

Top-Down Approach in Enhancing Listening

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Abstract

Listening is the most important skill to learn and to speak the language. This paper concentrates on top-down approach in order to enhance listening skill. Top-down approach is a kind of strategy focuses on understanding the text on the whole. It gives a clear picture of the main idea of the text. It also enhances the previous knowledge of the learner which builds to improve the comprehending of the text. This paper discusses the role of top-down approach in ameliorating listening skill. This strategy is used with the assist of listening activities. There are: completing the sentences, identify the differences, identify the appropriate homophones and, role-plays and announcements. These are the activities have given to the students to test their listening skill, identifying ability, comprehending level, thinking and analyzing ability. The findings of the work are discussed in detail for further research.

Keywords: Listening, top-down approach, previous knowledge, predicting ability, comprehending level

Introduction

Listening is the most important skill which should be properly practiced and trained in the English classroom in order to improve listening as well speaking. Listening is the ability to comprehend and identify what the sender is communicating and how the sender is communicating the message. It also involves the understanding of speaker's accent, grammar, sentence formation, stress, tone, vocabulary, gestures and meaning. Listening skill should be concentrated more to enhance language learning. For this research paper, the researcher has conducted the sessions to the ninth students who are from Kanchipuram district, Tamilnadu and basically there are from vernacular medium of instruction. The students are from vernacular medium of instruction. To promote listening for these vernacular students, top-down approach has been taken and materials have framed to conduct the research classes.

Top down approach is also known as whole language approach, because it relies on the meaning of the text than the individual words. Top down gives a big or whole picture of the text. It helps the students to know the gist of the text. The L2 learners do not worry about the small learning components of the language. Learners can grab the text effectively even though they have got unknown vocabulary or structures. This strategy greatly helps for slow learners and beginners to understand the outline of the text. Moreover, the learners may understand the information by guessing meaning from the give context. Top down approach promotes recalling ability, previous knowledge, guessing ability, comprehension,

thinking, analyzing and so on. This research paper focuses on mainly three components. There are (1) Understand the content, (2) Prediction and guessing ability and (3) Attentiveness. These three are ought to be elevated through activities. Activities are the best way to ensure the participation of the students in the language classes.

1) Understand the content

Top-down learning chiefly gives way to comprehend the general idea of the text of what the students are listening. The L2 learners are mainly expecting to know the outline of the text. It has been fulfilled in this process. Psychologically, they are happy about knowing the message of the text. They are motivated inwardly and so the students can find or guess meanings from the other unknown structures. While observing passages the students recall the related information or ideas passages of what they already know. Recalling and recollecting the related messages highly improve the knowledge. Recollecting the relevant ideas again motivated students to learn the concept in depth. Their understanding content analyzed with previous known related ideas help to remember the message for long time. Remembering messages would increase memory. Certainly, the ideas would never rub from their memory. Obviously, it would increase memory.

2) Prediction and Guessing Ability

Top-down learning makes the students to concentrate on what to listen and how to listen, without bothering about the small or individual linguistic components which is unknown or difficult to understand. New words or unfair structures have no place to deviate in this process of learning. Few known words are enough to understand the text. This is the boon for the slow learners to learn better and feel comfort in this learning. In this way, they are observing the unknown words with the learning tendency. They do not have any inhibition or hindrance or feel vagueness in learning new vocabulary. With the help of other known words, the students predict the meaning of unknown or new words. Through this, their guessing ability and prediction has enriched. When prediction and guessing has motivated inwardly, they gain more information about the content of what they have listened earlier. Thinking and analyses have developed which also directs the students to acquire the content in various dimensions.

