ELLs: English Listening Comprehension Development Through Digital Literacy Practices

Dr. Yogeswari Menda

Abstract:

With the rapidly increasing popularity of the digital technology, the incorporation of this medium into the English language instruction process becomes necessary. As English has become a global language, and proficiency in English communication skills is considered highly essential for a person's personal and professional growth. In the globalized context, the individual needs a specific set of language skills for their success throughout. In this paper, rise of digital technology in modern world and the changing landscape of English language education were explained. Important issues concerning listening, listening comprehension and digital literacy were reviewed. It tries to focus on the role of using digital technology in developing major parts of listening ability. The utilization of digital literacy practices in English language classroom to be critically examined at the outset. Recommendations for the successful integration of digital technology also mentioned. The present paper aims to highlight the need and importance of integrating digital literacy practices for enhancing English Listening Comprehension in English Language Learners (ELLs).

Keywords: Listening, Listening Comprehension, Communication skills, Digital Literacy Practices, English Language Learners, English language instruction.

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Introduction-

Today's world is in a burgeoning digital age in which digital forms of information and communication dominate virtually every aspect of society including education (Payton & Hague, 2010). In this modern era of information and technology, due to rise in Globalization and Commercialization, English language teaching has become an integral part of our educational scenario and occupies a pivotal position. The method of English language teaching has been considerably changed due to the entry of technology. Technology offers a lot of benefits as making teaching interesting and more productive in terms of advancements. The use of technology helps learners get involved and learn based on their interests. Graddol (1997) said that technology is the center of the globalization process and impacts education and culture. With the rapidly increasing popularity of the digital technology in recent years, the diversity of learning programs continue to shift and change according to the demands of society. With the emergence of new technology, English has become a global language, and proficiency in English communication skills is considered highly essential for a person's personal and professional growth. In the globalized context, they need a specific set of language skills for their success throughout. In today's world of emerging trends in digital technology, methods of teaching English language have developed rapidly. So it is important that English language learners and teachers adopt and upgrade the various techniques of language teaching.

I. Listening (Definition, Stages, Process &Importance)

Listening consists of auditory discrimination, aural grammar, choosing necessary information, remembering it, and connecting it to the process between sound and form of meaning (Morley, 1972 as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Thomlison (1984) and Hamouda (2013) defined listening as the ability to recognize and understand what others are telling. This process includes understanding a speaker's pronunciation, the speaker's grammar and vocabulary, and understanding of meaning. Gulec and Durmus (2015) indicate that listening means making choices from among what is heard, organizing them, integrating what is transferred them with background knowledge by the speaker, and structuring them mentally. Studies indicated that listening comprehension consisted of several procedures. First, listeners had to distinguish the sound, stress, intonation and pitch of the language. After they could be aware of the entire information that the speakers said, listeners had to hold the information in their memory until it could be understood. Then, they had to unscramble the information from what they heard and that was the output or the utilization process (Brown, 1995; Chastanin, 1975). Clark & Clark (1977) concluded that there were three parts in the process of listening comprehension: the perceptual, parsing, and utilization. For the perceptual, listeners received the sounds by a speaker and formed an image in their short-term memory, and learners transferred quickly to the information in echoic memory to short-term memory to process the sounds for meaning. The parsing process reorganized the messages into a meaningful word that could be stored in short-term memory. Listeners utilized long-term memory to link the incoming message to their original knowledge. When the new information could link with existing knowledge, comprehension occurred.

HURIER model (Judi Brownell)—a six stage model of the listening process involving hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding. Hearing is the passive physiological process in which sound is received by the ear. Hearing means physically receiving sound; receiving and processing the message. Understanding is assigning meaning to the stimuli that have been selected and attended to. Understanding means comprehending the literal meaning of the message Remembering is recalling something from stored memory; thinking of something again. Remembering means storing the message in the memory for future action Interpreting is the process of understanding the meaning of the message from the speaker's point of view and letting the speaker know that you understand. Interpreting means assigning meaning to the message in relation to the contextual and nonverbal message aspects. Evaluating is when the listener analyzes evidence, sorts facts from opinion, determines the intent of the speaker, judges the accuracy of the speaker's statements and conclusions, and judges the accuracy of his or her own decisions. Evaluating means applying logic in order to assess the message and judge the credibility. Responding is sending feedback is overt verbal and nonverbal behavior by the listener indicating to the speaker what has and has not been received. Responding means based on the previous steps, answering the message in order to indicate listening.

