



The rate of listening skill integration in teaching EFL

A case study in schools of Korça

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The importance listening has in English language teaching and comprehension

English language acquisition relies on four productive skills:

✦ reading, writing, speaking and listening

But

are these skills taught in an integrative way by English teachers?

✦ Is listening skill the focus of teachers' attention in the process of English language acquisition?

Listening as a skill

- It is one of the **greatest challenges** with English language learning
- It is **one of the most complex skills** required to be developed in English acquisition
- **Greater attention** is given to **speaking, reading and writing** as effective skills in English language mastering
- **Listening is believed to be a skill acquired by students themselves**
- **Students are usually given practice in listening but they are not actually taught listening.**

Why teach listening?

- a - Listening is *the most common communicative activity in daily life*, according to Morley (1991: 82), ***“We can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write.”***
- b - Listening affects other skills such as speaking and reading. Without listening we cannot reproduce or reply. As Rost says ***“listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin. Listening is thus fundamental to speaking.”***
- c - Listening is the *ability to understand what is said*. During the process of listening, (Rost 1991), a listener needs to discriminate between sounds, recognize words, identify grammatical grouping of words, identify expressions and sets of meaningful utterances.
- d – Listening involves *a sender* (an instructor, a speaker, radio, television), *a message* and *a receiver* (the listener). **Listeners have to process messages**
- e – We must not forget the fact that the *receiver (the student) is listening something said in second language contexts*, where his overall knowledge of language is not complete.

Three stages of listening

The process of listening is divided into three stages (McDonough, Shaw (1993) and Rost 1991):

- **1. Pre-listening activity** – the purpose of listening task is given at this point. It is otherwise known as “**guess-what-it-is-about**” task where students, **try to find out** what they will hear and **what they are expected to do**. It serves as a warm-up activity
- **2. Listening itself** – **comprehension is the main target** of this stage, which is achieved by some activities, such as giving the main idea, topic, setting, and summary. Listening in this stage needs to be repeated.
- **3. Post-listening activity** – its aim is **to check comprehension and listening skill**, and the effectiveness of listening strategies. A set of activities are organized in this stage, as “**follow-up-work**” such as; multiple-choice questions, true/false or general questions, discussion on main points of the text, etc. **It can also serve as a topic for later writing or extension**, for practice of new vocabulary and pronunciation, group discussion etc. (Mili Saha & Md)

Strategies for listening

- ✦ Students need to know how to listen while teachers need to teach them the language system, (the knowledge of language: grammar and vocabulary etc.) and the use of the language system, (the skills of language use). (Mili Saha & Md)

Top-down strategy – involves listener's background knowledge, prior knowledge of the topic, context, and type of text

The aim of this type of strategy is (O'Malley 1989) (Rubin 1994)

- ✦ to listen for main idea,
- ✦ to predict what is going to happen,
- ✦ to draw conclusions,
- ✦ to summarize.

Strategies for listening

✿ ***Bottom-up processing*** - students make use of their linguistic knowledge; from the smallest linguistic unit as phoneme (bottom) to the largest one as complete text (top). They consider the sound, word and grammatical structure altogether to gain the meaning of the text.

The bottom-up process is used

- ✿ to listen to special details,
- ✿ to recognize cognates,
- ✿ to recognize patterns of word-order.

Planning and teaching listening

Considerations for teachers

Listening exercises need to be well-designed by the teachers in order to build up students' confidence in listening ability.

Teachers should set tasks for listening activities in order not to overburden the concentration of the students. They are:

- ✦ Define the activity's instructional goal
- ✦ Check the level of difficulty of the listening text
- ✦ Use pre-listening activities to prepare students for what they are going to hear
- ✦ Match while-listening activities to the instructional goal, the listening purpose and students' proficiency level (activities even after listening)

Table 1: Generalities on teachers involved in the survey.

