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Activated process: listening

Dinleme becerisini aktif hale getirme

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Özet

Bu çalışma öğrencilerin pasif olan dinleme becerilerini çok sayıda dinleme çalışması yaparak aktif hale getirme konusunu işler.

Dinleme beceresi iletişimde önemli bir yere sahiptir. Yabancı Dil olarak öğretilen İngilizce sınıflarında en zor becerilerden biridir. Öğrencilerin bu becerisini bir yıl içerisinde en azından ihtiyaçlarını karşılayacak seviyeye getirmelerine yardımcı olmaya çalışıyoruz. Yıl sonunda, öğrencilerin ilk önce kelimeleri ayırt ettikleri, sonra not alma tekniklerini öğrendikleri ve son olarak dinledikleri metni anladıkları gözlemlenmiştir. Öğrenciler metinde geçen kelimeleri bilmeme, telafuzu yanlış anlama ve arka fonda gelen sesler gibi problemlerle karşılaşmaktadırlar. Bütün bunların üstesinden gelmek için, öğretmenler anlaşılır direktifler vererek ve sınıfta sessizlik sağlayarak öğrencilerini yönlendirirler. Tüm bu önlemler neticesinde, hedefler gerçekleştirilir ve başarılı bir dinleme yapılmış olur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, İngilizce öğretimi, dinleme

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Abstract

This study focuses on activating students' listening skills by means of practice. Listening has an important role in communication. It is one of the most difficult skills in EFL classes. We help students to improve listening comprehension at least needed knowledge in a year. In the end of the year, it is observed that students gain information to distinguish firstly words, and then learn how to take notes and finally comprehend the texts they hear. Students face many problems, such as not knowing the words in context, misunderstanding in pronunciation, and competing with the background noise. In order to avoid all these, teachers guide students by giving them clear instructions and keeping the classroom atmosphere silent. After all these precautions, the objectives are achieved and successful listening comprehension is fully performed.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, English language teaching, listening.

Literary survey

There are many researches conducted on this skill as it needs to be improved. Nunan (1998) believes that listening is the fundamental skill in language learning. Without listening skill, learners will never learn to communicate effectively. In fact over 50% of the time that students spend their time involving in a foreign language will be devoted to listening. Rost (2002) defines listening "as a process of receiving what the speaker actually says, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding, and creating meaning, and creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy." He believes that listening is a complex, active process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know. These theories underline back ground knowledge as a critical component of the listening process. Rubin (1994) states that there are five factors affecting listening. These are; process, text, interlocuter, task and listener. Also Peterson (1991) believes that the higher level processes are driven by listener's expectations and understandings of the context, the topic, the nature of the text and the nature of the world that is top-down process. The lower level processes are triggered by the sounds, words, and phrases which the listener hears as he or she attempts to decode speech and assing meaning that is Bottom-up process. Rumelhart (1977) Adams and Collins (1979) say that ESL learners found Top-down and Bottom-up processing useful. Mendelsohn (1994) says that native speakers approach most listening top-down. Peterson (1991) adds that less proficient learners are unable to activate Top-down processing. It happens because they focus on extracting information form text instead of focusing globally on the whole story. Another reason is that they mainly attempt to decode, trying to translate every word rather than understanding the message. The problem of too much reliance of Bottom-up processing is that insufficient basis for comprehension; the less proficient listeners rely on Top-down processing. Tsui and Fullilove (1998) underscore the reason by saying "because less-skilled L2 listeners are weak in bottom up processing, they need plenty of contextual support to compensate for the lack of automized decoding skill". Learners heavily depend on Top-down processing when they first encounter a foreign language and have no linguistic knowledge about it. Ellis (1994) explains that hey may pay little attention to the form of input, and not acquire anything new. There have

been also theories of listening comprehension and successful listening for the last half century such as Communication Theory Model by Shannon and Weaver (1949), Information Processing model by Anderson (1985), Social/Contextual Model by Ohta (2000) and Situated Action Model by Barsalou (1999). As we see, there are many researchers who have dealt with this skill so far and it is still going on. Researches have shown that our students rely on Bottom-up processing; they are so stick to the words that they do not concentrate on the whole meaning. They try to translate the text into their first language and are not able to see the differences between two languages. As a conclusion, listening needs much more practice than other skills because of the fact that it is a kind of process starts with recording and interpreting, finally responding. In this case, before responding we focus on what we hear and how to interpret it. It is the activation of our backround knowledge to achieve listening comprehension.