According to Krashen (1985) and Hamouda (2013), listening skill is an important element in obtaining understandable input. Learning will not occur if there isn't any input. The importance of listening has changed over the past years. Listening used to be defined as the ignored skill. Listening skills were believed to be learnt automatically through the practice of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. It was very amazing as listening played a very important life (Hedge 2000). Listening is the act of hearing attentively. Researchers have

demonstrated that adult spend 40-50% with listening, 25-30% with speaking, 11-16% reading and 9% with reading (Vandergrift 2005). We listen more than we speak. If this listening skill is used in a proper way, we can master the tools of communicative skills. Listening is difficult, as human mind tends to distract easily. A person who controls his mind and listens attentively acquires various other skills and is benefited. Listening is defined as the process of identifying and understanding the speech of the speaker of a language. It is the language skill that is used frequently. It involves understanding the speaker's accent or pronunciation, speaker's grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning (Saricoban1999).

II. Listening Comprehension (Definitions, Components &Importance)

Listening comprehension is the different processes of understanding the spoken language. Hamouda (2013) define listening comprehension as interactive and where ideas originate. This definition directly reflects individuals' abilities to understand material for the purpose of gaining knowledge. Listening comprehension is considered as an active process whereby individuals tend to change words into thought with the aim of creating a meaning from the passage. Listening comprehension tends to have a long history, from the readings of analog, phonograph, through the era of the audio tape, and into the realm of digital (Wagner, 2007). Listening comprehension could be viewed as a crucial language skill which learners of language need to develop. Moreover, all other language skills' development becomes interwoven with listening skills. This stands said to be within language learning in both first and second instances (Vandergrift, 1999). Language learning tends to rely on listening. It also tends to play a fundamental role in the acquisition of language, making it possible for an oral interaction between the learners (Smidt & Hegelheimer, 2004). It tends to provide the foundation for all language acquisition/learning facets and plays a long-life role in the communication process. Listening comprehension process provides beneficial intuitions in teaching listening. Learner may find listening comprehension skill difficult to learn and this can also provide teachers with opportunities to change their listening exercises into more effective ones. Developing listening comprehension skill helps learners to succeed in language learning to enhance comprehensible input. Since learners' self-reliance in listening comprehension will be increased, they will be motivated to have access to spoken English such as conversations with native speakers (Kurita, 2012).

Listening comprehension is divided into four components Chastain (1988). The first is the ability to differentiate all sounds, intonation patterns, and voice qualities in the second language and to distinguish between them and the same sounds in the native language. The second is the understanding of the whole message uttered by a speaker. Rivers (1981) said that the understanding of spoken messages depend on comprehension of semantic meaning, moving from what one comprehends in the sound sequence with respect to the knowledge of syntax only when the meaning is not understandable. The third is the ability to hold that message in one's auditory memory until it can be processed. To develop the learners' auditory memory, teachers should know that they hear as much language as possible. This means that most of the class time should be carried out in the language being taught. The speed of presentation and difficulty level of the content must be adjusted to the learners. Language activities that are comprehensible increase auditory memory. The significant point here is the idea of improvement. The improvement from the simpler to the more intricate sentences should be slow and continuous. The speed of delivery should be increased based on the learners' ability to understand (Chastain, 1988).

Comprehension is the speech reception at the syntactic, lexical, pragmatic, and discourse levels. Thus the last component is comprehension. It involves different steps. The first step is to establish the context. Real language happens within a communicative framework and the listener should know the framework to recreate the speaker's message. The second step is to activate related background knowledge and use it to predict the ideas the message may have. The third step is to anticipate the general content of the message. Skilled listening requires that listener look ahead in anticipation of what is coming. They are checking the received material as opposed to trying to make an unexpected and immediate interpretation (Kaspar, 1984). The fourth step is to sample the important meaning carrying components of the material. Listeners should expend moreenergy to understand material about unfamiliar topics and they rely more on linguistic clues to make up for their lack of background knowledge. The last step is to use the samples to confirm or reject the formerly made anticipations. When the samples are in line with listeners' anticipations, they accept them as being correct. When the samples do not comply with their anticipations, they should reconsider either their anticipation or the material as they look for making the message meaningful (Kaspar, 1984).

