

Using Multimedia To Improve Listening Skills For Students At Central Ethnic Minority College Preparatory School

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Abstract- In the past, due to the lack of modern facilities and technology, teaching grammar made up a majority part of the lesson plans. However, thanks to the increasing demand for globalization, the teaching trend has been shifted to teaching all of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

However, among the skills mentioned above, according to an informal survey, most English students have admitted that they encountered a lot of difficulties improving their listening skills. The most common reason is that they have been taught in traditional ways. In other words, they practice listening passively. Sometimes teachers just play the recording and ask students to listen, which means students do not have enough guidelines and motivation to practice listening skills.

The answers to their problems can be the use of multimedia in classes. Thanks to the fast development of technology, teachers can apply effective tools in the classroom to make their lessons interesting and comprehensible.

With the above facts, the authors have conducted a study to identify the current situation of the listening skill of students at Central Ethnic Minority College Preparatory School (CEMCPS) and suggest some ways of using multimedia to help students make better progress in improving their listening skills.

Index Terms- listening skills, multimedia, Central Ethnic Minority College Preparatory School, CEMCPS

I. INTRODUCTION

The feelings of the students at Central Ethnic Minority College Preparatory School of towards listening skills

Most of the students consider Listening the most difficult skill, in comparison with Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills. To be specific, the statement was strongly agreed by 23 out of 40 participants, equivalent to 57.5%. It was also agreed upon by 25% of the participants. Although there are opposite ideas, they accounted for only 17.5%.

Maybe listening is considered the most difficult skills by a majority of the students, it could result in negative feelings among them.

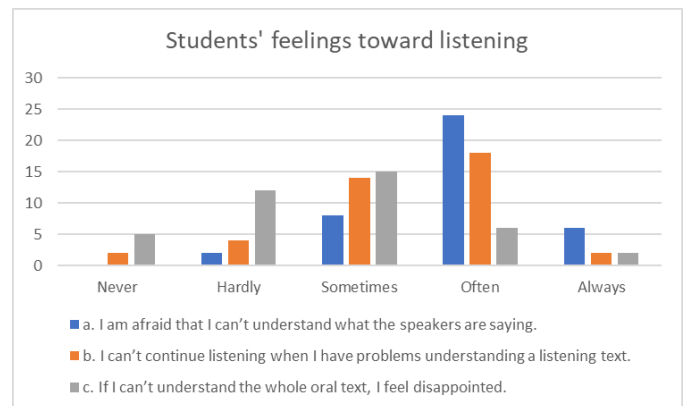


Figure 1.1: Students' feelings toward listening

As shown in figure 1.1, when being asked if they worried that they could not understand what the speakers were saying before they do the listening tasks, none of the students claimed not to be nervous. Six of them (equivalent to 15%) always feel worried and the other twenty-four (equivalent to 60%) often have that feeling. One-fifth of the participants sometimes feel that way while only 5% claimed that they hardly have the problem. The statistics show the fact that students are under pressure even before they listen as they are afraid that they could not understand the oral text. The statistics illustrate how discouraged the students feel when they could not understand the whole oral text. Just 12.5% never feel disappointed while the others, more or less, have that feeling. While 30% is hardly demotivated by not understanding the whole listening text, 37.5% of them sometimes feel that way. Much worse, six students often feel disappointed (making up 15%) and 5% always has that negative feeling.