- ✚ 50 teachers of English language completed the questionnaire;
- ✚ 24 of them teach in the 9-th grade schools while 26 teachers at high schools of our district.
- ✚ 48 % of them have been teaching for about 5 years, while 40 % have been teaching for about 10 years.
- ✚ The figures show that most of them have considerable teaching experience.

Table 2: Teachers' awareness on the importance of listening skill in percentage.

The results from the table above show that:

- nearly all teachers (84 % of the teachers; 42 out of 50) are fully aware of the importance listening has in comprehension in particular and learning English in general.

Table 3: The place listening activities occupy among other skills in %; (reading, writing and speaking)

📌 **Listening** 18 %

📌 **Reading** 34%

📌 **Speaking** 28%

📌 **Writing** 20%

📌 Listening is given the least time (18 %) in comparison with the other skill activities in English classes.

📌 Reading takes the first place followed by speaking and writing.

Table 4: Activities on setting instructional goals by the teachers.

Frequency

- Always (100%)
- Usually (75%)
- Often (50%)
- Sometimes (25%)
- Never (0 %)

- About half of the teachers (42 %) always help students identify the goal of listening activity, but a quarter of them (24 %) do not often set any goal on listening comprehension.

- About half of the teachers (42 %) always help students in determining the topic, type of text and setting, but still there are teachers (9 out of 50) who do not give importance to facts concerning the passage.

- The main idea is usually defined (30 %) but 38 % of the teachers practice this activity less.

- A considerable number of teachers (three fourth of them) help students comprehend listening by presenting supporting details.
- 38 % of the teachers do not ask students to reproduce the message either orally or in written form.

Table 5:

The level of difficulty of the listening text checked by the teachers.

This part of the questionnaire reveals how teachers of English check the difficulty of the listening text/s.

- ✚ Only one third of the teachers (34 %) set tasks to ease students' text comprehension,
- ✚ while 22 % of them only sometimes help students to define the type of text, the individuals and objects involved and the visual aids used.
- ✚ the familiarity with the topic; 76 % of the teachers always or usually check the level of difficulty by identifying how familiar students are with the topic.
- ✚ In conclusion, there are still teachers who do not give proper attention to this strategy.

Table 6: Pre-listening activities

- ✦ Half of the teachers involved in the survey (50 %) provide students with the background knowledge necessary for text comprehension.
- ✦ but less attention is given to the activities for group or collaborative work (10 % or ten out of 50).
- ✦ Since students are little involved in class discussion activities, teachers may find it difficult to fully assess their background knowledge of the topic.

Table 7: During and after listening activities to the instructional goal, the listening purpose and students' proficiency level.

- 32 % of the teachers ask students to complete a written task during or immediately after listening.
- 28 % of the teachers use questions and predictions to draw students' attention on crucial elements of the text;
- 27 teachers out of 50 only sometimes or never give feedback to listening comprehension (so the teachers do not receive the necessary information in response to the assignments set, and consequently do not find out the difficulties students have)
- 52 % of the teachers sometimes or never refer back to details or difficult patterns when listening is over, (it means listening comprehension is not totally realized successfully).
- It can be asserted that only 35 % of the teachers surveyed do teach listening strategies to help students' listening comprehension

Conclusions

- ✦ Listening is one of the most important modalities used in English learning.
- ✦ It involves the interpretation of what is heard, as well as the background and linguistic knowledge of the students.
- ✦ It is essential for English language teachers to help their students become effective learners, i.e. to use listening strategies in teaching and provide listening practice in authentic situations for their students.
- ✦ As for the survey, teachers are aware of the importance of listening strategies, but not good appliers of them
- ✦ Pre-listening activities seem to be well applied by most of the teachers, but little is done on focusing students' attention on crucial elements of the text, giving feedback, referring back to the script to check listening comprehension details and difficult listening patterns.
- ✦ **Listening strategies instruction should be given proper attention by teachers in order to make this skill be integrated into language analysis.**