III. Digital Literacy (Definition, Conceptual Framework and Importance)

Digital means understanding, using, and communicating with multimedia technology. Digital Literacy means the ability to use digital technology, communication devices and the network in digital environments to live the life efficiently. European Commission working paper (European Commission, 2008) digital literacy is defined as: "the skills required to achieve digital competence. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT and the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet". The definition indicates that digital literacy is comprised of basic ICT skills, which lead to digital competence. However, in the academic field, digital literacy is used as a synonym for digital competence. "Having the knowledge and ability to effectively and critically navigate, evaluate and create information using a range of digital technologies. A digitally literate person can use technology strategically to find and evaluate information, connect and collaborate with others, produce and share original content, and use the Internet and technology tools to achieve many academic, professional and personal goals."From National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (Alex Grech, 2014). It is evident from the above definition that digital literacy requires various abilities and aptitudes.

Educational institution, organization and personnel that give the meanings of Digital Literacy vary from the technology development as follow; Gilster,P. (1997) Paul Gilster has identified that Digital literacy is the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers. Eshet-alkalai (2004) suggested that Digital literacy involves more than the mere ability to use software of operate a digital device; it includes a large variety of complex cognitive, motor, sociological, and emotional skills, which users need in order to function effectively in digital environments. DigEuLit (2005) has identified that Digital literacy is the ability to succeed in encounters with the electronic infrastructures and tools that make possible the world of the twenty-first century. Digital literacy has become a central enabling agent in the educational enterprise, as a result of a number of trends. AECT (2014:324) has identified that Digital literacy is the use of high technology in everyday life. A digitally literate person may use specific hardware such as a computer, a cell phone, or other digital resource in combination with communication software, such as the Internet, to interact with society at large, thus becoming a digital citizen or e-citizen and improving social and economic opportunities. In summary, Digital Literacy means the ability to use digital technology, communication devices and the network in digital environments to live the life efficiently.

IV. Digital literacy practices for enhancing English listening comprehension

One of the basic skills in English language is listening skill. According to Brett (1997), listening skill plays a vital role in language acquisition. Listening involves understanding the accent, pronunciations, intonation, meaning of words and meaning of speaking (Saricoban 1999). As for listening skills of students, it is important that multimedia technology is integrated into English teaching and learning. Multimedia technologies such as audio, video and animation are becoming commonplace and becoming a potential tool for listening. Media tools, such as radio and TV programs (Nomass 2013), increase students listening skills and increase self-confidence in terms of listening and also increase using media when it is not always possible to reach native speakers or teachers. The use of computers in listening activities provides visual and auditory inputs that enhance listening skills and contributes to listening skills (Hoven 1999). With the use of tools such as radio, audio-tapes, podcasts, tape recorders, IPODs and videos in English teaching and learning, students can comprehend intonation and learn the pronunciation of words and experience different accents (Nomass 2013). Beyond the students' future, learning that is fun, hands-on and challenging will engage the student. The Internet has opened up so many avenues for teachers to teach content.

- **Web-Based Learning and Instant Messenger**

A variety of basic language skills can be developed with the help of web-based language learning activities. It is known that; there are four basic skills in English which are listening, speaking, writing, and reading. These skills can be put on the web and made interactive in a variety of ways. One of these ways is internet communication tools such as m-learning, e-mail, blogs, chat. These tools provide integrated environment for teachers and students. A variety of messenger services such as MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, etc. began to serve to people. Newly more services are added to such technologies. Students writing, listening and speaking could be improved if the above websites are used.

- **Mobile Devices-podcasting**

Mobile learning is also defined as "any service or facility that supplies learner with general electronic information and educational content that aids in acquisition of knowledge regardless of location and time" (Lehner & Nosekabel, 2002, p. 15). Mobile learning system is available for delivering education to learners anytime and anywhere they need it. Mobile phones are the most popular devices among people. IPods are one of the mobile media devices which enable users to produce, organize, deliver, and use media also users can share texts, images, audio or video with their peers and teachers. The technology and pedagogy of using podcasting and iPod could be in improving listening skills in case of language learning, but the use of podcasts in literature is really important. There are many universities like the Stanford University from which podcasts on literature called "Entitled Opinions" on different aspects of literature including literary schools, criticism and literary theories as well as history of literature could be downloaded.

Using mobiles in English listening, students can use 'podcasting' for an authentic and meaningful learning opportunity. 'Podcasting' (defined as "a type of digital media consisting of an episodic series of audio radio, video, PDF, or ePub files subscribed to and downloaded through web syndication or streamed online to a computer or mobile device", on Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcast) has recently become very popular.Stanley (2006) mentioned that podcasts could be used as both a source for authentic listening materials and a supplement to textbook materials. Thus, podcasts can be used to provide learners with a wide range of opportunities for listening practice both inside and outside of the classroom.