The difficulties encountered by the students at Central Ethnic Minority College Preparatory School of towards listening skills in the listening process

Table 1.1. Students' difficulties in the listening process

| | N | H | S | O | A |
|--|---|---|--------|--------|--------|
| Before listening | | | | | |
| Before listening, it is hard for me to predict from the clues what I will hear. | 4 | 7 | 1 5 | 1 0 | 4 |
| While listening | | | | | |
| a. It is difficult for me to connect what I have heard with something from an earlier part of the listening text. | 2 | 4 | 1 2 | 1 9 | 5 |
| b. It's hard for me to check whether I understand correctly the meaning of the whole chunks of the listening text. | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 1 | 1 0 |
| c. Because I have to hear and process information constantly, I don't remember the previous content. | 7 | 5 | 1 6 | 1 0 | 2 |
| d. I find it hard to determine the main idea of the listening text | 1 | 3 | 1 0 | 1 7 | 9 |
| e. As the listening tasks vary, I do not know which strategy to apply to different types of tasks. | 8 | 6 | 1 5 | 1 0 | 1 |
| f. It difficult for me to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words. | 0 | 3 | 1 9 | 1 5 | 3 |
| g. Although some words sound familiar, it is difficult for me to recall their meaning immediately. | 6 | 6 | 1 7 | 1 1 | 0 |
| h. I have difficulty checking my understanding of the text based on what I already know about the topic. | 6 | 7 | 1 6 | 8 | 3 |
| i. I find it difficult to use the context to guess those parts of a listening text that I cannot hear clearly. | 1 | 2 | 1 0 | 1 5 | 2 |
| After listening | | | | | |

Before listening, one of the most common strategies that teachers often recommend their students to do before listening is predicting what they are going to hear. However, whether students could apply it well should be made clear. According to the statistics, only four students claimed that they could predict from the clues what they would hear, accounting for only one-tenth of the participants. Seven students hardly find applying the strategy difficult, making up 17.5%. However, there were more students find this tip hard to apply. Ten out of forty students said anticipating the information before listening based on given hints is sometimes a problem for them. There were a larger number of students who often found it hard to determine what they are going to hear, accounting for nearly forty percent. While there was ten percent of the students who always could apply the tip, there was the same number who always got trouble predicting from the clues what they would hear. This data has posed an urgent requirement of finding solutions to help students better prepare before

practicing listening skills. By having good preparation, students could understand the text better and become more confident and motivated.

Obviously, the problem arises more in the process of listening. Therefore, more questions were created to investigate deeply into specific challenges that the students have encountered.

Firstly, when students listen to a long text, relating what they have just heard with things from an earlier part can be problematic. Only two students (equivalent to 5%) never considered it a problem. 10% of the respondents hardly had any trouble. However, 12 respondents said they sometimes could not connect the information they heard with that from the previous part. This problem often occurred to nearly half of the participants. It even happened to 12.5% of the students whenever they were listening. It could be concluded that when listening, most of the students had problems processing the information. Specifically, it is hard for them to link the information of different parts of the oral text together.

(Wray, 2002) embraces different types of multi-word units, or what most non-academic texts for teachers refer to simply as (lexical) chunks. These, in turn, can be subdivided into such overlapping categories as collocations, lexical phrases, phrasal verbs, functional expressions, idioms, and so on. Although some words seem to be familiar to students, their meaning, when they are put in fixed phrases can vary. The change in the meaning of the word can confuse English learners, especially when practicing listening as they have to think and process information in such a short time. It could be the reason why one-fourth of the students claimed that they always had difficulty checking whether they correctly understand the meaning of the whole chunks of the listening text. More than half of the students often had to struggle with this during listening. Ten percent of the participants sometimes found it hard to check if they understood the meaning of the whole chunks precisely. Those who hardly or never experienced the problem only accounted for more than ten percent in total.

Many teachers said that the students could understand single sentences better than they do with the whole talk. One of the most common reasons is that the recording was played non-stop from the beginning until the end. The students, therefore, have to process a large amount of information in an instant time. As a result, even if they can hear the whole text, they cannot remember what is mentioned before. Among surveyed participants, only four students never experienced this problem, comprising 10%. Those who hardly encountered this matter consisted of almost the same number, 12.5%. The number of students who sometimes and often got the problem was quite similar, with 32.5% and 35% respectively. There were still 10% of the participants who claimed that this matter always caused trouble for them.