3) Attentiveness

When students observe something from what they listen; provokes involvement and kindle curiosity to learn further. They feel ease to learn more and to show interest to learn more. Their mind is focused on the particular content. So they could not distract from the concept. Their involvement brings attentiveness in learning the text. The researcher has designed various tasks to implement this approach to the students. Though they are from vernacular background, the researcher has started the activities from the beginning level. Five tasks have discussed in this paper. They are a) sentence completion b) predict the appropriate words from the given sentence c) fill the blanks with appropriate homophones d) role-play e) announcements

1) Time/Duration	:	45 minutes
2) Questions	:	20 questions given
3) Audio-Visual	:	Only Audio
4) Level	:	Beginning to Intermediate
5) Participants	:	Overall strength 35 boys-21 girls-14
6) Individual/Group activity	:	Individual Activity
7) Speed of the Audio	:	Slow to Medium

Activity 1: Sentence Completion - This is the beginning stage of learning. So simple, small and easily understanding sentences are given to make the students to feel ease and for happy learning. Their view on new approach should be welcomed if it is designed as per the needs of the students. If they learn something from the task, they will like to move on to the next step. The students are asked to fill the blanks while listening.

For example: 1. Snakes are _____ 2. Penguins are live in _____

Outcome: As it expected, most of the students have come out with correct response. They used their previous knowledge, recollected what it is needed, analyzed profoundly and applied in the sentences to find the answers.

Activity 2: Guessing Meaning - Their, there, they are – these three words have different meanings, yet they have slight differences in pronunciation. This task is given to test their keen observation of pronunciation. Their observance of listening words is evaluated from the given sentences.

Example: 1. _____ playing football. 2. _____ house is beautiful

Outcome: most of the students have given the appropriate answers. They observed the pronunciation of the words keenly and also they have the ability to analyze the given words to get the answers. They predicted the response from the give words in the sentences. This kind of task elevates the predictive ability to answer and infer meaning from the given context.

Activity 3: Homophones - Homophones have similar pronunciation which has different spelling and meaning. This kind of task brings awareness of vocabulary. New words and meanings can be learnt in this task. Prior-knowledge and infer meaning also greatly helped here to learn new words. Some pronunciation has chosen because the learnt words could not forget easily. The words would be rooted in the minds deeply.

Example: 1. Train _____(fair/fare) is low. 2. She has a long _____(hare/hair)

Outcome: As it expected, the students used prior knowledge, drawn inferences meaning, analyzed the homophones, think twice, comprehend and given correct response. The ability to identify the homophones developed gradually. They showed interest to learn more homophones. They also explained the answers with their own examples.

Activity 4: Role-play, it enacted by the students in front of the class itself. This helped to rubbed off the students' inner inhibitions and fear. They find way to articulate the words, learn to pronounce with stress and follow tone and pauses. In this role-play some new words are given to find meaning from the other words. Their input is tested through closed questions.

Outcome: The students listened and comprehend the role-play well. In this task the word "shots" is given which denotes 'vaccine'. The students brilliantly found the meaning and explained it wonderfully. Through the closed type of questions, they started to reciprocate in the target language. Opportunity has created to speak about and they also used it greatly and excellently.

Activity 5: Announcements exercises are given. This is the real happening activity. Announcement in Railway stations are given. It would be very useful to meet the day to day situations. The students become aware of announcements and they understood that time, name of the train, arrival, departure or any delay would be the information in the announcements. This information deeply rooted in their minds through this activity.

Outcome: They listened and observed the announcements and found correct answers. Their listening is focused. They understood that what it is needed to receive information. Their selective listening is self-motivated and guided by themselves in order to receive the exact information.

Findings:

Top-down process of learning liked by the students and showed way to learn the target language easily. Particularly, they are from vernacular background, but they learnt, understood and did the activities well. Their comprehensible input is up to the mark. Their self-motivation towards learning is a powerful source. They learnt how to listen and what to listen from this approach of learning. As listening is the prior step to speak the language, this approach guided to listen as well speak in this target language. Though this approach has merits it has limitations too. Here, linguistic components are ignored, which is very essential to learn a new language. Individual linguistic components are the pillars to construct a building. The overall result of this approach largely helped the students to comprehend the outline of the text.

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