

A Study on difficulties in Developing the English Listening Skills of the Fourth Year Students at the University of Information Technology, Yangon

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Abstract— Listening skill is a vital role to communicate in the real life situation and crucial to maintain productive relationships, and sometimes the only way to establish communication. It is important that listener has to understand the speaker's message and respond in the right manner. This research explores the difficulties in developing English Listening Skills of the fourth year students at the University of Information Technology, Yangon. Language learners usually express their difficulties in learning listening skills in which students are trying to understand every word, they do not know the most important words and recognise the words they know. The most two striking difficulties in learning speaking skill are that students make incorrect pronunciation and they have problems with different accents. Questionnaires with close-ended and open-ended questions were distributed to the students. This paper analyses the difficulties in learning English Listening Skills of the University of Information Technology, examines to what degree the obstacles that hinders the listening skills of the fourth year students and suggests effective approaches to English listening skills at the University of Information Technology, Yangon.

Keywords— Difficulties, Learning English Listening, Developing Listening Skills, Students, University of Information Technology

I. Introduction

This paper focuses on the investigation of the difficulties in students' learning of listening skills in English as a second language of the University of Information Technology. Listening is the most crucial communication skill and communication is not complete without effective listening. Good listening skill makes students better understand assignments they are given.

Hamouda (2013) stated that listening skill plays a crucial role in understanding language. According to Pourhosein Gilakjani and Mohammadreza Ahmadi (2011) also described that listening makes people successful communication. According to Richards, John Platt and Heidi Platt (2000) and Pourhosein Gilakjani and Seyede Masoumeh Ahmadi (2011), good listening skill is the basic source of speaking and better communication, which focuses on role of linguistic units, such as phonemes, words, grammatical structures and the role of listener's anticipations, the situation and context, previous knowledge, and the subject. Hamouda (2013) stated that EFL learners face the most difficult problems in understanding listening skill as grammar, reading, and vocabulary are regarded as the essential subjects in universities. Most of the books do not describe Listening and speaking skills as the most important sessions and teachers do not emphasise these skills in their classes. Most of the fourth year students at the University of Information Technology are not interested in teaching listening skill and they think that listening skill is

not essential in effective communication. Most of the students are bored with listening session in language lab and they cannot catch up with the recording teacher plays. Students face a lot of difficulties when they listen to a language.

In this paper, the researcher identifies the students' listening comprehension problems when listening to oral texts. This paper aims to develop teachers' consciousness of these difficult areas in listening comprehension so that suitable and effective actions can be applied. It is hoped that the findings of this paper provide good views for the teaching and learning of listening comprehension for teachers and students.

II. Literature Review

The literature review is divided into two sub-sections: what listening is, and the difficulties of students' listening skills.

A. What Listening Is

[5] Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is key to all effective communication and without the ability to listen effectively, misunderstanding occurs within families, colleagues, organisations [5]. Some important parts of Listening include discriminating between sounds, recognising words and understanding their meaning, identifying grammatical word order, identifying expressions and sets of utterances that act to create meaning, connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues, using background knowledge to predict and to confirm meaning and recalling important words and ideas. There are five stages in listening process: hearing, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding. According to Rost (2009), listening helps people in understanding the world and the environment and is one of the key elements in creating successful communication. Jafari and Hashim (2015) stated that listening is a channel for comprehensible input and more than 50 percent of the time learners spend in learning a foreign language is devoted to listening.

B. The Difficulties of Students' Listening Skills

This section includes six sub-sections: trying to understand every word, not knowing the most important words, making incorrect pronunciation, having problems with different accents, having a mental block, and distracting by background noise.

1. Trying to Understand Every Word

Students are trying to understand every word in recording, so they cannot catch up with key words. Teachers should use the effective way to solve the problem

to identify the key words while listening to the recording tape. Teachers should ask students to notice the words in the sentence are stressed. As the first approach, teachers can give instruction to the students to know the key words and then students need to listen out for, which is easy-to-spot way in English. This is the way to deal with the difficulty in listening skills. Teacher should give another task which is very easy to the students that they can do, such as identifying the name of a famous person or spotting something that is described repeatedly.

2. Not Knowing the Most Important Words

Learners just do not know key words in recording while listening. Teachers should do vocabulary task before listening session. Teachers should give interesting and new vocabulary to the students to guess the context. By doing this, students can be familiar with the new words and are interested in listening recording tape. Teachers should ask students practise this three times a week, which can develop students' listening skills. In addition, teachers should carry on this practice from which students can guess the words from the text for a short time. And then, teachers should give much more difficult task to the students to improve their listening skills. After that, students will predict the new words within a few minutes. By doing this, students can develop their skills of guessing vocabulary and listening at the same time. Another one to solve the problem is to build up their vocabulary and teach them how students can do the same in their own time with vocabulary lists, graded readers, monolingual dictionary use etc.

