The importance of listening and speaking

Haydarova K.D
Teacher of Termez state university
E-mail: yasmina8687@mail.ru

Acquiring good listening and speaking skills in English are the main concern of many second and foreign language learners, and today's English teacher needs to be well versed in current approaches to the teaching of the aural/oral skills. Initially, we should clarify that what are listening and speaking skills themselves.

Teaching listening refers to teaching listening comprehension. Listening is an activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear. It involves understanding a speaker's accent and pronunciation, his grammar and vocabulary and grasping his meaning. For successful communication, listening skill is essential, so it should be taught to students [1].

Much has been written and discussed about listening comprehension, learning strategies and their importance to language learning. It is undeniable that we use listening more than any other language skill. In other words, language learning depends on listening because most learners spend more time in listening to the foreign language than in producing it themselves . [2] Listening is the aural medium that gives the way to language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication. Therefore, students with good listening comprehension skills are better able to participate effectively in class. In addition, students learn to speak, read and write by listening to others.

The critical role of listening comprehension in the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language has been acknowledged by researchers and language educators. Formerly, listening was the least emphasis skill in EFL classes, it is now recognized as a language skill which needs an active process in the learners' mind and therefore has increasingly received more attention in language learning. [3]

Hence, listening is an important skill which needs more consideration in teaching foreign languages. Researchers estimate that we listen to twice as much language as we speak four times as much as we read, and five times as much times as we write. [4]

According to Nation and Newton "listening is the way of learning a language". [5] There are certain reasons for the importance of listening for foreign language learners. First, listening is an essential perquisite for oral communication to take place. Second, it often influences the development of reading and writing. Third, it plays a central role in academic success, since students understand teachers or lecturers through listening. [6]

In order to teach listening comprehension effectively, the teacher should be clear about the skill to be developed in students. According to Rivers, before the teacher can devise a sequence of activities which will train students in listening comprehension, he must understand the nature of the skill he is setting out to develop [7]. Field in Richards and Renandya examines a commonly used format for teaching listening, one which involves three stages in a listening activity: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. [8] They are also known as listening techniques.

1.The Pre-listening Stage

This is the first stage of teaching listening. At this stage, students are given some background information about the audio. Indeed, this is the preparatory phase of teaching listening in which students are prepared and motivated for listening and performing the tasks. Following it consists of several activities like giving background information, looking picture, topic discussion, question answer, etc.

2. The While-listening Stage

In this stage, the students listen to audio, perform the activities and do the tasks based on the listening comprehension. This is the actual listening stage whereby students are asked to do exercises based on the audio. The main purpose of this stage is to help the students develop the skill of eliciting messages from spoken language.

3. The Post-listening Stage

This is the final stage where follow-up activities are done. As its name implies, post-listening stage embraces all the activities related to a particular listening activity which are done after the listening is completed. In a way, this stage is the extension of the activities done at pre-and while-listening stages. Problem- solving and decision-making activities, interpreting activities, role-play activities, written work, etc. can be exploited at this stage [9].

Listening skill should be taught properly to the students at school. Instead of leaving it to be developed as part of a pupil's general education training, it is to be taught explicitly to them. Students spend half of the classroom time in listening, so it should be developed properly. In this context, Harmer suggests that listening should be developed in all school children since it is a vital means of learning that may be as important as reading. In order to teach listening properly and effectively, appropriate approaches should be used. Without employing the appropriate approaches, listening skills cannot be taught well.

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