TECHNOLOGY –ASSISTED TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE LISTENING SKILLS AMONG RURAL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Education, in the largest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. Technology is an ever-increasing part of the English language arts classroom. Today's teachers are developing new and exciting means of integrating language, writing, and literature with innovative technologies. Teachers incorporate technology effectively into their classrooms and this supplements the process of acquiring knowledge and skill. Listening is a critical element in the competent language performance of learners whether they are communicating at school, at work, or in a community. Through the normal course of a day, listening is used nearly twice as much as speaking and four to five times as much as reading and writing.

This paper focuses on how technology can be incorporated along with the syllabus to improvise the listening skill of the learners. The sample comprises of High School Students of a private CBSE school in Kerala.

> *To listen well is a powerful means of communication.*
> *-John Marshall Quotes.*

Listening is the most important part of oral communication. Listening is used to make oral communication effective. The need of the day in academic circle is to enhance and improve listening skills. The progress of the skill leads to an effective communicator and successful individual. There is a considerable deterioration in the particular skill be it in the primary or higher level. To excel in such a field one has to continue the practice of inducing this skill through adolescence. Let us peep on to find what really means by the term- improvising listening skill among rural learners using technology, what is important, how to implement and how it works out.

Technology is the usage and knowledge of tools, techniques, crafts, systems or methods of organization. Science is the reasoned investigation or study of phenomena, aimed at discovering enduring principles among elements of the phenomenal world by employing formal techniques

such as the scientific method. Technologies are not usually exclusively products of science, because they have to satisfy requirements such as utility, usability and safety.

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Listening is a multi-dimensional cognitive process of the brain for decoding the content. During listening, our mind perceives the patterns of characters and decodes the meaning in them. Listening is a means of communication through which information and ideas are shared between people, and a way of language acquisition . Listening is necessary for most activities. It is essential for living a productive life professionally, socially and academically. Few skills are more important to a person's success in and out of the class room including listening skills. Listening is not just something that happens naturally as most of us perceive. When we talk, sing, read to, and play with an infant, toddler, or preschooler, we are laying the foundation for listening. If a person is let to grow up in isolation he will not be able to develop the communication skills.

SYSTEMS OF FORMAL EDUCATION

Education is a concept, referring to the process in which students can learn something:

- **Instruction** refers to the facilitating of learning toward identified objectives, delivered either by an instructor or other forms.
- **Teaching** refers to the actions of a real live instructor designed to impart learning to the student.
- **Learning** refers to learning with a view toward preparing learners with specific knowledge, skills, or abilities that can be applied immediately upon completion.

  EAR IS FOR HEARING

  There is a big difference. You can hear the noise, but you have to listen to your parents.

  Hearing is the process of capturing the sound waves through ears and sending this data to the brain. Or simply put, hearing just means listening enough to catch what the speaker is saying.

  What happens when we listen?

  Interpreting: Once this data reaches your brain, based on past experiences and learning, the brain will interpret / understand the data and classifies it as noise, word, music…etc.

  Giving a contextual meaning: Depending on the context/situation, the data is given a specific meaning.

  "Listening is a demanding process, not only because of the complexity of the process itself, but also due to factors that characterize the listener, the speaker, the content of the message, and any visual support that accompanies the message."

  – (Brown & Yule, 1983).

FACTORS AFFECTING LISTENING:

o   THE LISTENER: Interest in a topic increases the listener's comprehension. The listener may tune out topics that are not of interest. A listener who is an active participant in a conversation generally has more background knowledge to facilitate understanding of the topic than a listener who is, in effect, eavesdropping on a conversation between two people whose communication has been recorded on an audiotape.

o   THE SPEAKER: Colloquial language and reduced forms make comprehension difficult. The extent to which the speaker uses these language forms impacts comprehension. The more exposure the listener has to them, the greater ability to comprehend. A speaker's rate of delivery may be too fast, too slow, or have too many hesitations for a listener to follow. Awareness of the speaker's corrections and use of rephrasing ("er…I mean…That is…") can assist the listener. Learners need practice in recognizing the speech habits as to deciphering meaning.

o   CONTENT: Content that is familiar is easier to comprehend than content with unfamiliar vocabulary or for which the listener has insufficient background knowledge.

o   VISUAL SUPORT: Visual support such as video, pictures, diagrams, gestures, facial expressions, and body language, can increase comprehension is the learner is able to correctly interpret it.

THE LISTENER:

o   Determines a reason for listening.

o   Takes the raw speech and deposits an image of it in short-term memory.

o   Attempts to organize the information by identifying the type of speech event (conversation, lecture, radio ad) and the function of the message (persuade, inform, request).

o   Predicts information expected to be included in th4e message.

o   Assigns a meaning to the message.

o   Checks that the message has been understood.

o   Determines the information to be held in long-term memory.

o   Deletes the original form of the message that had been received into short-term memory.

- (Brown, 1994; Dunkel, 1986)

LISTENING STARTS EARLY:

Kids have an uncanny ability to appear to be listening to you while actually paying no attention at all. While this is something that may pass with age it is important to help children develop good listening skills early. They will do better in school and you will keep your sanity. Poor listening skills do not just create trouble at home - they can cause problems at school and in social situations, too. A few simple ways to train children to listen are:

Transcript: Listening is an important skill that we all need to master. When wee are giving advice, asking a question, or handing out a scolding. The child tends to hear and reciprocate.