3. Making Incorrect Pronunciation

Most of the students always make incorrect pronunciation. They are not aware of the pronunciation of the words and they do not look up dictionary if they do not know the vocabulary. Most of the students do not look up the phonetic symbols to pronounce the words accurately and correctly. They cannot understand the words in recordings because the pronunciation they make is totally different from the pronunciation of recording tapes, therefore students need to look up dictionary and phonetic symbols so that they can make correct pronunciation and catch up with the speakers'. Making correct pronunciation is key to successful listening.

4. Having Problems with Different Accents

Students face a lot of difficulties in understanding different accents while listening recording tape. Nowadays, students are in touch with a variety of British, American and Australian accents. In order to build up their skills to understand different accents in the long term, the best way is watching English movies and listening to BBC World Service Radio whenever they are free. Students should think about concentrating their pronunciation word on sounds that they need to understand many different accents rather than one, so they will develop their listening skills.

5. Having A Mental Block

Students face a lot of difficulties in English listening. Among them, having mental block affects the students' developing in learning listening skills. Students are reluctant to attend listening session because teachers give the most difficult tasks to the students during lecture, so students always think that they have to listen to the

recording tape they cannot understand in class. They feel that they are spending time for listening class. As a result, students do not want to attend the listening session. Teachers are responsible for choosing the suitable listening tasks for their students' need, which is the most important to improve students' listening skills. Teachers should think the listening tasks students can be interested in and choose the updated lessons for the students. In addition, teachers need to know the mindset of the students, which is the most important one, so students' difficulties in listening will be tackled and teachers can help students to develop their listening skills.

6. Distracting by Background Noise

Students are distracted by background noise while listening recording tape. In order to solve this problem, teachers are responsible for creating the environment without noise pollution for listening, etc., and need to reduce noise inside and outside the classroom. Teachers should do listening test in a silent place because most of the students face a lot of difficulties in listening skills, so they try to concentrate on it very much. Therefore, teachers should choose the best place for the students to listen to the recording tape enthusiastically. For the first task, teachers should ask students close their books and down their pens. And then, teachers should ask students listen the same topic in recording tape with headphones. By doing this, students will increase their confidence. When students get used to it, give them an additional challenge by using a recording with background noise, so they will develop their listening skills.

III. Data Analysis

In order to investigate actual needs for developing English Listening Skills of the fourth year students at the University of Information Technology, Yangon, the following questionnaires are given to the students attending the fourth year course in the academic year (2019 – 2020). The study questions are:

- 1) What difficulties students face in learning listening skills at the University of Information Technology?
- 2) To what extent do these difficulties affect learning listening at the University of Information Technology?
- 3) What are the approaches to develop effective teaching English Listening at the University of Information Technology?

A. Participants

The present study was carried out at the University of Information Technology, Yangon. The 100 participant students are studying Software Engineering and High-Performance Computing. The students at the University of Information Technology have passed their Matriculation Examination with good grade. The age is 19 to 20. They have already had more than ten-year exposure to learning English. Approximately 70% of the students were female and 30% were male.

B. Instruments

In this study, the only investigating tool is questionnaire. Questionnaire on the difficulties in learning English Listening Skills was distributed to 100 students attending the fourth year at the University of Information Technology. There were 25 items, the best choice, open-ended and close-ended questions (Shown in Appendix). Biographic details

C. Results Analysis

The study shows that there are altogether 100 students majoring in Software Engineering and High Performance Computing attending the fourth year at the University of Information Technology, Yangon. Their ages range from 19 to 20. They have already had more than ten-year exposure to learning English. Most of the students are very interested in English and always try to develop their listening skills. 30% of the students learn English with less motivation because English is a compulsory subject and their purpose is to pass the exam that mainly focus on reading and writing skills.