The research

Aim

The general aim is to provide students with an opportunity to practice listening while exploring culturally relevant topics. In this research, contributions of students are great. By observing them we are able to improve our teaching skills. Some skills like listening are especially problematic. Also another problematic item is how to test them. In this study, it is shown that there are various tests that we can use, but firstly we should be aware of their levels, and what the listeners need. Actually they need a great amonunt of practice and training. The common mistake among students is that they focus on sounds and grammar not to the social conversation.

Objectives

The objectives of the study can be stated as follows:

- To listen to the conversation in order to cover the general meaning,
- To enable students to recognize different intonations,
- To enable students to learn how to pronounce the words,
- To give students the ability to recognize the communicative functions of utterances,
- To encourage students to understand the information about the cultural elements.

Research methods

Comprehension is defined as “the comprehension of a speaker’s message in the listener’s mind, so that successful listening reproduces the meaing as much as the speaker intended.” (Clark and Clark, 1977) Another view is that the important role is on the goals and internal meaning of the listener; the listener does not receive meaning, but rather constructs meaning. Both views show us how complex the listening process is. So we should ask the question of what is involved in comprehension?

1. The listener takes in raw speech and holds an image of it in short-term memory.
2. An attempt is made to organize what was heard into constitutents, identifying their content and function.
3. As constituents are identified, they are used to construct propositions, grouping the propositions together to form a coherent message.
4. Once the listener has identified and reconstructed the propositional meanings, these are held in long-term memory, and the form in which the message was originally received is deleted (Clark and Clark, 1977 as cited in Richards, 1982).

Moreover, some researchers have categorized listening into extensive and intensive listening. In extensive listening students are encouraged to choose what they listen to which helps students acquire grammar and vocabulary. Listening usually occurs outside of the classroom. The motivational factor increases due to student's personal choice in listening material. Teacher should build a personal library of listening activities made available for students. Some suggestions can be audio version of a book, course-book tapes, TV sports events or news or talk-show recordings. Students must respond in some form to the extensive listening activity. This can be in the form of a journal, report forms prepared by instructor, summaries of text, comments written on cards. When we come to intensive listening they are usually taped materials that teachers want students to practice listening skills. An attempt to create genuine communication for live listening activities, such as: story-telling, (T tells Ss story and stopping at any stage for Ss to make predictions, provide descriptions of what they have heard, and summarize plot/story) interviews, (where Ss interview each other on a given topic or a visitor is asked to attend class to generate Ss questions then answer them. Ss can then summarize the interviews orally or written), reading aloud (T reads aloud to class from a written text or dialogue and prepares comprehension check) and conversations (T can prepare with a S in advance or invite a visitor to class to hold a conversation). Furthermore, there are some advantages and disadvantages of intensive listening. As an advantage, it allows Ss to hear a variety of speakers apart from their instructors as well as a variety of situations and dialects. Material is also portable and readily available. On the contrary, classrooms can be noisy and have poor acoustics making listening difficult for students. For my own classes, I chose interview as a research method. It is the best way for students to express themselves. I ask them the problems they face and how they improve this skill outside the classroom; however, their opinions towards listening are not satisfactory. Some of them say that outside the classroom they practice extensive listening by watching foreign channels and also listening to English songs. They try to improve listening skills in order to be proficient in both listening and speaking. In contrast, some of them come to school and listen nothing but taped materials of the books in the classes. The result makes us think about the problem. It is true that we have conscious students as well as unconscious ones. But we always use the same type materials in our classes in order to follow the schedule. We need more time to practice free activities to guide them. What they need is only to practice listening not only at school but also at home.

- *How to test listening* The most common task for testing listening is the discrete-point tradition. In it there are phonemic discrimination tasks, paraphrase recognition and response evaluation. In phonemic tasks test takers listen to one word spoken in isolation and have to identify which word they have heard. Often the words are called minimal pairs: 'ship', 'sheep'. If it is necessary to understand more than just the point being tested, paraphrase recognition comes to the stage and finally in response evaluation, items focus on more than one point. Test takers hear a question followed by four possible responses and choose the most appropriate response. Example:

Test takers hear:

How much time did you spend in İstanbul?

