

The Role of Listening Skills in Developing Communicative Competence: A Case Study in the Language Classroom

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Abstract: Communication occurs as long as people receive and send messages which require good listening and speaking skills. Listeners listen, understand and respond in a communication process; therefore without understanding the speaker, learners fail to convey messages. Listening comprehension provides learners meaningful input to enhance their linguistic knowledge. This study investigated the role of listening comprehension in development of communicative competence and found that learners developed high communicative competence by language input provided by listening to language materials.

Keywords: Listening Comprehension, Language Skills, Communicative Competence, Accurate

1. Introduction

Teaching listening skills was ignored until the 1960s but it has recently gained importance. It was thought that learners could develop their listening comprehension skills while learning grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Over the last two decades due to increasing significance of communicative competence, the role of listening skills has been highlighted (Joiner, 1997). In particular, from 1980s to 1990s, listening skills became popular in foreign language learning (Brown & Yule, 1983; Feyten, 1991). Yet the role of listening in communication establishment cannot be underestimated, therefore sufficient amount of attention should be given to the development of listening comprehension.

It was known that the major component in foreign language learning was communicative competence. In other words, when learners had good communication skills, they were considered as effective users of the language, yet Dunkel, Henning, and Chaudron (1993) state that listening skills is more important than speaking skills because without understanding speaker's message, the listener cannot respond thus communication between them cannot be established. In a study carried out by Feyten (1991) it was found that 70 % of a working day is spent on verbal communication and 45 % of this amount is spent on listening. Underwood (1989) states that in a listening process listeners pay attention to speakers and tries to understand what they say therefore listening and speaking skills should be integrated to develop oral communicative competence of learners. In real life these two skills are in integration, therefore real success in language teaching and learning occurs when learners use it skillfully and efficiently both inside and outside the classroom.

2. Literature Review

Foreign language learners need language input to improve their level of proficiency. Listening can provide learners the input they need. When listeners listen to listening texts, in particular to native speakers, their listening proficiency will enhance and they will stand a better chance of using the language effectively. In order to have a good mastery of listening comprehension, learners listening materials are fundamental in the language learning process.

Learners in a listening process should focus on messages to decode them. This requires concentration, linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, competence and skill to construct meaning. Therefore listening is an active process. Underwood (1989) points out that aural process has three stages:

- In the first stage learners structure what they hear or listen to into meaningful forms. Background information about the topic help learners make correct predictions and have better comprehension.
- Learners in the second stage work on the information they receive through listening. This stage requires learners to have linguistic competence. Along with the previous knowledge learners will try to decode the information accurately.
- In the third stage learners transmit the information into their long term memory so that they could retrieve whenever they need later.

During communication people receive and send messages. This process requires learners to have good listening and speaking skills. But without comprehending the speaker's message, an accurate response cannot be given hence the impact of listening skills on speaking skills is indispensable. Learners listen, understand, and respond so that they can establish communication. Listening skills will enable learners to communicate with other people. Listening plays a key role in communication and foreign language learning (Dunkel, 1986; Krashen, 1982). It should be borne in mind that without understanding the speakers' message learners are not able to respond appropriately for that reason listening at the same time facilitates the other skills (Vandergrift, 1999). Simply put, listening influences the development of other language skills. When learners obtain input, they are involved in language activities. This engagement will allow learners to learn the target language. Rubin (1994), Dunkel (1991), Anderson and Lynch (1988) claim that listening provides the most important component for communication. Oxford (1993) advocates the same idea and states that "listening is perhaps the most fundamental language skill" (p. 205).

McKeating (1981) suggests that learners pass through some processes in constructing the meaning of a message;

- Perception
- Decoding
- Prediction and selection

In the perception process, learners identify the speech sounds. Linguistic and non-linguistic resources contribute to construction of meaning and learners are able to change speech into meaningful words. Decoding occurs when learners try to make sense of messages through chunks. These chunks after becoming meaningful for the learners are kept in short term memory. Later on, they are kept in long term memory. Learners might not understand all words in a message but prediction helps learners to understand accurately without knowing all words. When language elements are predictable learners can easily process them. Oller's (1974) term 'expectancy' indicates that learners capacity to predict has a key role in listening comprehension. Under normal circumstances it is very difficult to listen to a speech and answer some questions related to it but predicting cues will allow learners to interpret the content of speech.

Research Questions:

- 1) Does listening skills develop communicative competence of learners?
- 2) Does listening skills develop other language skills of learners?

3. Research Method

3.1 Design of the Study

This study investigated the contribution of listening skills to communicative competence development. Descriptive research method was applied because the study aimed to describe a situation in language learning without using cause and effect hence it did not describe what caused a situation. A questionnaire was conducted and the collected data was analyzed without making any predictions.

3.2 Sample Selection

Ishik University preparatory school students participated the study. The university administration gave the researchers the permission to conduct a questionnaire at the university. Random sampling was used to avoid a biased representation of a group. Each individual is chosen by chance and each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. The number of students at Ishik University Preparatory school is 250 but a total of 100 students participated in filling in the questionnaires (N=100).

3.3 Data Collection

A questionnaire was conducted to gather information from individuals. Information that is unique to individuals was gathered in this research without any manipulation, thus the situation is described as it exists. The collected data is quantitative therefore statistical techniques were used to summarize the information. In this study the researchers used a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The collected data was analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) using simple frequency distributions.

