Teaching Listening While Improving Social Skills

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Abstract

Participating in a listening activity may be challenging for some students because sustaining their motivation while identifying the important information is a problematic factor. Renukadevi(2014)stated listening is the base of learning a foreign language. Listening skills also promote an amiable relationship between individuals and society(Abali & Yazici, 2020). As Abali and Yazici claimed, listening is the foundation of learning as it can offer an opportunity for language learners to integrate in society. Students' state of mind, motivation, and attitude significantly affect language development in every skill(Kassem, 2018). Thus, improving students' state of mind is a key factor for language development. Zúñiga and Gutiérrez(2018)emphasized implementing the communicative tasks that help students to improve social skills in the course of language development. Implementing the constructive instructions for students to express their thoughts in class is crucial for creating a social atmosphere. This paper shares an activity which induces students' interest in the topic and simultaneously alleviates their anxiety by collaborating together.

Introduction

A classroom should be an adequate place where students can voluntarily exchange ideas to grow intellectually. Nevertheless, sharing or expressing their thoughts in a classroom may be still challenging for some students. This results in some awkward issue for teachers. Many of them may have been

trapped in the situation where they can sense the dead cold Antarctica fear in the air when they asked their students a question as a means of stimulating a lively class discussion. This could happen in every classroom no matter what subject they teach when teachers genuinely want their students to experience the unexplainable joy and excitement of learning a language while simultaneously allowing them to acquire useful communication skills for their future.

Student-Centered Classroom

Teaching a language is not merely about passing on the knowledge about the language: it is also about offering students an experience that requires students' active involvement and engagement. Lately, more scholars have pointed out the effectiveness of language learning when students are engaged in the language learning activities. For example, Ahmed and Dakhiel(2019) discussed that learning is "an active process performed by the learner" and that students can perform the best when their learning mode is in "a learning situation," the most productive setting for language learning opportunity(p. 139). This seems to be associated with the principle of learner strategies, defined as the opportunity "to explore [one's] learning features and learn how to learn in this process" as Saban(2004)stated(cited in Gelisli, 2009, p. 470). Furthermore, Kassem(2019)remarked on the importance of students' active involvement in-class tasks to improve their language performance in all language skills. The listening class is not an exception. In the language learning process, aside from listening being an essential skill in itself, listening skills play an important role for the learners to build a foundation of acquiring the target language(Renukadevi, 2014). Consequently, the challenge of improving of listening skills has been extensively investigated. Inviting students to actively participate in listening class activities by creating a learning environment which encourages them to present their ideas and induces them to converse in groups also helps them to grow as confident, articulate individuals.

Motivating Students

In the course of instilling student-centered teaching, groupwork allows students to experience the benefits of interacting with each other and share their ideas. Arranging students into small groups helps them share their thoughts and opinions actively and inspires "cooperation between students" (Ahmed & Dakhiel, 2019, p. 140). Collaboration within groups is effective "cognitively, emotionally and socially" (p.140). Emotion affects students' willingness to attentively participate in class and relates to students' performance in listening classes. Emotion also influences students' listening proficiency level (Dimitroff et al, 2018; Kaseem, 2019; Kirbas, 2017). Specifically, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in English language learners (Dimitroff et al, 2018) are distinct insofar as ESL students are intrinsically motivated to belong to the target language's culture, whereas the EFL student's learning drive is extrinsic to the extent that learning the language is simply a step they have to take to achieve their instrumental goals (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).Those students who take English classes for earning credits are more likely to be extrinsically motivated, and they tend to be more eager to participate in class activities because they are crucial to the class grade. At the same time, they are also intrinsically motivated as they are engrossed in the activities which inspire them to learn about the topic.

Stimulating the Discussion in Classroom

Aside from the importance of motivation, other research emphasizes the importance of teaching listening with appropriate strategies. Both bottom-up and top-down strategies are effective (Fathi & Hamidizadeh, 2019; Zuniga & Gutierrez, 2018). For example, bottom-up strategies help learners "connect and interpret what they listen to" (Zuniga & Gutierrez, 2018, p. 164) while top-down strategy stimulates the learners' background knowledge to elicit their opinions (p. 164). In knowing this, educators may be mindful to invite students to voice their opinions to explore a topic. Thus, creating an agreeable environment for students to speak out is necessary. Following this, implementing two questions can help promote students' active participation in

class. Specifically, Gümüşok and Balıkçı (2020) suggest that "known information questions" and "information seeking questions" (p.209) in this order elicit more responses from students. "Known information questions," which are defined as "display questions" (p. 209) comprise the base that allows students to have "interaction." On the other hand, "information seeking questions," which also are known as "referential questions," (p.209) help students 'talk' in class. They specifically describe "alternative questions" and "elaboration questions" (p. 210). "Alternative questions" which allows learners to choose an appropriate answer, elicit a one-word answer in the beginning of the session before moving to the "elaboration questions," which usually starts with wh-questions for more details, helping learners maintain their talk. Teachers can assist students by providing "candidate words," providing possible words for the students to answer or invite other students to help them. The important point that teachers need to keep in mind is to provide learners some support with the questions with some keywords that allow the learners the freedom to choose. Incorporating the teaching strategies that Cumusok and Balikci (2020) have described, and considering the emphasis on improving students' social skills, a listening class can offer an environment conducive to learner development.