- a) Yes, I did
- b) Almost 250 dollars
- c) Yes, I had to
- d) About four days

Another way to test students is integrative tests. They attempt to help learner's capacity to use many bits all the same. First technique is reduced redundancy; it assesses elements of language relate to each other, and it is useful to see how redundancy works. Example: 'I studied for my exam yesterday'. There is a past tense marker, '-ed'. We understand that this action takes place in the past. Second, in noise tests test takers listen, and respond by repeating what they hear either speaking aloud, or writing it down during appropriate pauses. Third is listening cloze; the test taker has to fill in the blanks by writing down the word they think fits best. The text must be presented, the blanks indicated and the responses recorded, all in audio. Fourth is gap-filling techniques; it is about to ask test-takers to fill in the blanks. The most obvious problem with this is that test-takers could treat the passage as a normal cloze test, and fill in the blanks without listening to the passage. Fifth technique is dictation: the basic idea of dictation is simple: test takers listen to a passage and write down what they hear. Usually this involves listening to the passage twice: the first time, test takers just listen and try to understand; the second time, the passage is divided into a number of short segments, with a pause between each, and during these pauses test-takers write down what they hear. Another one is sentence-repetition tasks: useful for testing non-literature language users, such as children. It is basically the same as a dictation, except that students repeat the text orally during the pause between each section. The last one is statement evaluation; we can ask test-takers to show that they have understood either by evaluating the truth of the statement, or by comparing two statements and saying whether they mean the same thing or not. One of the best ways to test listening is communicative testing. The basic idea underlying communicative teaching is that language is used for the purpose of communication in a particular situation, and for a particular purpose, and the important thing is not what a person knows about the language, nor how grammatically correct they are, but whether they can usually use it to communicate in the target language or not. One of the characteristics of communicative test items is authentic texts. This task requires listening and recognising words. Conversations, announcements, lectures, narratives, personal reports, interviews, advertisements, and directions can be examples of authentic texts (Buck, 2001).

Finally, what I observed during the term is that breakthrough level students are generally given phonemic tasks and then when they are at waystage level, they are given integrative tests in order to distinguish the differences between tenses. In my own classes, especially integrative tests are applied to make students use many bits at the same time. Another test technique, which is frequently used in these classes, is response evaluation. For example, this technique is applied in their final exam; teachers make them listen to a text twice and let them choose the most appropriate response by looking at the answers on the sheets given. The listening part of the exam takes 15 minutes. When teachers hand out the exam papers, they let students to skip the questions for a few minutes and make them listen to the text. Then, give them 5 minutes to evaluate answers and finally they listen to the text again in order to complete missing points. Another testing technique we try to apply in our classes is communicative testing; however, students find it difficult as they have not mastered the language completely. They do not listen to communicate but to complete the task.

Subjects

This study is observed at İstanbul Aydın University Preparatory School where there are different level students, from breakthrough to vantage. For this study, two classes are observed during the term. Each of them has twenty-five to thirty students; between ages of 18-25. They are waystage level students.

Outcomes

Listening needs much more practice than the other skills. We should give students practice in listenings which ask students to interpret and understand meaning; that is, students need to focus on meaning and instruction about how to do it. This study shows us that our students generally use Bottom-up processing as they are not proficient at all. Intensive listening is used and our materials are usually taped materials without visual properties. The problem is that they lack note taking and look for the scripts of texts they listen to. They are busy with extracting information rather than focusing on the whole text. They are not able to catch the whole meaning, on the contrary, they think that by translating every word they catch is the way to comprehend the text. What we recommend our students is to practice extensive listening and use the information they learn in their daily lives by storing them in their minds.

Conclusion

The teaching of listening comprehension and trying to find effective ways of teaching listening are really difficult tasks for teachers. It is important that teachers use various techniques to attract students' attention. It is a complex process to overcome the difficulties we face as teachers in order to find solutions to the problems of our students. Many researchers have been searching this issue especially for the last century because of the fact that teachers did not teach listening or just attempted to teach it. In the past, listening was defined as a passive process; however, researches have shown that actually listening is an active process in which people activate their background knowledge and interpret it in order to comprehend the message. In this research it is implied that listening comprehension is the core of teaching listening by choosing right techniques to teach it. In order to do this, they need to practice extensive listening rather than intensive listening. We as teachers encourage our students to listen to the news, sports, radio programmes and interviews to achieve listening comprehension. With the help of speaking I tried to activate students background knowledge by using the words related with the topic. I write the words on the board and want them to make up sentences by using these words in order to make them familiar with the topic. As an example, in the second track, transportation, money, health and inventions are some of the topics discussed in the classes. Students listen to the conversations and interviews of these topics and one of the effective ways to activate listening comprehension is to summarize what they hear. In order to help them comprehend what they listen I generally want my students to prepare and ask questions to each other in pairs in front of their classmates. Therefore, I choose a volunteer to be partners with me to show how it is presented. Also, being part of the game means having fun with them and one of the best ways to expand our relationship like a flower expands its leaves. To sum up, we try to activate their background knowledge with a different language to make them competent on this skill. Another underlying factor emphasized in this study is to find out how to test the skill we teach. It is essential to know that teaching listening or testing it separately from speaking is very problematic as they are typically exercised in oral interaction.

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