

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 11 : 6 June 2011
ISSN 1930-2940

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The Vitality of Computer Aided Listening

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1. Focus of This Paper

Listening strengthens the quality of communication, interpersonal relations, human relations, emotional intelligence, conflict management and team management. The more one listens the better one can speak. Listening acts as a basic tool for the development of one's language. Improvement in fluency of language involves some degree of listening.

Unfortunately, majority of the learners of English as a second language are not able to succeed in their communication. One of the major reasons for this is poor listening habit. CALL (**Computer Assisted Language Learning**) serves as a better tool to solve this problem. Listening via computer can make a great difference in the development of the listening skill.

This paper focuses on CALL listening and argues that CALL listening helps achieve a better listening skill compared to the use of traditional method of teaching listening. In this study, students were exposed to both listening activities (CALL Listening and conventional Listening). The study showed that the learners are comfortable and were able to achieve the desired result by CALL Listening.

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2. Listening and Its Importance for the Enhancement of Learning Language

One cannot speak without listening. Listening starts from day one when one enters the world of learning language. The first activity a child does is listening but interest in that activity gets reduced in school environment! Academic and business achievement requires good listening habits.

There is a real distinction between merely hearing to the words and really listening for the message. Through listening we tend to catch the meaning intended by the person who is talking to us, who is having conversation with us. Listening becomes very important for on- the-job as well as academic communication. Listening can improve academic and work quality and boost productivity. Poor listening leads to innumerable mistakes because of which letters have to be retyped and meetings rescheduled that lead to poor performance both in business and in academic work.

3. Computer-based Listening versus Conventional Listening

Computers are most popular among students because they are associated with fun and games and also they are fashionable. Student motivation is therefore increased, especially whenever a variety of activities are offered, which make them feel more independent. Computer instruction can help pupils strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude and by helping them build self-instruction strategies and promote their self-confidence. Shy or inhibited students can be greatly benefited by individualized, student-centered collaborative learning.

When listening is involved as a grand tool for the language enhancement, listening becomes **ACTIVE and REFLECTIVE**. Learners are able to listen closely to content and intent, which helps to bring in mutual understanding.

Conventional listening is **SELECTIVE** and **INACTIVE** listening. In Conventional Listening there are a number of obstacles or distractions that stand in the way of effective listening, both within and outside the learning area. A few of these barriers may be categorized as follows.

- Physiological Barriers
- Physical Barriers
- Attitudinal Barriers
- Negative Assumptions
- Predetermined attitude
- Cultural differences
- Atmosphere
- Time

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4. The Aim of This Paper

This study aims to improve the learners listening activity for the total improvement of the English Language focusing on psychotherapy activities. Listening in terms of understanding and identification of the central theme, supporting details, prediction and atmosphere around where the students are asked to listen is analyzed.

5. The Study

A comparative experiment was conducted in an undergraduate engineering class and in a Language Lab. The group included average, below average and above average students so that the study can clearly portray the reality of the listening capacity of the students of various categories. Students from Tamil medium background and good English medium schools have different listening and understanding capacity. Based on their ability they were grouped.

Students listened to the audio in computer based listening and also listened to a language teacher reading the same passage. They answered the questions added to the lesson. This part of activity enabled the learners get acquainted with listening as a part of enjoyment and proceeding more with listening.

6. Methodology

An undergraduate engineering class of sixty students was divided into two groups equally including average, above average and below average students in both the groups. One group was taken to the Language Lab and the other group was retained in the class. A passage (Audio and Video) downloaded from VOA special English was given for listening for both the sets of students (Conventional Listening group and Computer based Listening group). Using Computers and Language learning software the downloaded audio passage was given to thirty students who took the activity individually using a computer. The audio was played twice and was followed by questions (Objective type, Answering in a sentence, framing questions and true or false) based on the passage. Students were asked to answer the questions in the question paper given to them within the time limit set for the purpose.

The second group was retained in the class and the same activity was conducted in a class by the Conventional method of Listening. A language teacher read the passage twice and the same questions were given to the students to answer within the time limit set. The same question paper was given to the students and asked to answer on the same.

Both the groups of the class participated in the activities with interest. Evaluation was done for both the methods manually.

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8. The Results

Students showed more interest to participate in the listening activity using computers. Their performance was better than the students who listened to the passage using the conventional method.

When the results were compared it was seen that the students who took the task in computer-based activity were able to achieve a high standard of listening whereas students who took the same activity in conventional way performed poorly.

I got the feeling that the conventional method did not lose its importance and effect but it has lost its value in the minds of young engineering students. They have a desire to apply technology wherever possible. When listening is done with interest and involvement a change towards the development of language is observed and various skills are improved.

9. Skills Improved

Proficient listening depends on the ability to recognize words, content, idea, theme, etc., effortlessly. Many approaches are available to improve listening comprehension. The usual method includes students answering teachers' questions, writing responses to questions or both, but many a time they are not able to provide even related answers.

The technique used for the present study motivated the students to actively participate in the activity given. The objective of developing the listening comprehension skills was easily achieved by the CALL. The experimented analytical activity encouraged the students to interact with text and make them critical listeners.

In this focused activity, students become aware of text construction and their interaction with the text improves their cognitive development. In the language classes, passages from various text books could be used for this task. Through this activity, students could improve listening skill, writing skill, framing questions, answering questions, and a thorough understanding of the passage. On the whole, the approach used for the study brings the following changes among the students during the listening activity.

- Attentive Listening is done.
- Active or Reflective Listening is witnessed.
- Able to account facts, thoughts and beliefs, Feelings and emotions.
- Communication level increases.
- Can develop better soft skills.
- Bring out a better understanding.
- Active participation of shy learners.
- Listening is perceived with Interest.

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- Student's language proficiency was much better than in normal classroom communication.
- Improve all the skills of the language.
- Help frame questions to bring out a better idea about the passage.
- Motivate students to concentrate.
- Students' cross-cultural knowledge and understanding increases.
- Directs students to make predictions on the theme of the passage.

10. Conclusion

The result suggests using computers in listening activity will pave way for young learners to listen actively both in conventional listening and CALL.

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