
The ways of improving esp learners' listening skills

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As ESP teachers, we know that, listening is a critical element in the competent language performance of learners as specific purposes, whether they are communicating at their studies, or in classes.

Listening should be relevant. Because learners listen with a purpose and listen to things that interest them, accounting for the goals and experiences of the learners will keep motivation and attention high. For example, if learners at a worksite need to be able to understand new policies and procedures introduced at staff meetings, in class they should be helped to develop the abilities to identify main ideas and supporting details, to identify cause and effect, to indicate comprehension or lack of comprehension and to ask for clarification. Material should be authentic. Authenticity should be evident both in language and in task. Use of authentic material, such as workplace training videos, audio tapes of actual workplace exchanges and TV and radio broadcasts, increases transferability to listening outside of the ESP classroom context to work and to community. Opportunities to develop both top-down and bottom-up processing skills should be offered. As we know top-down oriented activities encourage the learners to discuss what they already know about a topic, and bottom-up practice activities give confidence in accurate hearing and comprehension of the components of the language as sounds, words, intonation or grammatical structures.

On the process of developing listening skill, the listening strategies should be encouraged. Predicting, asking for clarification and using non-verbal cues are examples of strategies that increase chances for successful listening. For example, using video can help learners develop cognitive strategies. As they view a segment with the sound off, learners can be asked to make predictions about what is happening by answering questions about setting, action and interaction; viewing the segment again with the sound on allows them to confirm or modify their hypothesis. [1]

Activities should teach, not test. Teachers should avoid using activities that tend to focus on memory rather on the process of listening or that simply give practice rather than help learners develop listening ability. For example, simply having the ESP learners listen to a passage followed by true/false questions might indicate how much the learners remembered rather than helping them to develop the skill of determining main idea and details.

The teacher can facilitate the development of listening ability by creating listening lessons that guide the learner through three stages: pre-listening, the listening task or while-listening, and post-listening.

We should engage our ESP learners in a pre-listening activity. This activity should establish the purpose of the listening activity and activate the schemata by encouraging the learners to think about and discuss what they already know about the content of the listening text according to their knowledge level.

On while-listening stage they can do the listening task itself. The task should involve the listener in getting information and in immediately doing something with it. At last we can engage in a post-listening activity. This activity should help the listener to evaluate success in carrying out the task and to integrate listening with the other language skills. Even as ESP teachers, we should encourage practice outside of the classroom whenever possible.

The final stage of teaching a text or the given topic involves post-listening activities, which cover two kinds of activities:

1. comprehension activities

2. evaluation activities [2]

Comprehension activities focus on checking understanding of English itself and interpretation of the text. Students are asked to do some question-oriented exercises which test students' comprehension and memory, and the questions are usually offered by textbooks.

Evaluation activities aim at developing students' self-evaluation strategy in order to make them more efficient listeners. In order to let students have a chance to practice oral English in a functional situation, we can have one more kind of post-listening activities: production activities, which are intended to promote students' oral ability. [3]

There are many helpful activities to choose from for developing listening skills of our ESP learners. Lund has categorized them according to responses that can be observed as comprehension checks:

1. Doing: the listener responds physically such as in Total Physical Response;
2. Choosing: the listener selects from alternatives such as pictures, objects, texts or actions;
3. Transferring: the listener transforms the message such as drawing a route on map or filling in a chart;
4. Answering: the listener answers questions about the text;
5. Condensing: the listener takes notes or makes an outline;
6. Extending: the listener goes beyond the text by continuing the the story or solving a problem;
7. Duplicating: the listener simply repeats or translates the message;
8. Conversing: the listener is an active participant in a face-to-face conversation. [4]

So, if we teach ESP learners by feeling strongly responsibility we can achieve good results. For that we should analyze the listening tasks if they are authentic or interesting or possible to their knowledge level or not and should follow the guide of the stage of every lesson.

References

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