**Developing students’ listening skills through pre-listening skills**

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The topic of my study is developing students’ listening abilities through pre-listening tasks. The purpose of my study is to examine the effects of pre-listening tasks in promoting the listening comprehension ability of 9th graders. This study uses different pre-listening tasks with a hope to improve learners’ listening ability.

How did I come to this topic? I chose 9th A grade because at the end of the first term I noticed that students in my group have low motivation in studying, they were all time distracted and have low results in academic performance. I needed to answer the following questions: What are some of the main problems students have in learning English?  
What resources will my students need to listen to and speak English?  
What are the key skills / strategies that learners need to make them more effective at learning English?  
 How can I make in-class `listening practice more enjoyable for the learners?

I used observation, questionnaire, psychologists support in defining students learning styles and interview to gain data. Observation was used to confirm students‟ answer about questionnaire. Interview process was held to know deeply about the students‟ difficulties. Then, all of the result questionnaire and interview were analyzed.From the psychologists description given to students I learnt that half of the group are visual learners while seven of them have abilities to acquire information by hearing and doing physical activities like moving in the classroom or making projects, posters. I conducted survey to know students learning interests. The first question was asked to know what they would like to change in the lessons where 5 students said nothing,2students-more interesting games,1student wants more interesting lessons,1student’s answer was everything is right. For the second question what is interesting for you on the lessons the answers were carrying out tasks, exercises, new cognitive tasks, reading, learning new words, completing group tasks. The next question was how students prefer working where most of them- 5 answered in groups,4students in pairs in a group and 1student said individually. And for the question which skill they want to improve 5students responded listening, 3said speaking, 2 pointed it as writing.

Survey results in 9th A (2)

All of students are able to comprehend listening text. However, there are problems in students understanding of the listening. From the interview I cleared the difficulties students often meet challenges such as misunderstanding of the details, understanding fast speech, different accents, students needed to listen more than once, identify speaker’s intention. Also, I noticed that 2students received only 5out of 9 in listening task in SAU and in the listening part of SAT almost 7 got only 2 out of 4.

To answer research questions I decided to motivate students learning English by using various pre-listening tasks in perceiving listening material. Listening is one of the important skills that provides input for the learners in language they are learning. Researchers determined two classifications in listening tasks: one-way and two-way interactive listening. Two-way listening refers to the listener's active involvement in a communicative situation where at least one other speaker is involved. A one-way listening task comprised pre-listing, while-listening, and post-listening task. Pre-listening – allows learners to ‘tune in’ to the context or topic. While listening – what students are asked to do during listening. Post-listening – off-shoots of previous activities. Pre-listening activities can be considered as the most vital aspects of the listening process because other activities depend on the extent to which the teacher has been successful in activating students’ background knowledge and directing them to reach the goals of the activity. Firstly, this stage develops students’ listening skills by enriching students’ vocabulary and making input into the listening task, secondly, gives a student a reason for listening.

Here are some pre-listening activities which can be adapted easily for different classes and levels, as well as for general English and ESP listening lessons:

1. Visuals: What Theme is it?

Show eye-catching images, maps, or diagrams to help students guess the theme of the listening text.

Students can write pre-listening comprehension questions, then listen to see if their questions are answered.

2. Basic Brainstorming

The most basic form of brainstorming consist of revealing the theme of the listening passage and students make notes on papers before they share their ideas with the rest of the group

3. Brainstorming & Word webs:

Give students the topic of the listening and elicit words from them.

With students’ help draw semantic webs on the board with the words, focusing on the relationships between the words, the topic, and sub-topics that might come up in the listening.

4. Brainstorming: Brain Walking

You can paste posters around the classroom and divide students in small groups, students go to the poster and talk about what comes to mind after taking a look at the posters.

5. Brainstorming: Board Writing

You divide the class in small groups, the groups have to brainstorm ideas related to the topic given by the teacher.

The teacher divides the board in small section and one representant of each group and add the words the group brainstorm.

6. Visuals – What do you Think Happened?

Show a picture related to the listening passage and ask to student to come up with ideas of what happened.

Students can work in small groups and come up with an idea and share with the rest of the class.

7. Visuals – Make up a Story

Provide learners with some pictures and they have to place the pictures in a order that make sense.You should ask them to write briefly what they think it happened

8. Visual – Time to Draw.

Provide the learners with the topic and ask them to draw something related to it

Ask them to provide as many details as they can.

As a follow-up, we may wish to display the illustrations for all to see. This activity is especially useful for younger learners.

9. Teach me

Give each student a couple of words and expressions. Ask them to explain the words/expressions to one another in pairs. Quickly check with the whole group, and students then make a short of what they said. They can use that list in the while-listening stage and tick the words they hear in the listening passage.

10. Chinese whispers

Use a sentence or expression related to the theme of the listening. Arrange students in two lines, whisper a word/expression to the first in the line, who whispers it on to the next in line, and so on until the last student in the line shouts out the word/expression they hear or writes the word/expression on the board. Score points for correct words.

