

Second National Conference New Perspectives in ELT
D. Nagarathinam, Ph.D., V. Ramkumar, Ph.D. and R. Vani, M.A., M.Phil. (Eds.)

Improving Listening Aptitude through Innovative Technology

Dr. E. V. Ramkumar, Ph.D. and Mrs. R. Vani, M.A., M.Phil.

Abstract

English is used as the first language in many countries like UK, the USA, Australia, and Canada; as second language in the Postcolonial countries; and as a foreign language in the rest of the world. It is essential that English is taught and understood around the world so that the common man can keep abreast of current world affairs. English is available to Indians as a historical heritage, in addition to our own languages. English language helps us to develop culturally and materially to compete with the best in the world of mind and matter. In that way English language is our window to the world. Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is key to all effective communication; without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. If there is one communication skill you should aim to master then listening is it. This paper reveals how technology plays a vital role among the students to enhance the Listening skill.

1. Introduction

In the present scenario, English is widely used in almost all the parts of the world, and so it is considered as an international language. It is used as a first language in many countries like UK, the USA, Australia, and Canada; as second language in the Postcolonial countries; and as a foreign language in the rest of the world. American English has now become the principal representative of the English language owing to the increasing popularity of the accent and the Americans' dominance in the field of Science and Technology.

Barriers of race, color, and creed are no hindrance to the continuing spread of the use of English. It is the official language of international aviation and unofficially the first language of international sports and pop scene. The subsequent role of English in India has been significant. Former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru acknowledged in parliament that English was the major window for us to the outside world. “We dare not close that window, and if we do it will spell peril for the future”. There is however, a further reason why English enjoys worldwide currency apart from political and historical considerations. The rapidly developing technology of the English speaking countries has made British and American Television and Radio programs, films, recordings, and books readily available to all, including the most undeveloped countries. Half the world’s scientific literature is written in English, when compared to the languages like Arabic, Yoruba, and Malay which are little equipped to handle the concepts and terms of modern science and technology. English is, therefore, the only available tool for 20th century learners.

1.2 English as a Global Language

As the world becomes more and more interconnected by trade, improved communications, medical, political, and cultural demands, the need for communication as a way of enabling people to control and influence their own destinies will inevitably increase. This will not necessarily lead to the emergence of one world language, but it must produce a demand for one or more auxiliary languages to complement those with only local currency.

With the world steadily heading towards globalization, it is essential that English is taught and understood around the world so that the common man can keep abreast of current world affairs.

1.3 English in India

English language has brought to us great advantages at the international level in all walks of life – to be the winners of Oscar Awards in movies, Grammys in music and Booker prize in literature. In a multilingual country like India, where more than 22 official state languages and hundreds of local dialects are in use, English is playing a binding force among the citizens. Keeping this very fact in mind, the highest authority in the Indian democracy, has also recognized English as an official language in addition to Hindi which is considered the national

language. All the facts of history and developments in present day India underline the continued importance of learning English in addition to other Indian languages.

Keeping this reality in mind, most of the states in the country are witnessing popular increase in public demand for teaching English even from pre-primary classes, and the great demand for admission in English medium schools throughout the country is a testimony to it. A language attracts people because of the wealth of literature and knowledge enshrined in it. English is available to us as a historical heritage, in addition to our own languages. English language helps us to develop culturally and materially to compete with the best in the world of mind and matter. In that way English language is our window to the world. We can make use of English to spread our world view and spiritual heritage throughout the world.

1.4 Motivation behind the Review

In the early 1990s World Wide Web made a significant stride in the use of communication technology for all computer uses. The launch of the Web in the public arena immediately started to attract the attention of language teachers.

The use of Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) in the classroom continues to be strong, despite the other uses of computers in various fields including research and development. CAI is available on the Internet as a helpful tool for teachers who want to review the improvement in creativity and quality; many programs offer motivating experiences for students in analysis of problem-solving and decision-making.

English Language Laboratory software allows teachers to use audible communication to all the students via microphones, head phones, and speakers while running voices broadcast. Teachers can play media files on teacher console and broadcast it to the entire class.

As each student has his/her own console with a head set, they have one of the main advantages of practicing in their own privacy. If they have any doubts they could discuss with the teacher directly from their own station instead of disturbing the entire class. Moreover, the virtual recording feature helps them: listen, repeat, record, and compare, which are some of the most important aspects of any Language Lab.

2. Listening Skill

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Languages are generally taught and assessed in terms of the ‘four skills’: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Listening and Reading are known as ‘Receptive’ Skills while Speaking and Writing are known as ‘Productive’ Skills. All language learners will need to develop their skills in each of these areas, and your language classes should incorporate activities related to all these skills.

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is key to all effective communication; without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. If there is one communication skill you should aim to master, then listening is it.

Listening is so important that many top employers provide listening skills training for their employees. This is not surprising when you consider that good listening skills can lead to: better customer satisfaction, greater productivity with fewer mistakes, increased sharing of information that in turn can lead to more creative and innovative work.

