

Enhancing Listening Skills through Online Courses: A Comprehensive Exploration

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Abstract- This paper gives a comprehensive view on listening skills and its role in developing one's cognitive skills. Listening skills are very important to develop personally, academically and professionally. The technology has brought a change in learning scenarios of students. Online learning is very attractive and also useful to improve listening skills of students. Though online learning has many problems in developing listening skills, these problems can be solved by introducing innovative methods in online teaching such as creating interactive sessions, providing online platforms for peer group discussion. The course designer has to see that the online course should engage learners in different kinds of activities where they get an opportunity to improve their listening skills.

Key Words: Listening Skills, online learning, interactive sessions, subjects, technical problems, approaches and methods.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores some aspects of the intersection of listening skills improvement through online learning. This paper reviews some literary works, examines theoretical frameworks and considers some practical approaches related to the development of listening skills through online education. This paper also provides a comprehensive view on the factors that enhance listening proficiency of individuals. The structured analysis of this paper explores benefits, challenges and outputs of online learning in improving listening skills. It also suggest some methods that can be incorporated in the design, implementation of online courses whose objectives are improving listening skills. They can act as recommendations for the educators and researchers in the field (Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2018).

Definition

Listening skills along with cognitive and emotional intelligence are very important to understand verbal communication. Effective listening is completely different from hearing. Hearing is just to get the sounds, whereas listening requires active participation from listeners. Listeners should have empathy to understand speaker's message. These kinds of requirements are very much needed in personal and professional life. Effective listening skills lead to effective communication, build good relationships, and develop a co-operative environment. Individuals who possess strong listening skills are able to manage things efficiently at the same time they can resolve conflicts and show empathy to build good interpersonal relations with others (Brown, 2015).

Importance of Listening Skills

Effective listening skills are given high priority in personal life due to its pivotal role in promoting trust, developing bond and, maintaining long relationships with others. Listening skills in academic setting is crucial to improve learning skills and developing critical thinking. When it comes to professional life, listening skills are key skills for developing many attributes such as leadership, negotiation which are very much needed for any organization success. These attributes brings back employee satisfaction too. Hence, listening skills are very important to get success in personal, academic and professional life (Gudykunst & Kim, 2018).

Listening Skills through Online Learning

21st century's revolutionary change in education is online learning. Online platform offers number of opportunities for skill development as well as knowledge acquisition. Individuals can access any

kind of information through digital platforms and virtual classrooms at any time and at any place in the world. This online learning process is easy to access according to our convenience with customized options. As there are number of learning styles in online learning, individuals can choose their own preferences. This paradigm shift towards online learning creates lot of potential to learners to improve their listening skills by engaging themselves in multimedia, interactive sessions with peer members and participating in virtual discussions (Rubin & Rubin, 2016).

Literature Review

Any research paper should refer some theories to understand the base point for the discussed topic. This paper has also referred some theoretical frame works to understand dynamics of listening skills. Information processing theory is one of such important theories that are developed to understand listening skills. This theory states that listening is a cognitive process in the brain which later stimulates auditory organs, interprets the information, and organizes the information to get a meaningful output. This meaningful output depends on the personality traits of the listener such as individual's attention, perception and memory power. This adds the value to the processed information. Cognitive skills are very important to get clear information as well as for interpretation of obtained information. This theory also states that external factors also influence listening skills. Some of the common external factors are distractions from individuals and less accessibility to required resources (Brown, 2015).

The other theory that should be mentioned in this context is transactional model of communication. This theory says that communication is a dynamic and reciprocal process that required for successful interaction. This theory was developed by communication scholars Barnlund and Watzlawick. According to them the communicated message does not have any inherent meaning. The message is co-constructed according to the listening capacity of receiver. If the receiver is active, the listening process takes an active form rather than passive form. The active process of listening involves negotiation and interpretation which are very important factors from the receiver's point of view. Negotiation and interpretation are the two main components that make communication a continuous process. This

transactional model also suggests that the ultimate goal of listening is getting response from the receiver in time. This response from the listener depends on several factors, context, culture and, relationship between sender and receiver (Gudykunst & Kim, 2018).

Methods to Develop Listening Skills

The traditional method for developing listening skills is based on class room activities. These activities goal is to enhance comprehensive skills through spoken information. Lectures, seminars, presentations and, group discussions help students to practice listening skills. These activities also develop critical thinking of listeners. The real-life situations are given in the form of role-plays to practice active listening skills in specific contexts. Though these methods are effective, there are some limitations for these activities. These methods do not provide individual feedback, and have limited scenarios for real-world applications. There is no possibility to address challenges encountered by various listeners in different contexts due to their individual differences.

One of the advantages of traditional methods for improving listening skills is its class-room based approaches. This class-room based approach includes, designing of activities, engaging learner in activities and, providing contextual relevant topics. These approaches improve basic listening skills and help to gain knowledge (Field, 2008). For instance, teacher use different audio and visual aids for interactive classrooms. These teaching aids improve students' understanding capacity and they can remember the information for a long time (Karpicke et al., 2009). Role-play creates real-life situations in the classroom where students get an opportunity to explore real world with a practical approach. They learn the importance of activities (Pica et al., 1996). The limitations for these approaches are passive learning environment and insufficient resources and authentic practice (Cullen, 2015). The actual problem starts when students start applying their listening skills in real world contexts due to lot of differences between classroom settings to real world context (Vandergrift, 2007).