Procedure for Additional Listening Activity

My listening class consists of two parts: listening activities from a textbook that encourage students to acquire basic skills, including the language learning rules which gives opportunities to work in pairs, and a follow-up listening activity which leads to group conversations and a class discussion. The following sections demonstrate the procedure of how student-centered teaching was facilitated for the second part of my class as a student-friendly environment.

Students' attention usually starts to dissipate around the halfway point of class, when they start to see the end of the tunnel of the textbook activities. Weaving a listening activity from the Internet into the second part of the class allows the topic to flow from the expected class topics to some seemingly mundane but intriguing everyday facts or topics. The topic should be

something relatable for students which stirs their interest. In this occasion, I chose chocolate as a topic since many students like chocolate and are familiar with it.

In order to create a comfortable class-setting, an instructor can start the activity by asking whether students like chocolate or not so they can have the opportunity to express their opinions on chocolate, which can be shared with their neighbors. Meanwhile, the instructor can post additional questions with the projector that they are likely to discuss as their conversation proceeds. This is because their talk usually develops into questions such as what kind of chocolate they like or the products they have found out lately, which leads to the following step to allow them to discuss further. This basically comprises answering the additional questions presented by the instructor. At this stage, their conversation should keep flowing, as they can already associate the topic, chocolate, with what they have been discussing.

Preparation for the Listening Activity

After the warm-up phase, a worksheet, which is composed of two sections, is distributed: a list of words along with the definitions and four or five comprehension questions. By answering these questions, they can summarize the story. The list of words from the narration on chocolate includes some vocabulary they might find challenging. Students read through the list of the words, and they are asked to match the words to the correct definitions. Here, they are expected to match the words to the correct definitions individually first, but they are then instructed to work together with their neighbors. After all, it takes longer, and some students may be discouraged about completing the task if they work alone. Collaboration with their neighbors also encourages teamwork. The instructor calls out the students' names to answer the vocabulary, allowing them to feel more comfortable with voicing their ideas.

Listening to the Story

Students will be reading the comprehension questions in the second section to prepare for listening to the story. Most students feel more comfortable with

being prepared by reading the comprehension questions prior, as they know what they are expected to pay more attention to while listening to the narration. They are advised to take notes, which should be an automatic procedure for them, as taking good notes is a regular listening activity. Students will be listening to the story twice, the first time mainly concerning on the questions I posted, which are actually key points of the story. In other words, by the time they finish answering all the comprehension questions, they will be writing a summary of the story. For the second listening, they will be writing down the details aside from what they would already have written from the first listening. Here, I usually tell students that it is perfectly fine to write down the information in Japanese, as they are juggling multiple tasks while listening.

Working in Small Groups for Comprehension Questions

Small groups of two or three will be formed to work together on the comprehension questions that they already have looked through. For novice-level students, they have the option of going over the questions in Japanese, preventing them from being caught in the endless web of dead silence arising from an inability to talk about the questions when there is the stress of compulsory English speaking. However, when they share their answers in class, they must do so in English. This is the moment when working as a team plays a significant role. As they previously worked in a small group and exchanged the ideas, students feel relatively assertive enough to share their ideas in a relaxed environment. For most students, sharing their answers in class is very uncomfortable, especially if they are not confident with the answers. Therefore, going over the questions with their groups helps assuage their anxiety and creates a sense of teamwork. Most students seem to feel pleasant and more secure to engage in group work prior to sharing the answers with the class.

The Discussion Proceeds

Finally, one or more discussion questions is posed to the class. This task

provides students an invaluable opportunity to express their own opinions. For example, in the story, they learned about the history of how chocolate was invented and developed into the product it is today, as well as the dark side of the story, fair trade. Before moving on to the discussion question, the instructor can open with the "alternative question"(p. 210)which can be answered "yes" or "no" as Gümüşok and Balıkçı(2020)described. The discussion session can be followed by a discussion question, which should be an "elaboration question"(p. 210)of the story, and should be simple, as students can effortlessly discuss it with their groups. On this occasion, questions such as "What do you know about fair trade?" would be appropriate, as it is approachable yet stimulative enough for maintaining their conversation, since many students already know about fair trade. The important point here is that students may discuss it in Japanese at this stage; however, they should answer in English when they are asked to speak to the class. This is when group discussion plays an important role. During the discussion time, students have a vital moment to prepare their ideas, allowing them to be more confident sharing while exchanging and learning new thoughts and ideas on the topic as well as developing their skills as more eloquent speakers. If a student loses the train of thought or has trouble voicing their ideas, other group members can help them. This is the positive outcome of the collaboration.

Conclusion

A classroom is a public education entity, yet it should be a congenial learning environment for general learning and personal growth. Listening and other language skills courses need not be all about passing a class. Instead, teaching the skills that help them develop their personalities to their full potential and perform well in society in the long run while learning a language can be an effective maximization of the EFL experience.

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