Many successful leaders and entrepreneurs credit their success to effective listening skills. Richard Branson frequently quotes listening as one of the main factors behind the success of Virgin - “Effective listening is a skill that underpins all positive human relationships, spend some time thinking about and developing your listening skills – they are the building blocks of success.”

About the Survey

To explicitly reiterate the importance of technology in enhancing listening skill, a survey was conducted to understand the correlation between the demography of the sample respondents and their exposure to Computer-Based Technologies, and to explore the possibilities in making the effective use of Computer-Based Technologies to improve the Listening skills effectively.

Sample Respondents Selection

For the study, a questionnaire was prepared and was administered to the students of Theni Kammavar Sangam College of Technology. The data were collected from 180 students.

180 samples were collected- 60 students from first year, 60 students from second year and 60 students from third year. The sample respondents were selected at random from both English and Tamil medium. The data were collected personally from the 180 students. Proper instructions were given to the students before answering the questions. Students were requested to make their responses in the space provided. Students were also requested not to omit any of the questions. Finally, the filled-in questionnaires were collected from the students.

Table 1.1 categorizes the respondents according to their ability in understanding the lectures delivered in English.

Understanding the lectures delivered in English	I Year (60)	II Year (60)	III Year (60)	Total (180)
Completely	20(33.3%)(	15(25%)(	29(48.3%)(	64(35.6%)(
Partially	19(31.6%)(	31(51.6%)(	20(33.3%)(	70(38.8%)(
To some extent	11(18.3%)(	10(16.6%)(	6(10%)(	27(15%)(
Very Little	10(16.6%)(	4(6.6%)(	5(8.3%)(	19(10.5%)(

Table 1.1

Listening skill plays a vital role in understanding lectures delivered in English. Complete understanding of English lectures is possible only to those who have an excellent observation and who are also keen listeners. Among the 180 respondents, 64 (35.6%)(have replied that they can understand completely the lectures delivered in English. Among the 64 respondents, 20 (33.3%)(are from the 1st year, 15 (25 %)(are from the 2nd year and 29 (48.3%)(from the 3rd year. Among the 180 respondents, 70 (38.8%)(respondents have replied that they can comprehend lectures partially, that is, 19 (31.6%)(are from the 1st year, 31 (51.6%)(are from the 2nd year, and the rest 20 (33.3%)(are from the 3rd year. Under the category “To some extent,” there are 27 respondents (15%)(, that is, 11 (18.3%)(are from the 1st year, 10 (16.6%)(are from the 2nd year and 6 (10 %)(are from the 3rd year. Among the 180 respondents, 19 respondents (10.5%)(have responded to the option “Very little,” that is 10 (16.6%)(are from the 1st year, 4 (6.6%)(are from the 2nd year, and 5(8.3%)(are from the 3rd year.

The following bell curve (Figure 1.1) indicates that in a class, average student's strength will be high when compared with good and slow learners.

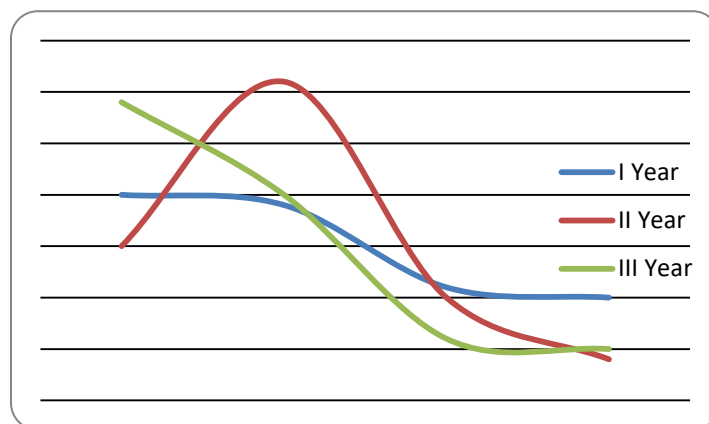


Figure 1.1

This bell curve points out that the students have promptly responded and they have come out with the proper response. This certifies the authenticity of their statement. During the 1st year, understanding capacity of the respondents is high as they have “Technical English I and II” in their curriculum. During the 2nd year, it is low because they do not have English theory or lab. At the same time, there is a drastic improvement in the understanding capacity in the 3rd year because of their Language Lab.

So it is clear from the above Table that the 1st year (33.3% and the 3rd year (25% students are having more understanding capacity when compared to the 2nd year (38.6% students. This is due to lack of English class or Lab in the 2nd year. The difference between the students of the 1st and the 3rd year who have English as part of their curriculum and the 2nd year students who do not have English in their curriculum is clearly visible.

Table 1.2 shows the frequency of the students chance to listen English through electronic media.