Read to Kids: Reading aloud to young children is one of the best ways to lay a foundation for the listening skills they will need in school.

Listen to Kids: Listening is a two way street. Parents need to be model good listening behavior for your kids. When the child is talking, be patient and try not to interrupt. Make eye contact and repeat back the important points of what your child says to you.

Listening During Dinner: Practice listening skills at the dinner table by giving each child the chance to tell a story about their day. Listening together as a family will keep you all more connected.

HIERARCHY OF TECHNOLOGY IN IMPROVING LISTENING SKILL:

- **Radio –** the radio was used in broadcasting lessons on subjects that deserved importance. As such a student who owned a radio alone could be benefitted from this.
- **Television-** the television served as an audio visual aid. The potent of non-verbal communication favoring the process of Listening was substantiated.
- **Cassette Player-** a pre-recorded voice on the topic was played and it can be used according to the will and wish of the student.
- **Language lab – conventional –** the conventional language lab had a main cassette player with supporting players. The student could not use the player to his will and wish.
- **Language lab – modern –** the modern language lab has computers with a main server. The student can gain access to the learning material. It is like a genie-serving the wish of a student with the aid of internet. The student can use it according to his competency level.
- **Web sources-** .aiff (Apple Audio file)
  .wav (Windows Audio file)
  .au (Windows Audio File)
  .rm (Real file)
  .ram (Real file)

SAMPLING:

A few conclusions from the pilot study:

- SYLLABUS: The syllabus is "packed". Teachers find it to be a struggling task to finish the portions on time. Thereby, they are not able to train the students properly on the skills. Units are to be decreased.
- PERFORMANCE: Students are rarely able to perform the four skills. Nearly, 80% - 85% of the students are able to listen and reciprocate to the language. Students rarely speak and nearly 30% of the students score border marks for the examination.
- SKILLS OF THE STUDENTS: Students are not well-equipped with the skills. This is because 50% of the students are first generation learners. The social background plays a significant role in their skills acquisition.
- TIME-TABLE: There are 6 hours allotted for English language in a week. One unit takes six periods to be completed.
- STUDENT'S EXPOSURE TO COMPUTERS: students are taught the computer-oriented subjects in their computer classes and hence they are not introduced to the method of acquiring language with the aid of technology.
- ARE STUDENTS INTERESTED IN LEARNING LANGUAGE WITH THE AID OF TECHNOLOGY? Yes, students show a likeness to use computers to learn as teachers feel that it would kindle the interest in students through pictures, videos, and animations.
- ARE TEACHERS WILLING TO USE COMPUTERS TO TEACH ENGLISH? Teachers welcome technology. But the strange fact is that the syllabus does not provide any scope for such usages.

The experimental group of students belonged to standard VIII. The English syllabus was identified with a lot of difficulties for the learners as well as teachers. Teachers claim the syllabus to be "packed" with no scope of creativity and use of technology. The survey was conducted by providing questionnaire to the teachers and students as well. The group consisted

of a heterogeneous mixture with first generation learners. The IQ level of student varies and the time of action adopted for this methodology was 40 minutes.

METHODOLOGY:

o   PRE-READING: The teacher provides the students with an introduction of the topic/lesson to be discussed. This gives a platform to the student to understand the topic and prepares the student for a better comprehension of the content.
o   SHIFT IN GEAR: The student realizes a shift in gear from the animate to an inanimate medium. The voice of the teacher is to be replaced by the voice from a pre-recorded source.
o   COMPLETION OF FIRST STAGE: The student listens to the pre-recorded voice and gets a first-hand experience on the lesson.
o   PREPARE NOTES: After listening to the topic, the student is made to prepare notes/hints on what he has perceived about the topic.
o   PLAY ON AGAIN: The teacher plays the recording for a second time and the student recognizes his level of understanding about the topic in comparison with his notes.
o   ROLE-PLAY: The teacher creates a medium for role-play among the students which increases the interest in the student.
o   CLARIFICATION: The teacher clarifies certain aspects which have been misinterpreted and those which have not been understood by the teacher.
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THIS TECHNOLOGY - A "FRIEND" OR "FOE"?

- Student's awareness in using technology increases.
- To enhance the curriculum and promote learning.
- Technology - enabled classrooms increase the interest among the students.
- The feedback can be immediate, which is of course a very effective learning tool.
- It can assist teachers and act as a tutor for the students.
- A lot of teachers have not been trained to use a computer and many do not know how to incorporate technology.
- No student will be overwhelmed because he or she is missing fundamentals the computer will repeat material.
- It is time-consuming.

CREAM OF TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED TRAINING:

- We get to reconsider how people learn, how they are empowered, and what the nature of learning and useful information.
- Technology-enabled training helping students to achieve their full development potential.
- Use of technology can assist teachers and act as a tutor for the students.
- It helps to increase the creativity in students.
- Technology = A good slave but a bad master.

*Sampling was done in 2010.

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