11. Sing along:

Teach students a short song, a rhyme, or a jazz chant on a topic related to the text they are going to listen to.

12. Graphic organizers

Give students a blank graphic organizer which summarizes the information in the text under headings.

Students listen and fill-in key words that they hear in the correct places.

13. Controversial Opinions

If the listening involves a controversial issue or question such as:

What should be the minimum driving age?

Should we ban violent video games?

Students then listen to the text and see what opinions are voiced.

You can also have a quick ‘anonymous’ poll, whose results can be revealed at the end of the lesson.

14. Let me read it first

Give students the first lines of the transcript of the text they are going to listen to.

You could even give them the whole transcript and very little time to read it

Then work on listening for specific information without students reading the transcript. This is an effective activity for complex texts with many details.

15. Mime it

If there is a dialog in the listening, mime part of it, to arouse students’ interest.

You can also ask students to mime small part of it.

16. What do I need to do, teacher?

Write instructions in point form for the listening in the wrong order.Ask students to order them.

This activity may help relax students for the listening, as they know exactly what is going to happen next.

17. Note-taking:

Discuss the topic with students and have them brainstorm headings to take notes under. Then brainstorm the sort of transition words they might hear.

18. Who’s who?

If students are going to listen to a dialog with several characters and of course if identifying the characters is not going to be one of the tasks in the listening. Give them an overview of who’s who in the listening

A dialogue with several speaker can be difficult sometimes, so this task can help them have a higher rate of success in it.

19. True or False

As a teacher, you can prepare a series of statements, some of them true or and some of them false. Read these to your students and let them determine if those statement you are making are true or false. Don’t corroborate if they are right or wrong. This will help learners to have a reason for listening

Aims of pre-listening tasks

• Setting the context

This is perhaps the most important thing to do - even most exams give an idea about who is speaking, where and why. In normal life we normally have some idea of the context of something we are listening to.

• Generating interest

Motivating our students is a key task for us. If they are to do a listening about sports, looking at some dramatic pictures of sports players or events will raise their interest or remind them of why they (hopefully) like sports. Personalization activities are very important here. A pair-work discussion about the sports they play or watch, and why, will bring them into the topic, and make them more willing to listen.

• Activating current knowledge - what do you know about…?

'You are going to listen to an ecological campaigner talk about the destruction of the rainforest'. This sets the context, but if you go straight in to the listening, the students have had no time to transfer or activate their knowledge (which may have been learnt in their first language) in the second language. What do they know about rainforests? - Where are they? What are they? What problems do they face? Why are they important? What might an ecological campaigner do? What organizations campaign for ecological issues?

• Acquiring knowledge

Students may have limited general knowledge about a topic. Providing knowledge input will build their confidence for dealing with a listening. This could be done by giving a related text to read, or, a little more fun, a quiz.

• Activating vocabulary / language

Just as activating topic knowledge is important, so is activating the language that may be used in the listening. Knowledge-based activities can serve this purpose, but there are other things that can be done. If students are going to listen to a dialogue between a parent and a teenager who wants to stay overnight at a friend's, why not get your students to role play the situation before listening. They can brainstorm language before hand, and then perform the scene. By having the time to think about the language needs of a situation, they will be excellently prepared to cope with the listening.

• Predicting content

Once we know the context for something, we are able to predict possible content. Try giving students a choice of things that they may or may not expect to hear, and ask them to choose those they think will be mentioned.

• Pre-learning vocabulary

When we listen in our first language we can usually concentrate on the overall meaning because we know the meaning of the vocabulary. For students, large numbers of unknown words will often hinder listening, and certainly lower confidence. Select some vocabulary for the students to study before listening, perhaps matching words to definitions, followed by a simple practice activity such as filling the gaps in sentences.

• Checking / understanding the listening tasks

By giving your students plenty of time to read and understand the main listening comprehension tasks, you allow them to get some idea of the content of the listening. They may even try to predict answers before listening.

The choice of pre-listening task also gives you a chance to grade the listening lesson for different abilities. If you have a class who are generally struggling with listening work, then the more extensive that the pre-listening work is the better. If, however, you wish to make the work very demanding, you could simply do work on the context of the listening. Thus, the same listening text can provide work for different abilities. Pre-listening, as the first stage of listening teaching, is long argued by linguists and teachers on its contexts and role in the listening teaching. For example, some researchers (Buck, 1991; Cohen, 1984) suggested arrange a question preview in pre-listening stage with the reason that it may guide the students’ attention in the right direction. On the contrary, others (Ur, 1984; Weir, 1993) argued that the question preview process may distract the learners from attending to the actual input. Hence, it is worthwhile to clarify the status of pre-listening in classroom teaching of listening.

Before analyzing the role of pre-listening in the process of a listening class, it is useful to overview the difficulties in listening teaching initially so that the role of pre-listening stage can be further discussed.

