

Use of Authentic Materials on Teaching Listening: Advantages and Disadvantages

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of the main listening resources of the English language on the listening skills of beginners. Studies have shown that the main listening resources have a positive effect on the listening comprehension and motivation of the learners. The current research was conducted by library review method, the purpose of which was Use of Authentic Materials in Teaching Listening: Advantages and Disadvantages. The results of the research show that increasing the awareness of language learners regarding the prosodic features in the pronunciation of words can be used as an emerging and practical method in teaching the listening skills of language learners. As was concluded from the gathered data in this study, more Analytical learners appear to be better listeners, while more Global learners seem to be weaker listeners. Therefore, teachers can develop those learning activities and strategies that promote analytic style in the learners in order to assist them to improve their performances on listening comprehension tests.

Keywords: listening skills, language learners, authentic materials

1. Introduction

For decades, the majority of linguists and language researchers have focused on teaching and using of different methods. In recent decades, learning has attracted a growing interest. Although it is believed that education is necessary for learning, it is a continuous process for everyone and there are various ways to learn. Teaching is giving lessons, but just in a more formal approach, and learning is the end result. From some of the researchers' point of view who have focused on teaching, learning is passive and all learners need to process the gained information in the same way, while there are various learning styles that learners feel more comfortable with. Knowing learners' styles of learning is important because according to evidence in literature they are influential in language learning process. Knowing learning styles will help to develop techniques and strategies to compensate for potential weaknesses and take advantage of strengths (Cassidy, 2004).

What is achieved by a learner in a language classroom depends on the process that takes place in his or her mind. Each and every learner has a specific way of learning in which he or she can acquire, structure and process information. Different degrees of success might be the result of these psychological differences (Oxford, 1990).

Up to this time quite a large number of researchers have conducted studies on how different learning characteristics of the learners induce different learning processes and how each learner approaches a problem in a specific way. Generally, a learning style is the way in which learners process their learning. According to Brown (2000, p. 114), "learning styles serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment". There are other different definitions for learning styles. For instance, Reid (1995) describes it as an individual's habitual, natural and desired way of receiving, processing and keeping new data. As it is known, language contains four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), all of which should be acquired by the learner. According to Oxford (1990), some mistakenly believed that productive skills are of more importance and receptive skills can be simply acquired by exposure and they do not need any specific instruction, but research has indeed indicated that adults spend half of their communication time on listening (40-50%), and less time reading (11-16%), speaking (25-30%), and writing (9%) (Rivers, 1984; Oxford, 1993) Taking into account all the studies and experiences, the relationship between different learning styles and listening comprehension is the least examined area which needs to be studied. The current study was an attempt to explore the relationship between cognitive learning styles and listening comprehension process.

1.1. Theoretical

The process of learning to listen in the first language has similarities with the process of learning to listen in the second language, but there are many differences in between. Children can hear even before they are born, and the process of hearing and listening improves along with their cognitive maturity. They can understand spoken language very well even before they are able to respond to it. Toddlers quickly learn words and understand spoken language. At the age of six, children's vocabulary includes about 14,000 words. Of course, they may use much fewer words in meaningful discourse (Flowerdio and Miller, 2005:12).

Along with biological development, children's dictionary knowledge range also increases, their understanding, listening skills and learning skills are strengthened, and they quickly gain the ability to recognize the sounds of their mother tongue and learn the morphological and syntactic structure. Children, like adults, spend more time per day listening than reading or writing and speaking. According to Clement (2003:37), native listeners use their mental or schema network to understand input information, but despite the natural ease of interaction through listening, they also need to be more skilled in understanding important points or processing auditory inputs with High cognitive load such as lectures are taught.

Native speakers learn listening skills non-dynamically and with little effort. In the first years of life, they develop their skills, but this is not possible for second language learners, and this process is much more dynamic for them (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Native speakers can easily overcome difficulty in understanding in situations where they are faced with disturbing sounds. On the contrary, in such situations, the process of making sense of the auditory input is much more difficult for L2 learners, and seemingly insignificant distractions, such as background conversations, may make comprehension difficult or even impossible for them (Clement, 2007:37).). Also, sometimes cultural differences hinder understanding, so that what is completely meaningful to a native speaker may be completely meaningless and foreign to a second language learner (100:2008).

1.2. Research findings

Usually, the first skill that language learners acquire in the process of learning a first language is listening. In the process of learning, they listen to parts of speech, repeat them, then read what they have heard, and finally learn to write. This natural sequence does not always apply to second language learning. In the case of languages other than the first language, giving priority to reading and writing skills causes the listening skills to grow less and the self-confidence of the learners in facing the second language is degraded (White, 2008:209).