As it has been known that there are a lot of distractors in the oral text; thus, it is hard for the students to follow the general ideas of the speakers. In a spoken language such as conversation, we always find redundancy of words, like repetitions, elaborations, and insertions of "I mean" (Brown, 2003). The redundancy of words works well for the speakers as they could have more time to find or arrange their ideas logically. However, it makes their expression longer, which means the listeners had to receive more information to process. Thereby, it is hard for them

to determine the main idea of the listening text. Only one out of forty surveyed students claimed that they never had difficulty doing so and three others just hardly had the problem. However, the ones who had trouble identifying the main idea comprised the major proportion. 25% of the students sometimes had to struggle to get the main idea of the text, while this often happened to more than 40% of the respondents. Nearly one-fourth of the participants found finding the main idea of the listening text challenging. Main-idea questions have long been considered a challenge for the students. To detect the main idea, students not only could recognize and understand keywords and phrases of the oral text but also had good generalization skills. Even in a reading text, as a teacher, the writer noticed a lot of my students had difficulty in finding the main idea, let alone the listening text, which requires students to employ more skills but the time allowed is really short. The total number of students who frequently had trouble finding the main idea of the oral text accounted for nearly two-thirds of the total participants. This number presented the urgent need for effective solutions to help students overcome this matter.

The results of the questionnaire survey on how students could apply listening strategies to complete the listening tasks showed that about nearly 25% of the respondents had no or hardly any difficulty choosing suitable strategies for different types of listening tasks. This number is almost equal to the one who was often confused with choosing the good steps to deal with the listening task. Half of the students sometimes find it hard to employ the feasible approach to handle certain listening tasks.

A lot of listening difficulties that the students had resulted from the lack of vocabulary understanding. No student never had such a difficulty in guessing the meaning of the unknown words. In addition, only three students claimed to hardly had the trouble. The number of students who sometime, often and even always found it challenging to predict the meaning of unfamiliar words were nineteen, fifteen and three respectively.

During the teaching time, the author has witnessed a number of students who could catch and even repeated the words that they had listened to before. However, they could not connect the sounds with their meaning. When the teacher showed the words and their meaning, they were very surprised as they already knew those words but they could not remember the meaning right after listening to them. While 5% of the students claimed that they had never experienced this matter, the same number admitted that it always happened to them. 10% hardly found it difficult to immediately recall the meaning of familiar words. Meanwhile, the number of respondents who said that they sometimes or often had the problem is the same which accounted for 75% in total.

In addition, it is also difficult for students to check their understanding of the text based on their knowledge of the topic. While the students who never or hardly had the problem were only six and seven respectively, those who sometimes, often, and always got the troubles accounted for sixteen, eight, and three sequentially.

Besides, not all students could understand the whole oral text, they had to used given context to guess the parts that they did not hear clearly. However, most of the students were often confused in doing so (accounting for nearly 40%). Only one student never found it difficult to guess the missing parts.

After listening, eleven out of forty students often found it difficult to estimate the general accuracy of their understanding.

The number of the students who never or hardly had the troubles were only six in each group.

Using multimedia for improving English listening skill of the students at Central Ethnic Minority College Preparatory School