1. The Difficulties in Teaching Listening

Comparing to other language competence, such as reading and writing, listening has some specific features which could bring learners pressure and difficulty in dealing with it. They are concluded as follows (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2002; Thomson, 2005):

• High frequency in communication. Based on the investigation of Rivers and Temperley (1978), listening takes approximately 45% of the place in communication of an individual’s daily life.

• Passivity. Apparently, listening is considered as a totally passive action in communication, though it is further regarded as an active process rather than its original passive role (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2002).

• Speediness and repeatlessness. Differ from reading, listening normally needs to process the information instantly and usually just once. It is not as flexible as in reading that readers can refer to the contents as many times as they like.

• Other widely-concerned aspects of natural characteristics. In the process of listening, many other aspects of language of knowledge are needed such as phonetic, vocabulary, grammar.

Due to above features of listening, teaching listening was involved in an amount of difficulties. According to the introduction of Cherry (1957), in second and foreign language listening, most of the difficulties are caused by “uncertainty” which could present in the area of speech sounds and patterns, language and syntax, recognition of content and other influence of environment. The difficulties could show different representations in classroom teaching of listening:

• Learners could be anxious about a long text for the reason of lacking time to process information.

• Unfamiliar context and background could scare the learners and make them lose interests and patience.

• Learners may be influenced by new vocabularies, phonetic phenomenon, grammar structure and these affections could decrease their comprehension about the text.

• By giving a long audio material, learners could have difficulties to concentrate on the important information.

• There are also some other elements in the process of listening which could confuse the learners such as different accent, background noise and assimilation, etc.

2. The Functions of Pre-listening in a Listening Class

As discussed above, pre-listening can be recognized as a stage of preparation and warming up of the whole process of listening. As some researchers (Rees,2002; Peachey,2002)review, there are a few of aims and types of pre-listening tasks that enable the learners deal with the following listening text smoothly and strategically, such as to generate interest, build up confidence and facilitate comprehension. Following is the detailed discussions on the functions of pre-listening.

(1) Motivating learners

People believe “Interest is the best teacher”. To arouse students’ interests is one of the most important conditions for a teaching process. Only when the students are interested in the contents of teaching can the efficiency of teaching and learning be guaranteed. Therefore, the first role of pre-listening is motivating learners.

Underwood (1989) summarizes a variety of ways of pre-listening work can be carried out during the classroom teaching. Some of them are suitable in motivating students:

• The teacher gives background information.

• Organizing the students to have a discussion about the topic or situation in the upcoming text.

• Showing a picture which is related to the content of the text.

To make the listening task interesting, the teacher also can tell the beginning part of the text and provide with some questions as a guideline for the students to guess the end or take some keywords for brainstorming.

(2) Activating current world knowledge and acquiring new knowledge

The main purpose of listening is to teach the knowledge of language and help the learners to be competent in listening. Design some activities that can activate learners’ world knowledge will facilitate them behave better in the listening. Moreover, pre-listening can also play a role to input some new language knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary and meaningful to introduce or review the language knowledge in pre-listening session.

There could be a number of ways to make this part meaningful, depends on the content of the text, the teacher can:

• List the new vocabularies and make sure the students know the meaning and the pronunciation of each one.

• Introduce some phonetics knowledge which could impact on comprehension, such as jointed sounds, lost sounds and etc.

• Review the complex grammar rules and introduce new sentence patterns if any.

• Introduce some language discourse knowledge briefly.

(3) Setting context and predicting content

Rees (2002) emphasized the importance of setting context for listeners in pre-listening session because even in exams learners have the chance to know a general idea of the listening materials. It will greatly help them to predict what they are going to learn. It will help learners to form expectancy of what they will listen and this is an important listening strategy for their future study.

Listening is a difficult and complex section in language learning. Especially in foreign language teaching which has no language environment for practicing, listening competence seems even harder to be developed. Thus, before presenting a “long and horrible” text, acquiring some listening techniques (for instance, concentrating on the stressed words, predicting the information, etc.) could be helpful for the students to deal with the task.

Personally, I feel it is important to devote a fair proportion of a lesson to the pre-listening task, should the listening warrant it. For example, the listening about an ecological campaigner lends itself well to extended knowledge and vocabulary activation. However, a listening involving airport announcements may only need a shorter lead-in, as the topic is somewhat narrower. Overall, training students to bring their own knowledge and their skills of prediction to their listening work can only help them when listening to the language outside the classroom. These skills are as much a part of listening as understanding pronunciation or listening for details.

In conclusion, I can say that, the activities leading up to the listening can make a difference in the levels of comprehension. The results of students ‘knowledge gave visible results by comparing the academic performance and motivation in I and IV terms. I am going to apply listening strategies which become the main point to be successful in listening comprehension test.

Literature:

1. [British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/pre-listening-activities]

2. [Pre Listening Stage English Listening Teaching. Essays, UK, 2013].