Although listening is one of the most important and difficult second language skills, especially in interacting with scientific texts, the complexity of understanding it, as it should, has not received the attention of researchers. From a traditional perspective, listening is considered a non-dynamic skill, while it is a dynamic skill that requires a lot of research and attention (Vandergrift, 2004:3). In the past, the common belief was that because speaking and writing are productive skills, they are considered a dynamic process, but reading and writing, which are perceptual skills, have a non-dynamic nature; Therefore, there is no place for teaching listening skills in second language education programs. It should be noted that even second language learners master the second language to an acceptable extent, they face difficulty in understanding oral discourse, especially scientific discourses. They also have problems in recognizing why the main and secondary points of the listening texts are related. (Flavordio Miller, 99:2005) and this itself is a testimony to the importance of the perceptive skill of listening and the consequences of not paying attention to the efficient training of this skill. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the cognitive needs of language learners, including listening. In this process, in addition to the linguistic processing of the text, the mental representation of perception, interaction with the text and production of comprehensible output are also necessary.

2. Tips on improving listening skills

1. Active Listening: Listen with the intention of understanding the speaker's message, rather than simply waiting for your turn to talk (Weger, 2019).
2. Eliminate Distractions: Turn off phones or other distractions that may interfere with your ability to concentrate on what the speaker is saying (Bell & Smith, 2021).
3. Nonverbal Cues: Observe the speaker's nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language to help you interpret their message (Hybels & Weaver, 2015).
4. Clarification: Ask questions to clarify anything you don't understand or ask the speaker to repeat or rephrase what they said (Weger, 2019).
5. Note Taking: Taking notes while someone is speaking can help you to focus and retain what they are saying (Bell & Smith, 2021).
6. Practice Mindfulness: Practicing mindfulness can help you to be more present and focused when listening to others (Hybels & Weaver, 2015).

3. Effective activity to improve English listening skills

3.1. Step 1: Listen to podcasts

Podcasts are a great resource for improving listening skills, as they cover a wide range of topics and can be listened to at any time (Bell & Smith, 2021).

3.2. Step 2: Watch Movies and TV Shows

Watching English-language movies and TV shows with subtitles can help improve your listening comprehension (Weger, 2019).

3.3. Step 3: listen to music

Listening to English music and paying attention to the lyrics can help improve your listening skills while enjoying music (Hybels & Weaver, 2015).

3.4. Step 4: Engage in Conversations

Practicing speaking and listening with native English speakers can greatly improve your listening skills (Bell & Smith, 2021).

3.5. Step 5: Use Language Learning Apps

Language learning apps such as Duolingo, Babbel, and Rosetta Stone provide listening exercises and interactive activities to help you improve your skills (Weger, 2019).

3.6. step 6: Watch TED Talks

TED Talks are informative and engaging presentations that cover a wide range of topics, making them an excellent resource for improving English listening skills (Hybels & Weaver, 2015).

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the relationship between learning styles and listening comprehension of language learners. Like all other studies, the present study suffered from some inevitable shortcomings. One of the limitations of this study was the level of the participants. They were selected to be from upper-intermediate level and there is a probability of gaining different results if the study was conducted with participants from different levels of proficiency. A further limitation can be related to the time-based condition during which the participants had to fill out the questionnaire and the instruments used in the classrooms which may affect the participants' performances on listening test.

The results of the current study may present useful pedagogical insights for both language learners and teachers. As we know, there are factors other than language ability which affect learners' processes of learning and performance. One of these factors is said to be learners' cognitive style. The outcomes of this research can help teachers understand the interaction between learners' cognitive styles and their performances on listening comprehension test. It can be suggested that language teachers had better be aware of different cognitive styles and their impact on the learners' learning processes and performances on various tests. Also, it can be beneficial for language instructors at institutes to make use of numerous accessible learning style questionnaires to become conscious of the learners' styles and consider them in their teaching and assessment methods. As it was concluded from the gathered data in this study, more Analytic learners appear to be better listeners, while more Global learners seem to be weaker listeners. Consequently, teachers can develop those learning activities and strategies that promote analytic style in the learners in order to assist them to improve their performances on listening comprehension tests. However, other styles may not impact learners' performances on listening comprehension test, they might be influential in the learning process or other skills. Thus, familiarity with them can be advantageous for teachers and in some cases for learners too.

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