Online Learning to Develop Listening Skills

The challenges faced in traditional classroom methods can get solutions in online learning. There are many

advantages in online learning related to listening skills. The first advantage is its flexibility, accessibility, and personalized learning experiences (Means et al., 2009). The learning happens through videos, podcasts, and interactive quizzes and other virtual discussions. Learners can choose all of them or can choose according to their learning style (Sitzmann et al., 2006). The active listening process is happened through discussion forums on online platforms. These discussion forums also help to develop collaborative learning and social interaction with other members (Simonson et al., 2011). The collaborative learning prompts not only active listening process but also provides an opportunity to learners to practice their listening skills in real world context (Boling et al., 2012).

There are number of multimedia resources available in online learning to engage learners. This active engagement helps to improve listening skills of learners. The multimedia offers different levels of learning experiences to learners. Videos provide an opportunity to observe facial expressions and body language of the speakers which help learners to retain spoken information. Podcasts provide auditory-based learning experience. They include conversations, interviews and, narratives. These kinds of activities are very helpful to improve listening skills and to acquire more vocabulary.

Additionally, multimedia combines text, images, audio and video to provide a different kind of learning experience with multiple models. All these platforms create dynamic learning experiences to all learners and promote better listening skills and comprehensive skills.

Though there are many advantages in online learning and improving listening skills, it too has many challenges. The main challenge is technological barriers in the form of limited access to internet connection, hardware and software errors. These problems really hinder the participation of many undeserved communities (Hao & Zhang, 2020)

Another disadvantage is digital literacy. As most of the people are unaware of many features in online learning, they cannot utilize digital tools and interfaces effectively to improve listening skills (Bozkurt et al., 2020). People also need self-discipline and motivation for online learning (Bates, 2019). Most of the online courses are self-paced and there is no chance for interaction. This self-paced learning limits the

opportunities to interact with others for effective communication and to develop interpersonal connection (Anderson & Dron, 2011).

Innovative Approaches to Improve Listening Skills through Online Learning

All these challenges should be addressed properly with innovative approaches. The innovative approaches include creating interactive elements, engaging learners in peer discussion, providing timely feedback and fostering a sense of presence through engagement of learners in different activities. These methods are given below with proper explanation.

The course designer has to consider some important issues while structuring the course. Every module in the course should facilitate active engagement exercises and skill development strategies. The engagement exercises may be in any form such as discussion forums, peer interaction and other virtual simulations. These interactive elements engage learners actively in learning (Means et al., 2013). The second aspect is setting clear learning objectives for each activity in the beginning of the course along with useful instructions and expectations. These aspects create interest among learners and they understand the relevance of the study and are self motivated to learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Activities should be designed in such a manner they should promote collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving among learners. These skills help them to improve their listening skills in different contexts such as personal, academic and professional (Salmon, 2013). All activities should have assessment criteria followed by feedback mechanism. This assessment and feedback helps learners to monitor their learning progress and finds out the areas improvement. They also get support from experienced faculty or other peer members to improve specific skills (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). By incorporating all these activities in the course structure, course designers can create an engaging virtual classroom sessions which is different from traditional classrooms. This virtual classroom enhances learners' listening skills through active participation and skill improvement.

The holistic leaning is possible by integrating listening skills as a part of all subjects and disciplines including languages. This integration develops communication skills of the learners in which listening are one of the

important skills of it. The approach should be different for languages and subjects. While creating course for languages and literature activities such as storytelling, dramatic readings should be incorporated. These activities improve comprehensive abilities and appreciation capabilities of learners. Whereas these activities are not suitable for subjects like mathematics, science etc. The course designers have to choose different activities to enhance listening skills of learners. Instructors should use podcasts and videos to present complex concepts in an easy method. The aural formats that are used in these courses improve listening skills along with critical thinking.

The other important subjects are under arts branch. Course designers should create a different listening atmosphere to learners. The preferred activities for these subjects are history interviews, debates and documentaries. These activities help learners to understand historical events, diverse perspectives and, other societal issues along with improving their listening skills in a different environment.

The most important aspect that every course designer for online learning should consider is integration of listening skills along with other skills in respective subjects. Educators have to create an interdisciplinary atmosphere to learners where they can foster their listening skills along with other skills mentioned in the course objectives.

It is understood from the above points that if educators, instructional designers, and online course developers integrate all the effective strategies into course structure, it will be very useful to improve listening skills of learners. They have to use different multimedia sources such as podcasts, videos, and interactive simulations to create an atmosphere where learners can practice their listening skills (Means et al., 2013).

The refinement of listening process of learners will be possible with their active involvement in group discussions, role-plays, and virtual simulations. If they practice in their learning they can apply the same in authentic contexts (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Online learning not only improves listening skills of learners, it also develops collaborative skills of learners where they can share their perspectives, exchange their experiences, get feedback and learn from each other (Richardson et al., 2017). This collaborative learning helps them to improve their cognitive skills with deeper understanding of their

listening skills such as their listening strengths and weaknesses. They can improve the areas that they identify in this process (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Finally, it is understood that listening skills are important for successful communication in various contexts. Online courses offer various listening activities which fosters the development of listening capacity of learners in different contexts. These listening skills help to develop cognitive skills which are very much needed for the development of their communication competencies. All educators and course designers should take care of creating more engaging activities to learners to improve their listening skills through online platform.

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