a. Using power point presentation

Although power point presentation has long become familiar among teacher, it is an effective tool to give lecture in general and teach listening in particular. During the studying time, the writer, also the teacher used this tool in various activities. Firstly, when giving a lecture or mini-lecture, PowerPoint helps to highlight key points in teacher's presentation. The visual format of PowerPoint allows the teacher to easily project timelines, and images. Adding visual component in audio material is proven more helpful to engage students emotionally (Whiting & Granof: 2010). For example, when teaching new vocabulary items, the teacher displayed pictures or animations which could illustrate their meaning. This way not only could draw the students' interest but also help students understand and remember the meaning of vocabulary items. Secondly, the teacher used PowerPoint to provide an outline of the listening text (in the form of mind map, for example) so that students could easily follow the overall listening text. Thirdly, PowerPoint was used to present instructions for a paper assignment or class activity. The sequential order of the slides lends itself to providing step-by-step instructions. In addition, the teacher prepared PowerPoint slide shows to project a discussion prompt to the class. This technique is particularly suited to post-listening stages when the students reviewed what they had learned and developed their critical thinking skills. The teacher then used PowerPoint to project bulletin board or other class materials relevant to the prompt and/or follow up questions. During the experiment period, PowerPoint was used not by the teacher herself but by the students as well. Students were asked to work in groups and prepare PowerPoint slide shows to present their ideas. During the experiment stage, PowerPoint was also employed in displaying tests or quizzes. PowerPoint gave the teacher the ability to project a test or quiz question, discuss it with the class, and then project the answer below or alongside the question. The teacher also used PowerPoint to project student responses to questions.

b. Using videos

It could be boring or difficult for the students if they just listen to the oral text without any illustrations. Therefore, videos would be a good option. When using videos, the teacher divided it into three stages, previewing, viewing and post viewing.

In previewing stage, students were let to watch a small part of the video to guess the content of the video or to give their ideas on the matter presented in the video. This way could not only draw students' attention into the lesson but also help them brainstorm some vocabulary items that could be used in the oral text. Another way which was applied in this stage is that students watched the video clips without hearing the sound or seeing the subtitles. Based on the displayed images, students had to discuss the content of the video clips. The visual illustrations could help students in understanding the main content of the videos and also provide them with visual clues so that they could link the information of

different parts of the listening text, even when they could not hear some parts clearly.

In viewing part, a wide range of activities were organized. Students could be asked to listen for the main idea, for details, for a sequence, for specific vocabulary, for attitude and opinions, etc. Although the students could understand the message of video, they still encountered difficulties in listening selectively to specific vocabularies and details of the information. It was due to the background utility of authentic materials which were not exactly designed for foreign language learning. Therefore, choosing suitable videos for students and providing them with key vocabulary items play an important role as it could improve students' attitude toward English and greatly improve students' motivation to get engaged with the lesson. With videos, teachers could let students check their accuracy by watching the subtitles. Although teacher's feedbacks were still necessary, this way enabled students to evaluate themselves and allowed them to remember the vocabulary items longer.

In post viewing stage, students were asked to summarize or retell the content of the video. Besides, they were expected to express their opinions about the video more specifically. Teachers assisted them by showing the outline of the video or giving them time to prepare for their presentation.

c. Using dictionaries

Students are allowed to use their dictionaries, both online and published version to check the meaning of unknown words and phrases. The students were advised not to use bilingual dictionaries so that they were not framed to a single meaning of the vocabulary items. The use of dictionaries was arranged in forms of either pair work or groups work and the students were given time to find out what the vocabulary items mean. Dictionaries could greatly support the students' comprehension, especially in understanding idioms or proverbs.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, listening is considered the most difficult language aspects by most of the students. Due to this perception, it has negative effects on the students' feelings. The difficulties

that students at Central Ethnic Minority College Preparatory School had before listening was predicting what they would hear. The challenge they found while listening consisted of connecting what they have heard with something from an earlier part of the listening text; checking whether they understand correctly the meaning of the whole chunks of the listening text; remembering the previous content of the listening text; determining the main idea of the listening text; deciding which strategy to apply to different types of tasks; guessing the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words; recalling the meaning of familiar words immediately; checking their understanding of the text based on what they already knew about the topic; and using the context to guess those parts of a listening text that they could not hear clearly. In addition, after listening, the students have to struggle evaluating the overall accuracy of their comprehension.

To help students deal with the aforementioned problems, it is recommended to appropriately apply multimedia in teaching. Based on the current available equipment, it is advisable to use PowerPoint presentation, videos and dictionaries to improve students' listening skills.

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