Chance to listen to English through electronic media	I Year (60)	II Year (60)	III Year (60)	Total (180)
Regularly	6 (10%)	8 (13.4%)	9 (15.0%)	23 (12.8%)
Frequently	8 (13.4%)	10 (16.6%)	22 (36.6%)	40 (22.3%)

Occasionally	18 (30%)(	18 (30%)(	14 (23.4%)(	49 (27.2%)(
Rarely	28 (46.6%)(	24 (40%)(	15 (25.0%)(	68 (37.7%)(

Table 1.2

From the above Table, it is inferred that during the 1st year, students are not exposed to electronic media to enrich their listening skills. During the 2nd year, they are exposed to electronic media to some extent. From the 3rd year they know how to utilize the CBT in an effective way to enrich their listening skills. Among the 180 respondents 68 (37.7%)(have chosen the option “Rarely.” This is higher than the number of respondents using electronic media “Regularly,” that is 23(12.8%)(. The majority of the respondents have responded to the option “Rarely.” Rural background of the students is the main reason for this contradiction.

Table 1.3 shows how the students make use of CBTs/Language Lab to facilitate listening.

Use of CBTs/Language Lab to facilitate listening	I Year (60)	II Year (60)	III Year (60)	Total (180)
Regularly	8 (13.4%)(	10 (16.6%)(	22 (36.6%)(	36 (20%)(
Frequently	7 (11.6%)(	19 (31.7%)(	17 (28.4%)(	43 (23.8%)(
Occasionally	15 (25%)(	21 (35%)(	15 (25%)(	54 (30%)(
Not Applicable	30 (50%)(	10 (16.6%)(	6 (10%)(	47 (26.2%)(

Table 1.3

By using Computer-Based Technologies and Language Lab, one can facilitate listening to a great extent. For this, they should know how to use it in an effective manner. From the above Table it is inferred that the 2nd year respondents are in the intermediate level for all the options. The 1st year respondents choosing the option “Not-applicable” (50%)(is higher than the options “Regularly” (13.4%)(and “Frequently”)11.6%)(. At the same time in the 3rd year, the number of students choosing the option “Regularly” (20%)(and “Frequently”)23.8%)(is higher than the option “Not-applicable.” It is clear that the first year students get least chance to use the technology in an effective way. Second year students somehow know how to use it in the right way, may be because of their entry into their respective core departments. Most of the third year

students know how to utilize the technology in the positive way, as they have Net Hours and Language Lab as part of their curriculum.

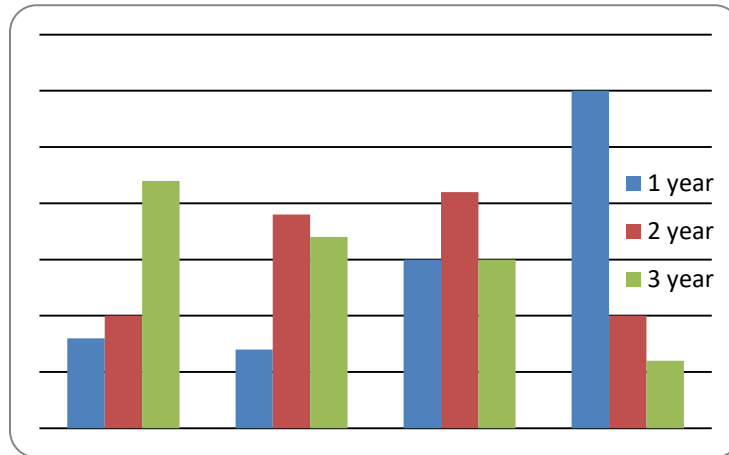


Figure 1.2

It is clearly shown in the Table and the Figure that, the number of the 3rd year students who choose the option “Regularly” is higher than the other two, first and second year students.

Conclusion

Learning is a never ending process and it is enterprising for both second language learners and language teachers. Though various methods and approaches with assistance of CBTs and ICTs have been followed, the English language learners, especially the adult learners, have to go a long way in the process of acquiring English language. As pointed out by Dr. Radhakrishnan, “a teacher who ceases to learn also ceases to be a teacher”. If the language teachers could instill the same willingness and determination among the English language learners in exploring and exploiting the effective use of CBTs, the dream of learning English language will become a tangible reality.

Though a computer can never replace a teacher, it comes in handy in making the English language learning process a pleasurable and meaningful one. This paper ascertains the fact, through the analysis of the data garnered, that exposure to CBTs could enhance Listening skills and proficiency in English language.

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<http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-skills.html#ixzz3vt1i1r1a>

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of the student :
2. Gender : Male/Female
3. Age : ----- years
4. Mother Tongue :
5. Medium of instruction up to Hr.sec :
6. Place of domicile : Rural/Urban/Semi-urban
7. Are you a first generation graduate? : Yes No

LISTENING

8. To what extent you understand lectures delivered in English?
 - a) Completely
 - b) Partially
 - c) To some extent
 - d) Very little
9. How often do you get a chance to listen to English through electronic media?
 - a) Regularly
 - b) Frequently
 - c) Occasionally
 - d) Rarely

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