

## **Strategies to Teach Language Skills– Focus on Listening.**

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### **Abstract:-**

The paybacks of the recent method of teaching using the online mode has raised several concerns, especially with regard to teaching the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Remedial measures with respect to design of the class, purpose of teaching in tandem with numerous constraints of network availability, bandwidth issues, device compatibility and the basic inclination to learning itself has been in the spotlight in recent times. Despite these oddities, learning as a continuum has gathered enough momentum that stakeholders have flooded most webinars and online lectures. Under these turbulent times, teaching language skills to participants is a tedious task. Although, teachers have embraced this new andragogy reluctantly, much improvement has to be done along the shores of the student participants. The current paper is an attempt to explore various methods to fuel the process of language with specific attention to the skill of listening, as this is a prerequisite for attentive and informed learning of language.

**Keywords: Online teaching, language skills, listening skills, students, teachers, strategies.**

### **1.Introduction**

Given the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic spreading across populations, online education has gathered an irreplaceable and irrevocable standing. Digital mode of learning had always been a distant approach, until now. Online learning is an important mode to learning both at the primary and higher education level. With the advent of social media and multiple digital platforms, enrolment to online courses has increased over the past few years. But the present situation underlines on all sectors of education to adopt online learning. Despite the acclaimed sweeping success of digital teaching-learning processes, several constant constraints tend to overflow into the online realm. Cho (2012), identified the main concern regarding participants is that they tend to easily feel disconnected and socially isolated. Since this is a recent innovation, several participants may even fail to reap benefits. As there is no interaction between the participants, unlike in areal time classroom situation,

one may also find it difficult to forge collaborations. Unless opportunities for interaction and collaborations are provided, the process of learning itself may not be successfully completed.

Language learning is an exercise that demands the familiarity and constant practice of the four skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Although the remaining three skills can be learnt through other means, listening is a specialised skill and therefore carries with itself critical importance based on the fact the listening itself improves and promotes the betterment of the remaining skills.

Thorne (2005), identified two broad ways to teach digitally. This approach was termed as “internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education”, one off-shoot of which was telecollaboration – a resultant of which is the collaborations of various experts and scholars from different fields coming together for academic events and the other was e-tandem wherein computer mediated communication happens. Thorne reiterates that careful planning, teacher intervention and organization is involved in successfully collaborating for such endeavours. Felix (2005), opined that constraints of time and circumstances make it nearly impossible for online teaching and learning to take place. As a solution to this recurring problematic situation, she suggests that a combination of the traditional aids supplemented by computer aided technology will improve the process of learning. Novel andragogical methods must integrate autonomous cognitive and meta-cognitive processes with real time learning.

Listening as a component of learning, results in an illusion that communication has been achieved. Effective communication involves active listening to take place. Listening as a process needs to be learnt through recurring practice sessions. Beall, et al (2008), remarked that listening as a component of the process of language learning was imperative and attributed improved reading comprehension to an invaluable element of meeting standards. Despite the value attributed to all language skills, listening is not given its credit in the classroom scenario. Constraints of time and space are the major factors that decide the time consumed to hone this skill. In the process of communication, especially in a classroom setup, it is through listening that nearly 80% of the learning occurs. Given the various distractions currently available to student participants within the confines of a classroom itself, only 25% of the stakeholders assimilate knowledge through effective listening. The remaining retain minimal or absolutely nothing at all, failing in the process of learning. This disparity can be attributed to the fact that teachers assume that students are well versed in the skill of listening and hence employ the auditory method to dispense knowledge.

To facilitate active listening and a completion of the process of learning, Campbell (2011), suggests that practical suggestions which are teacher-modelled listening, defining a purpose and a preparation for listening in general. Non-verbal communication like making and maintaining eye-contact, clarifying the message sent across or even queries, if any, through repetition and rephrasing, raising points to ponder over and a non-interfering passive role while the ward is expressing positively alters active listening. By projecting a model to improve any language skill, learning reaches completion smoothly and without any hindrance. Modelling a skill is the best way to reinforce the standards that can be established.

A poor listener tends to focus on appearance, tone of voice rather the contents of the talk itself. An active listener, on the contrary, tends to pay attention to the ideas expressed by the speaker so as to deduce and derive meaningful interpretations.

