



TEACHING LISTENING AT EARLY AGES

M.A Alimbaev

Educationalist, Karakalpak State University, Uzbekistan

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7379815>

Abstract: This article discusses about the significance of teaching listening in English at preschool age. It focuses on various challenges that young learners confront while learning listening skills and also some strategies to teach listening effectively.

Key words: teaching listening, preschoolers, young learners (YLS)

When people start learning a foreign language, especially English, their first expectation is to be able to speak fluently and clear in the target language. However, developing communicative skills in a foreign language is not just mastering speaking skills but also learning how to listen to spoken discourse. Due to the modern requirements of communicative language teaching and the focus on proficiency, the learning and teaching of listening started to receive more attention. Many studies and researches have proved sufficient empirical evidence that demonstrates the importance of teaching and learning listening in language learning.

Listening is one of the key language skills for young learners as it provides input for the learners. It is obvious that listening is the first skill that preschoolers learn since they start learning English by listening to various songs and words and they can be YLS' basic knowledge or sources in the target language. Foreign language input can be a key figure of children's achievement in learning a foreign language. Early introduction to authentic language can play an essential role in children's afterward levels of communication skills.

Listening is the natural precursor to speaking; the initial stages of language development in a person's native language (and in naturalistic acquisition of foreign or second languages) are dependent on listening [1, 89-90]. Vandergrift (2004) clarifies that learners should learn to listen so that they can better listen to learn [2, 13]. For foreign language students, listening is a skill that places the highest demands on processing as students need to store information in short-term memory at the same time as they work on understanding information [3, 66]. Listening plays a vital role in communication as we cannot interact with others without listening to the speaker's utterances and realizing what they say. Despite its importance, it is considered as the most challenging and passive skill to learn. Listening comprehension is more than just hearing what is said as it consists of comprehending, analyzing and thinking.

Teaching syllabi that are designed to teach YLS typically include songs, rhymes and chants which develop children's listening skills. Children, at preschool institutions, first listen to English words, stories, songs, rhymes and fairy-tales by their teachers and whatever goes through children's ears will provide them with the fundamental input in English. Children cannot learn listening skills during one lesson. Like other skills it should be practiced frequently and taught effectively.

Challenges that preschoolers confront while learning listening

There is a fact that, about 60% of misunderstandings comes from poor listening [4, 126]. While acquiring listening, preschoolers may face to various problems, such as:

1. Limited vocabulary and a lack of background knowledge. Children come to the preschool education institutions where they start initial stages of learning a foreign language with the different levels of knowledge. And those who have limited vocabulary resources may fail to comprehend while listening.
2. Demotivation to listen. The over-usage of the same listening tasks and activities that require more attention and comprehension may reduce YLs' motivation to listen. Unfamiliar vocabulary also can make YLs demotivated. As an example, if children know the words that they are going to listen, this can increase their interests and motivation to listen.
3. Teacher's over-usage of L1 (native language). Some teachers always try to dominate by using their native language in a foreign language classroom. This could be a huge barrier for YLs to learn listening skills. Learners at any ages and degrees should always be provided with the learning environment where they can think, speak in English and listen to native English accent.
4. Short attention span. As children are not capable of centering on one assignment for a long time, it is advisable that listening assignments or exercises ought to be brief, varied, persuading and interesting.
5. Teaching environment. Teaching a foreign language includes not only appropriate methods, materials and teacher's competence but also teaching environment. If YLs find the learning environment uncomfortable to learn listening, this may have a negative impact on teaching listening.

Strategies to teach listening effectively

Poorly developed listening skills may have a negative impact on children's language learning and communication development. In order to overcome above mentioned challenges, there are a lot of ways in which teachers of preschools can help to improve children's listening comprehension, such as:

- Prepare your children to the listening activities. Try to introduce the new words and phrases to your learners and repeat them several times with YLs. As Nunan. D (2002) states, learners should be aware of what they are going to listen and why [5, 31-34].
- Encourage YLs to listen attentively and ask what they hear. C. Goh and Y. Taib (2006) found that young learners became better listeners after they were encouraged to think what they listened, what made it easy and difficult [6, 14-16].
- Be aware of YLs' learning styles. There are different learning styles, such as: kinesthetic, auditory and visual. While preparing for listening classes consider your children's learning styles as they are YLs' preferred ways of learning;
- Become a friend of your children. Children like to make friends and this is one of the best ways to lead them to the listening tasks. Make children feel confident and do not expect them to understand every word they listen to. Since children have short term memory in foreign language learning, do not make them and their brains tired;
- Utilize multimedia resources. As you know they multimedia resource have a great impact on listening, show your children cartoons in English based on their interests. It is proven that cartoons are one of the effective tools to teach listening;
- Read stories and fairy-tales frequently. Try to find short and interesting stories and pay attention to rhythm, intonation and stress in your voice while reading them;

- Use variety of interactive games that promote listening. Do not use the same games all the time that can make YLs bored. To kill two birds with one stone, try to use Listen and Do activities as they promote not only listening, but also English vocabulary;
- If your children find listening very challenging or boring, change your listening activities. It is better to utilize reasonable and manageable listening activities in order to avoid demotivation;
- Use authentic materials as input, design motivational tasks and funny tasks not the complex ones. Take into consideration that, children love games, cartoons and funny things to watch and these are effective tools to get YLs' attention to listening.

The role of modern technologies in teaching listening

Modern technologies have become an essential part of any sphere, and they have a great impact on education system. Since children cannot learn foreign languages through reading books, technologies are the most effective and irreplaceable tools in teaching listening. When it comes to teach listening, we cannot avoid utilizing modern technologies. They provide learners with the variety of resources to learn English as a foreign language. Using modern technologies can help to get YLs' attention to listening tasks and children can get an opportunity to listen to variety of accents of English. This is also helpful to make children be aware of the different English accents. There is no doubt that modern technologies help to get YLs' attentions and reduce their stresses and anxieties.

Conclusion. To sum up, listening is a crucial skill to be learned as it provides children with the basic input in English. Preschoolers cannot learn listening skills during one or two lessons or weeks and it should be practiced and encouraged. Without comprehending input appropriately, language learning simply cannot make any progress. Furthermore, without listening skill, no communication skills can be developed. Teaching listening skills is possibly the most challenging part of language teaching-learning process and it requires to be started at earlier ages. Due to the significance of listening in language learning and teaching, it is requisite for language teachers to help YLs boost their listening skills. As listening is one of the building blocks of language learning, it should be taught not as a supplementary skill to other skills, but instead, as separate and crucial language skill.

References:

- 1.I. S. P. Nation and J. Newton (2009). Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking. New York, Routledge, Taylor and Francis.
- 2.Vandergrift, L. (2004). Listening to learn or learning to listen? Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 24, Cambridge University press.
- 3.Rubin, J. (1995). An overview to a guide for the teaching of second language listening. In D. J. Mendelsohn, & J. Rubin (Eds.), A guide for the teaching of second language listening. San Diego, CA: Dominie Press, Inc.
- 4.Iwankovitsch, R. (2001). The Importance of Listening. Language Arts Journal of Michigan. Vol 17. Iss: 2.
- 5.Nunan, D. (2002). Methodology in language teaching. In J. C. Richards and W. A. Renandya (Eds.), Listening in language learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 6.C. Goh and Y. Taib (2006). Metacognitive instruction in listening for young learners. ELT journal