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DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the need to improve how listening skills are taught to the students in the classroom. Teaching English through listening is not an easy task, especially when there are many factors that impede the learning process such as: lack of adequate materials and conditions; lack of qualified teachers with good pronunciation, and lack of innovative approaches to teaching listening skills. This paper focuses on the following aspects: an evaluation of how effectively listening skills can be taught EFL classroom; a look at how we can turn teaching problems into positive solutions; how to improve listening skills in the EFL classroom among students.

Key words: Teaching innovative approaches, skills.

Listening is one of four fundamental skills through which a language is taught. It is one of the skills that we use when communicating orally. According to Rost (1991) "Listening is an active process requiring participation on the listener (12)" For example when someone listens to a speaker, he/she processes the information mentally in order to construct an answer. During the listening process the listener is actively engaged. Effective listening skill is the ability to actively understand information provided by the speaker, and display interest in the topic discussed. It can also include providing the speaker with feedback, by asking pertinent questions so the speaker knows the message is received. It is a skill using multiple senses to comprehend the message being sent by the speaker.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING extends far beyond academic and professional settings. Understanding how to practice good communication even in your day to day life, among friends, family, and significant others, is important for a number of reasons: fostering good self-esteem, maximizing productivity, improving relationships, and even becoming a better speaker.

BARRIERS TO LISTENING

Teachers face problems in effectively teaching listening skills. These constraints include : lack of innovative methodology, equipment and materials; teachers who lack strong skills in teaching listening comprehension and the lack of student motivation. In addition, the learning environment in schools and colleges are not always conducive to teaching listening skills, i.e. noise factor, room set up etc. it is important to point out that over the years there are lot of improvements in how listening skills are taught, however we still have much to do before it is taught effectively. In light of this, this paper defends the argument that

listening skills should be taught more effectively in the EFL classroom in order to produce better English language speakers. Listening sometimes does not come easy. Often, the difficulty is not because people are not willing to listen but because they are unable to do so. Their mind does not allow them to see the total picture because they are only able to see the world in one dimension. This inability to listen using both sides of the brain can cause miscommunication, misinterpretation, and miscalculation.

TIPS FOR IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS

- **Paying attention** – practice focused attention instead of falling prey to the always present distracters. Ward off distractions by promising to remain focused for the lecture in its entirety.
- **Listening for the whole message**
- **Hearing before evaluating** – show up and don't automatically begin critiquing your lectures. Instead, practice actively listening by taking excellent notes.
- **Paraphrasing what was heard** – make mental summaries when the instructor takes a break to write something on the board. Frequent summarizing will improve your memory retention as well.
- **Try not to assume you know what will be said before it is said.**
We often develop bad habits of not listening because we assume it will be of no interest or use to us. We also make prior judgments about the amount of resistance or approval we will get from someone. With these prior notions we act without hearing or waiting to hear the speaker. We could improve our listening skills significantly by exercising patience and, even if we think we know what will be said, allow the speaker to finish.
- **Try not to let your biases control your listening**
We all have certain prejudices and stereotypes that influence how we receive speakers. You may refuse to listen to someone because they are overdressed, foreign, overweight, too loud, too old, or even because they're opinionated. Attitudes such as these affect our listening habits by making us defensive and argumentative, or cause us to shut them out altogether.
- **Try to monitor your listening through feedback.**
Whenever possible, ask clear and thoughtful questions. If these questions are asked in the right spirit the speaker has an opportunity to repeat, expand, or clarify his or her message. Remember that you're the other half of the communication process and your reactions are critical to producing good communication for both you and the speaker.
- **Learn to listen for the speaker's purpose.**
This purpose may be stated or unstated. It's the basic reason the speaker has for speaking. We often assume early on that some speakers don't know why they're speaking. Often this is true but let's not be too quick to judge. I have often found that a speaker who has some difficulty getting started, or who was a little disorganized, might recover and provide worthwhile information. Concentrate on what the speaker states as a purpose rather than what you have supposed is his or her purpose.
- **Don't yield to distraction.**
Our lives are noisy and confusing but we shouldn't use this as a convenient excuse for not listening. We can overcome some of the distraction by reducing noise and adjusting the listening environment. If we have no control over the distractions then we must rely on intense concentration to get as much as possible from the speaker.
- **When possible, take notes.**
If it is appropriate and it will not be distracting to the speaker, make a few notes as you listen. This will help you organize and frame the speaker's thoughts. It will also give you a reference to refer to at a later date if the material is technical or complex. There is no communication skill more important to a leader than listening, yet many persons aspiring to be leaders neglect this skill. It seems to take so little effort to hear a speaker's words, but this isn't listening. The kind of practice we need in the techniques listed above will require that we monitor our habits and actively work to improve them.

Even when a college student consciously pays attention when listening, outside distractions can break his concentration. Memory games improve concentration skills by requiring players to recall images, sequences and patterns. To play a listening-based memory game among a group of students, begin a story and then

instruct the group to take turns adding to the story. For example, start with, "I'm going on vacation and I'm bringing my bathing suit." The first player to your right repeats the sentence and adds an item to the list. Continue until someone breaks the order.

CONCLUSION

Learners can improve their listening comprehension skills more quickly when using a combination of different means provided to them in the classroom. Since not all learners possess high motivation and high proficiencies, improvement of their listening skills in a short period should be encouraging and motivating for the learners. Although factors such as learners' motivation and interests could also affect the results, this paper suggests the ways to promote active and effective listening skills among the learners.

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