structured questionnaire was administered to 100 randomly selected students. After collecting data from the learners, their perceptions were analysed and interpreted. A pre-test was conducted to 50 randomly selected students. Based on the scores of the pre-test they were further divided into two groups - the experimental group and the control group. An intensive training programme, for a period of five days (1hr per day), was given by the researchers to the experimental group on listening skills in English by including a variety of activities. The control group on the other hand was allowed to develop listening skills in English on their own.

8. Analysis of the questionnaire

The following is the analysis of the questionnaire based on the responses of the sample learners:

1. Ninety per cent of the sample learners stated that they are not good at listening skills in English.
2. Seventy four per cent of the sample learners stated that they do not have the ability to comprehend what they have listened to in English; while ten per cent stated that they have the ability to comprehend what they have listened to in English; whereas sixteen per cent stated that they have the ability to comprehend what they have listened to in English only sometimes.
3. All the sample learners expressed their wish to improve their listening skills in English.
4. Sixty two per cent of the sample learners showed interest to do activities that are given in their textbook; whereas twenty three per cent did not show interest to do

activities that are given in their textbook; while fifteen per cent showed interest only sometimes.

5. Eighty five per cent of the sample learners stated that their teachers do not conduct any additional listening activities other than those given in the textbook; while ten per cent stated that their teacher conducts additional listening activities sometimes and five per cent stated that their teachers do not conduct any additional listening activities.
6. All the sample learners stated that they do not practise listening activities outside their classrooms.
7. Eighty three per cent of the sample learners stated that their teachers do not pay any attention to improve their listening skills in English; whereas twelve per cent of the sample learners stated that their teachers pay attention to improve their listening skills in English sometimes, and five per cent of the stated that their teachers pay attention to improve their listening skills in English.
8. Ninety three per cent of the sample learners stated that their schools do not have language laboratory.

9. Training

The experimental group learners worked on the following activities given by the researchers in order to enhance their listening skills in English:

9.1 Activity 1

Guessing the word

The researchers divided the sample learners into five groups and explained the activity. One of the researchers read brief descriptions of some words and asked the learners to guess right words for the descriptions. Learners were also told that the group that guesses more number of words would be winners.

The following is one of the descriptions read out to the sample learners:

“This is an animal which lives mostly in Africa and Asia, it loves taking bath. It flaps its ears to keep cool. It has really a long nose”.

The learners guessed wrong initially. They assumed it as Giraffe. The researcher re-read the description and allowed the learners to re-think. Finally, they were able to arrive at the right answer that the animal is Elephant. Similarly, some more descriptions were read out to them and the learners tried their best to guess them correct.

During the session, there was great curiosity and anxiety among the learners to guess right words. As the researchers told the learners in advance the group that guesses more number of right words would be the winner, the learners displayed much enthusiasm in answering. This exercise generated interest among the learners.

9.2 Activity 2

Arranging words in right order

In this activity, the researchers once again divided the sample learners into five groups and supplied ten flash cards with pictures to each group. One of the researchers read ten words in sequence, uttering each word twice. The learners were asked to listen to the words carefully. Five minutes time was given to them to arrange flash cards in the sequence of words read to them. The following is one set of words read to them:

- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1. Temple | 6. Butterfly |
| 2. Book | 7. Chocolate |
| 3. Cat | 8. House |
| 4. Tree | 9. Pen |
| 5. Apple | 10. Umbrella |

However, two of the five groups could not arrange flash cards in right order whereas the rest of the three groups could arrange them correctly. Likewise, the learners were made to arrange cards for ten sets of words.

Learners displayed great interest in arranging the flash cards. Since the flash cards contained pictures, it created a little confusion among the learners in arranging them in sequence. This activity not only generated interest among the learners but also improved attentive listening skills of the learners.

9.3 Activity 3

Story telling

Learners were made to listen to an incomplete story of a “Dead Rat” (taken from the English textbook prescribed for 8th class by Telangana government) and were asked to listen to it attentively. They were asked to give conclusion to the story. The sample learners showed great enthusiasm while listening to the story. At the end of the session, they came out with innovative and creative conclusions. This activity helped them to develop their listening skills. Likewise, more stories that are incomplete were read to the sample learners.

9.4 Activity 4

Route map

The researchers distributed blank route maps to the sample learners. One of the researchers read out the route to be taken to their school by passing through different geographical objects. They had to identify the geographical objects first and also had to identify the right path that lead to the school.

Initially, learners felt this activity was difficult to do. However, after doing two or three such activities they could find it interesting and paid attention to the content.

9.5 Activity 5

Identifying pictures

The researchers distributed handouts containing pictures without labels to the sample learners. One of the researchers read out the names of the objects and the learners had to mark them on the sheet distributed. Initially, the researcher read out slowly but later increased speed for other handouts. Learners could adapt themselves to the speed-reading of the researcher. This activity helped in improving their listening perception.

10. Post-test

After completion of the five-day training programme, a post-test was conducted to the entire group to check whether the training programme enhanced listening skills among the experimental group learners or not. The average scores of the pre-test and the post-test are as follows:

S.No	Name of the test	Average score

1	Pre-test (Entire Group)	21
2	Post-test (Control Group)	23
3	Post-test(Experimental Group)	31

Post-test Results

A significant increase in score can be observed in the experimental group after the training programme. The sample learners also felt the difference in their listening perception. Thus, it is proved through the training programme that listening skills of the students can be improved by conducting different activities in the classroom.

11. Findings

1. A majority of the sample learners stated that they are not good at listening skills in English.
2. A majority of the sample learners opined that their teachers do not pay enough attention to improve their listening skills in English.
3. A majority of the sample learners expressed that they do not have the ability to comprehend what they have listened to in English.
4. Most of the sample learners showed interest to do listening activities that are given in their textbooks.
5. Most of the sample learners expressed that their teachers do not conduct any additional listening activities other than those given in the textbook.
6. A majority of the sample learners expressed that they do not get enough opportunities to improve their listening skills in English outside their classrooms.
7. A majority of the sample learners of the experimental group participated enthusiastically in the training programme.
8. Training programme gave enough impetus to the sample learners to improve their listening skills in English.
9. A majority of the sample learners of the experimental group noticed their improvement in listening skills in English.
10. Difference in scores between the pre-test and the post-test proved the effectiveness of the training programme.

12. Conclusion

The present study proved that enough exposure must be provided to the learners in developing their listening skills in English. As listening is a basic skill, the teachers of English have to concentrate more on that. If one is good at listening skills it would be easier for them to develop other three skills – speaking, reading and writing. If teachers of English of government high schools of Mahaboobnagar district put in an extra effort on improving listening skills in English of their students, they excel both professionally and personally.

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APPENDIX

Learner's Questionnaire

1. Are you good at listening skills in English?
a. Yes b. No
2. Do you have the ability to comprehend what you have listened to in English?
a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes
3. Do you wish to improve your listening skills in English?
a. Yes b. No
4. Do you have interest to do listening exercises that are provided in your textbook?
a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes
5. Does your teacher conduct additional listening activities other than those given in the textbook?
a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes
6. Do you practise listening activities outside your school?
a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes
7. Is enough attention paid to improve your listening skills in English by your teacher?
a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes
8. Do you have a language laboratory in your school?
a. Yes b. No