According to the data collected by questionnaires, 70% of the students admits themselves that their listening skill is poor and the rest fair. 80% of the students describes that learning English is very helpful in studying major subjects. 40% of the students describes that they never speak English outside the class. 80% of the learners understands the words in recording tape with great difficulty and they cannot identify the words spoken by the teacher. In addition, 80% of the students cannot guess key words in recording tape and they are not familiar with the pronunciation of the native speaker. 90% of the students admits themselves that making correct pronunciation is essential for developing English Listening skills, 60% of the learners also admits themselves that they never look up dictionary to know the correct pronunciation and phonetic symbols. 80% of the students has a lot of difficulties with different accents while listening recording tape. 70% of the students enjoys listening English songs to develop their listening skills and they think that listening BBC News can develop their listening skills. 80% of the students admits that they are distracted by background noise while listening recording tape. Most of the students also admit that listening is useful after their course, and state that good listening skill plays a vital role in effective communication.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the results from the study, there are some difficulties in developing English Listening skills of the fourth year students at the University of Information Technology, Yangon. The following factors hinder students' listening skills to a great extent: trying to understand every word, not knowing the key words, making incorrect pronunciation, having problems with different accents, having a mental block, and distracting background noise. 80% of the students do not understand the words in recording tape and they have a lot of difficulties in learning listening skills. Students cannot guess the key words in recording tape because they make themselves incorrect pronunciation and they do not look up dictionary to know the correct pronunciation, so their pronunciation is totally different from the native speakers'. Therefore, they cannot know correct pronunciation of the words in recording tape. In addition, most of the students have problems with different accents and are distracted by background noise, so they cannot catch up with the key words in recording. To deal with the difficulties in learning English Listening skills, encouragement, and suggestion are the effective methods.

To overcome the obstacles in learning English listening skills, teachers should give effective approaches to the students to know the key words while listening the recording tape. It is the most important that teachers should encourage students to look up dictionary to know the correct pronunciation. In addition, teachers should ask students read a short paragraph with 7 new words and translate it within five minutes. Teachers should not tell or give the meaning of these words to the students and should ask students to look up dictionary. And then, teachers should make students write phonetic symbols of the new words. Teachers should ask students practise it daily. In order to understand different accents in listening, teachers should encourage students to watch English movies and listen to English songs they like most. Teachers also encourage students to listen to BBC News, to watch VOA learning English App three times a week. By doing these approaches, students will develop their listening skills within a short time.

There are shortcomings in the current study and the findings of the current study suggest some questions for further research:

- 1)The current study covered a small percentage of students, more and more survey is needed to investigate the difficulties in developing English Listening skills.
- 2)The only one study on the difficulties of developing listening skills was done and did not carry out teaching experiment, so how teachers can teach English Listening in the classroom within limited time is a problem at the University of Information Technology, since most students in universities only take a listening session for once a week?
- 3)Teaching English at the University of Information Technology includes four skills. The author suggests that pronunciation and teaching phonetic symbols should be included in learning to develop listening skills. This paper covers one part of them and it is expected that further research will be carried out by excellent experts. Researchers can focus on what are the specific difficulties in other parts of English learning at the University of Information Technology, Yangon.

Appendix

This questionnaire is intended to obtain your opinion on your English Listening skills. Please fill it in as completely as possible. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Name-----
Age-----
Sex-----
Specialised Subject-----
Academic Year-----
University-----

Please mark (√) in the appropriate box and answer the questions:

1. How many years have you learned English?

2. What is your purpose(s) of learning English?
To pass the examination
To be successful communication

3. To what extent do you think learning English is helpful in studying Major Subjects?
 Very much
 To some extent
4. How is your listening skill?
 Excellent Good
 Fair Poor
5. Do you speak in English outside the class?
 Usually Sometimes
 Often Never
6. Do you understand the words in recording tape?
 With little difficulty
 With great difficulty
7. Could you identify the words spoken by the teacher?
 Yes No
8. Could you guess key words in recording tape?
 Yes No
9. Do you listen to your friends' speaking in English?
 Yes No
10. Does the teacher give chances to speak and listen in the class?
 Yes No
11. Do you listen to English News on television and radio?
 Yes No
12. How do you feel about the importance of listening skills?
 For better communication
 For future career
13. Are you familiar with the pronunciation of the native speaker while listening recording tape?
 Yes No
14. Do you think making correct pronunciation is essential for developing English Listening Skills?
 Yes No
15. Do you look up dictionary to know the correct pronunciation?
 Usually Sometimes
 Often Never
16. Do you look up dictionary to find out phonetic symbols?
 Yes No
17. Do you think good listening skill is a crucial role in successful communication?
 Yes No
18. To what extent do you have difficulties with different accents?
 Very much
 To some extent

19. Which type do you prefer to learn English listening?
 Films Songs
20. Do you think listening BBC News can develop your listening skill?
 Yes No
21. Which of the following reasons make your students difficult to learn listening English?
 Poor-quality CDs and CD players
 Limited practice time at class
 Fast speed speaking
22. Are you distracted by background noise when you listen to recording tape?
 Yes No
23. Do you think listening skill is useful after your course?
 Yes No
24. If yes, what advantages do you have for your listening skill?

25. If there are any approaches you want to use to overcome the difficulties in learning English Listening skills, please specify them.

Thank you for your cooperation.

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