In order to inculcate good listening skills in the classroom environment, facilitators themselves need to observe and evaluate their own listening skills. Hysop and Tone (1988), opined that the facilitator will have to establish the purpose of listening while reading aloud, to create the urge to listen.

## **2.Methods to improve listening**

In order to improve this pre-requisite skill for the successful completion of the process of communication, several strategies have been identified by experts. The following are some of such methods employed to improve the skill of listening.

The website “Learning through listening” suggests the method KWL to improve learning. The participants begin learning by initially writing what they already ‘know’ about the topic under discussion. In the next step, a few questions related to the topic, specifically those that will make one ‘wonder’ about the topic at hand must be noted. Post this activity of gaining initial insights, the participants correlate the K and W to the information gathered after loud reading. This improves easy retention of the topic under discussion and also cements the skill of active listening. This method not only improves active listening but it also defines the purpose of listening thus improving learning.

During an online class, the learner may find it difficult to assimilate hundred percent of what may be discussed or conveyed. Participants, especially those with low-proficiency in language learning having diminished linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge sources tend to devise a top down and bottom-up approach. The linguistic sources of knowledge include

those which comprise of phonology, lexicology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics while non-linguistic sources are knowledge of the context, topic and general knowledge of the world. A combination of either all these components or only few of them will contribute to better learning of language. In addition to these aspects, extensive familiarity with the register and vocabulary associated with the specific topic under discussion will support better listening which in-turn improves retention and recollection. Participants with these drawbacks tend to deprive themselves the opportunity to compensate for their lack of knowledge. Their delayed response or reaction times is mostly attributed to their word-to-word translation of the discourse. This becomes a huge handicap to most first-generation learners and learners unfamiliar with the language. The hindrance this drawback creates to the process of listening can be overcome by improving reading skills which occurs only with regular and consistent practice. For good listening to take place, reading habits must be voraciously practiced so that familiarity with words rather than merely knowing its linguistic function must be undertaken. Along with linguistic knowledge, enhanced non-linguistic knowledge too must be experienced.

Ceraso (2014), remarked that listening as a skill does not develop in isolation but is multimodal in nature, which is the culmination of an expansive multisensory function. It is also suggested that multimodal listening, according to experts is restricted to a semiotic framework which does not completely justify listening as a multisensory function. To substantiate this method of improving listening, he seeks the example of 'sound' as an interaction between the body and the vibrations it causes. This specific nature of sound creating vibrations is a multimodal event as it is the convergence of sight, sound and touch. In other words, sound can be seen, heard and felt. Thus, sound is a confluence of the sensory and the embodied components of the multimodal experience. To derive the complete yield of multimodal listening which is an aesthetic experience, one has to 'live through the experience' i.e., not just listening to the sound but one has to journey through the visuals and have a palpable episode so that the full benefit of the experience is appreciated. Participants in the online learning process must have had repeated previous encounters with the vocabulary at hand and also must have at some point in time witnessed the idea being expressed, at least virtually. Without the combination of all these multifarious happenstances listening becomes incomplete and communication as a process discontinued.

### 3. Conclusion.

Previous experience would have shaped listening practices, irrespective of how the listening had happened. The accumulation of these experience with time would have formed listening habits. Listening as a skill has to be developed over time so that participants unlearn their old habits. It must be reiterated that unlearning is a process of improvement and hence learning is the constant disruption of an old pattern. This improvisation occurs by substituting old archaic knowledge with novelty and innovation. To help student participants have an enhanced learning, facilitators must consistently emphasise on unlearning obsolete and redundant methods of listening and replace it with amplified multiple sensory reception.

The benefits of active listening are not restricted to following directions, it improves conflict resolution by giving due attention to the speaker and responding appropriately to the requirements of the situation. Active listening helps reduce misunderstandings between individuals and improves the depth of communication. Human tendency is such that communication becomes free flowing and easy when the respondents reciprocate attention and acknowledge the speaker. Conflicts in everyday life can also be avoided by listening actively. Churchill, once said that it takes courage to speak up and courage is what it takes to listen too. Therefore, listening takes lot of practice and skill too.

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