

ON IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING ACTIVITIES AT ENGLISH LESSONS

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

It has never been a secret that students' success at any lesson depends on their interest in the subject. That interest can be directly influenced by ingenious instructions. Achievements in the classroom are the result of the subtly thought-out inspirational work of a teacher who guides them and shows the right way. A lesson providing a lot of useful information can be *rational* but it might not be *inspirational*; especially if the students do not show much respect to the study material. The key is motivation. Like bookcases full of valuable books that become the best kind of decoration for a living-room, much of the "precious" information in the heads of our students become useless; a kind of noisy background that affects their attitude to studies.

Many teachers have faced the problem of students' inattentiveness to the material they prepare for their lessons. The reason may lie in the fact that topics selected do not appeal to them. In fact, it is not the curriculum that limits us but an unawareness of the needs of young people: a so-called "backwardness" of teachers. In addition, the teaching process sometimes lacks clear presentation and thorough practice of the target language. Consequently, students get lost in the atmosphere of constant mechanical work of

writing and reading, not to mention the approach to speaking and listening which are often neglected.

In this article we will try to demonstrate how systematic listening activities can improve language skills. First of all, listening tasks should be done systematically. This means that students should be aware that the goal of repeated listening tasks is to become accustomed to hearing a foreign voice. Obviously this goal should be introduced from the very beginning and done regularly. The success can be gradually achieved with the combination of conventional and modern methods.

Modern methods offer, for example, communicative activities of speaking and listening, small and group work, songs, and individual and group projects. Traditional methods focus on grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing, all of which are useful for learners.

Many students realize, and would not argue, that listening skills help them understand native speakers. That is why it is necessary to give special attention to practicing it. Additionally, we should also admit that listening practice is fun, it can easily involve students into lessons and helps to tackle the problem of student boredom. This also helps to encourage self-discipline by grasping students' atten-

tion since it requires much effort and concentration. While listening, students are exposed to proper intonation and pronunciation. Much of the vocabulary is understood in context and easily learned. They are soon able to read the tasks quickly and keep in mind the necessary grammatical forms to fill them in correctly in the answer sheets.

Choosing the right topics for listening material may require talking to students themselves. Generally, it is sufficient to follow some well-known framing, or skeleton, of relatively serious topics such as personal relationships, ecology and computers. Less serious topics such as hobbies, adventure stories and pop music should also be considered. Depending on the topical units in the textbooks, the teacher may always broaden or accent the unit's theme with the help of interesting and informative audio texts. The task for a teacher here is to select a text that contains a cross-curricular element which encourages students to discuss it after hearing a segment.

One more way to achieve high motivation in class is to join the learning of English with the learning of other subjects, for example, Geography, History, Science, Music and Mathematics. Use the test preparation materials provided by Oxford University Press, for example. Students can understand topics already familiar to them in their own language quickly and confidently, and this can increase their motivation once again.

Sometimes it happens that not only lexis of modern vocabulary is needed but

also the situation presupposes that students should understand some realities of the history of the English-speaking country. In this case, teachers should make careful selection of texts written by some classical authors. The use of bookish, archaic and seemingly strange words should be surely justified. Sparse use of such tasks is the key to success. Remember that *the result of this is like a firework* – you see something marvelous. But the bright showers of sparks are achieved by complex preparation. The explosive capacity comes from gunpowder (that is the teacher's ability to choose proper material), a number of stars (subtly considered listening tasks) ignited by the charge (students' motivation) when it reaches the desired altitude (mastery of fulfillment). All these steps account for the result – circle, willow tree, serpentine fireworks. It all depends on what you put into the sphere of a rocket, i.e. what tasks you prepare and what goal you have in mind. Just light the fuse and enjoy the process [1].

As have been stated, listening tasks “tune up” to quick reading skills, i.e. skimming and scanning. Here one should remember that clear presentation of material is compulsory, otherwise students will not be able to fill in the forms as it is desired. The diversity of tasks (matching, sentence/table/flow chart/ completion, short answer questions, labeling a diagram, global multiple choice, true/false/not given tasks, etc.) can help them not to be bored.

Apart from being enjoyable, good listening tasks really do prepare students for

correct timing. It means that grammatical patterns learned previously can be applied in the task and should be deliberately included by a teacher into listening practices. If the students are not well prepared, then the materials may contain short simple sentences connected with certain grammar (practiced at the moment) to fill in.

The daunting problem here is how to arrange all these time-consuming materials. A teacher needs to pay extreme attention to every detail of the process in order to touch all the aspects of language and not forget to please the class. But with time and careful planning, teachers who begin to explore the Internet resources and adapt them somehow will find that they will be able to achieve a lot. And so will their students! They may learn how to make listening projects themselves after a certain unit to help their teacher who will use it later in his work with other groups.

What is most important of all, the activities should increase students' motivation by constantly giving them a sense of achievement, and of progress. While completing the lessons and tasks prepared for them, students are supposed to be able to read questions quickly; understand what they are expected to write; be careful in their writing; check their spelling and grammar where necessary; and afterwards be involved in discussions of the new information they have been listening to. Even if asked to write essay on the problem, students should also be able and eager to do this.

Thus, motivation is the key to successful learning. We believe that if we have motivated learners, then our lives as teachers become easier and more enjoyable.

References

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