3.4 Findings

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.937	7

In this study the alpha coefficient for the seven items is .937, suggesting that the items have high internal consistency.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Listening_Fundamental	100	3	5	4.25	.061	.609
Promote_Other_Skills	100	3	5	4.20	.064	.636
Improve_Proficiency	100	3	5	4.16	.055	.545
Listening_Motivation	100	3	5	4.20	.062	.620
Listening_Awareness	100	3	5	4.18	.059	.593
Listening_Speaking_Integrated	100	3	5	4.18	.058	.575
Listening_Develop_Communication	100	3	5	4.18	.058	.575
Valid N (listwise)	100					

Table 2 shows the specific results for each variable that was entered into the analysis.

Table 3: Listening is the most fundamental of the four language skills

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Ambivalent	9	9.0	9.0	9.0
Agree	57	57.0	57.0	66.0
Strongly Agree	34	34.0	34.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The “Valid Percent” column shows that 34.0 % strongly agree and 57.0 % agree that listening is the most fundamental of the four language skills. A total of 91.0 % of the participants agree that listening takes priority over other language skills.

Table 4: The development of listening skills improve other language skills

Promote_Other_Skills					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Ambivalent	12	12.0	12.0	12.0
	Agree	56	56.0	56.0	68.0
	Strongly Agree	32	32.0	32.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The “Valid Percent” column shows that 32.0 % strongly agree and 56.0 % agree that the development of listening skills improve other language skills. A total of 88.0 % of the participants agree that listening comprehension development contributes to the enhancement of other language skills.

Table 5: Listening skills promotes overall language proficiency

Improve_Proficiency					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Ambivalent	8	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Agree	68	68.0	68.0	76.0
	Strongly Agree	24	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The “Valid Percent” column shows that 24.0 % strongly agree and 68.0 % agree that listening provides them with language knowledge. A total of 92.0 % of the participants agree that listening helps learners with language proficiency.

Table 6: Listening skills improvement motivates learners for language learning

Listening_Motivation					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Ambivalent	11	11.0	11.0	11.0
	Agree	58	58.0	58.0	69.0
	Strongly Agree	31	31.0	31.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The “Valid Percent” column shows that 31.0 % strongly agree and 58.0 % agree that as learners enhance their listening comprehension their motivation towards language learning rises. A total of 89.0 % of the participants agree that listening comprehension development motivates and inspires learners to achieve better in language learning.

Table 7: Listening fosters language awareness of learners

Listening_Awareness					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Ambivalent	10	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Agree	62	62.0	62.0	72.0
	Strongly Agree	28	28.0	28.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The “Valid Percent” column shows that 28.0 % strongly agree and 62.0 % agree that listening allows learners to become aware of how language is used in real life circumstances. A total of 90.0 % of the participants agree that listening is a perfect opportunity to learn how language is used effectively in real life.

Table 8: Listening and speaking skills should be integrated while teaching

Listening_Speaking_Integrated					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Ambivalent	9	9.0	9.0	9.0
	Agree	64	64.0	64.0	73.0
	Strongly Agree	27	27.0	27.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The “Valid Percent” column shows that 27.0 % strongly agree and 64.0 % agree that listening and speaking skills should be integrated while teaching. A total of 91.0 % of the participants agree that integration of these skills lead to the use of each other.

Table 9: Listening develops communicative competence of learners

Listening_Develop_Communication				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Ambivalent	9	9.0	9.0	9.0
Agree	64	64.0	64.0	73.0
Strongly Agree	27	27.0	27.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The “Valid Percent” column shows that 27.0 % strongly agree and 64.0 % agree that listening develops communicative competence of learners. A total of 91.0 % of the participants agree that listening has a pivotal role in the development of competency in communication.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In the last ten years much of the attention has been devoted to listening comprehension development in foreign language teaching and learning. To make sense of the incoming information, listening comprehension ability of the learners is of prime concern. Language learners interact in spoken communication through interpreting the aural input provided by listening.

Learners during listening process acquire correct pronunciation of words, how to use words and structures accurately in a sentence. Listening helps learners decode linguistic knowledge and utilize it for successful communication. In other words, comprehensible input through listening leads to comprehensible output in the target language. Rost (2001) stresses the role of listening in language acquisition and concludes that “a key difference between more successful and less successful acquirers relates in large part to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition” (p. 94). Listening is the primary skill for language acquisition and prerequisite for the development of other language skills.

Communicative language teaching puts emphasis on proficiency. Listening can provide learners large amount of language input to remove barriers in communication process. Moreover, listening and speaking are in integration in real life hence they affect each other. Learners fail to respond appropriately if they do not understand the input.

By the same token, this study found that listening comprehension development enhances language skills of learners, improve their motivation towards language learning, and increase their language awareness. 91 % of the participants in this study consider listening as the most fundamental skill. 92 % of the

participants believe that listening comprehension development provides them the language components they need for proficiency development and finally 91 % of the components agree that listening comprehension contributes to the development of communicative competence.

Listening contributes to comprehension and acquisition; however without comprehension language acquisition does not take place. Learners through developing their listening comprehension ability, improve their language acquisition. Comprehensible input learners acquire by listening enable them to get involved in language activities and this engagement lead to proficiency in the language.

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