- **Computer and Internet**

The use of computers in listening problems provides students with visual and voice inputs which can enhance their information and ideas, and develop their listening skills (Hoven, 1999). Computer-based listening tests are very important in reinforcing the understanding skills of the listener. CD-ROM based learning films can also provide significant advantages over the traditional methods. Finally, Internet voice chatting using the second language may also aid the communication capabilities of the student. The use of CD-player devices is another modern tool for listening comprehension. CD-players are electronic instruments used specifically to run audio CD-ROMs. Lectures and listening examinations related to content can be saved on these audio CDs for latter use by the English language learners.

The Internet is suitable place to practice English language as it offers the possibility, with the right software, of using images and audio resources at the same time, combining sounds and images as in communicative situations in the real world. It also provides users with a highly appealing and innovative format. There is a plethora of educational video and audio material available online and accessible via Web search engines such as Google.com. Skype is an internet-based application that enables Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) calls. It has a useful user-interface that enables the users easy and effective use. "Skype is a relatively newly emerging technology and the potential application of it to language and literature learning and teaching needs to be further explored" (Wu, 2005, p.13). Skype application is increasingly used as a part of listening development process throughout the world today.

- **Videos and Digital stories**

Using video in the classroom allows learners to access more information while listening. The first major advantage of using video is that it can provide samples of real-life situations. Lonergan (1984, pp. 4-5 cited in Lustigová, 2013) pointed out that video is able to present "complete communicative situations. At their best, video presentations will be intrinsically interesting to language learners. Learners can use video to study how language use may be employed by age and how the relationship between language use and paralinguistic features can be focused, including how to convey moods and feelings. It helps learners in developing listening skills, in learning new lexical terms and in encouraging autonomous learning.

In Verdugo et al., Digital stories are embraced by students dearly as they combine interactivity, visual aids and repetition, while they enthuse them through their topics. As listening comprehension is difficult to be taught, these stories help students develop this skill effortlessly, through a fun and motivational activity while developing linguistic structure, literacy, vocabulary, sound patterns and prosody which can ultimately lead them to learn the language. Additionally, students are familiarized with the ways one may employ to convey meaning to others using nonverbal communication such as gestures, facial expressions, pitch of voice etc. It is vital to point out that this social experience, as Verdugo et al. characterize it, takes place at the children's own pace as they are allowed to proceed that way.

- **TV/Radio: Broadcasting**

Listening to TV and radio educational language programs is technical way for developing the understanding ability. However, the listening student should be careful in selecting the specific programs that are suitable for his/her needs. News satellite TV channels, like the BBC, are also useful for practicing with audio and video media. Listening to the radio is one of the most accessible ways a learner has of developing listening skills. Using TV/Radio in

classroom is one of the more accessible forms of authentic listening practice we can give our learners. There are a lot of channels that broadcast in English within twenty-four hours. The popular channels broadcast in English such as BBC World service and voice of America (VAO   ) constantly on-air.

Conclusion

Digital technologies are fundamentally altering the nature of knowledge in the sense that they enable a more creative, active, collective, and personal way of constructing and communicating knowledge through digital media technologies (Payton & Hague, 2010; Sharpe, 2011). Increasing opportunities for learning are available and education is embracing the idea of e-learning and mobile-learning aiming at open and lifelong learning (Beetham, McGill, & Littlejohn, 2009). In today's participatory culture of media-saturated and automated society, digital literacy allowing one to acquire various capabilities required across a range of future scenarios (Beetham et al., 2009). Technology offers teachers and learners vast amount of materials and communication possibilities to enhance their language teaching and learning.

As technology has developed the incorporation of this medium into the instruction process becomes necessary. English language teachers should be allowed adding multisensory elements, text, sound, pictures, video, and animation, which provide meaningful contexts to facilitate comprehension. Teachers should be prepared with professional skills which include pedagogical and digital technology skill because the more enthusiastic and more knowledgeable language teachers are, the more successfully they can implement digital literacy practices in the language classroom. English language teachers should encourage their students to use technology in developing the language skills. University authorities should consider technology necessity as an important part of the teaching and learning programs. They should install new technology tools that support new instructional software. In order to facilitate the integration of technology, adequate support and technical assistance should be provided for teachers. Educational institutions should modernize their technical instruction capabilities by using new equipments and laboratories for supporting the teaching process. In order to provide an interaction between language learners and teachers or peer to peers internet connections and mobile devices are of the most popular and useful ways in language and literature learning. For successful integration of digital literacy practices in English language courses, both teachers and learners need to be prepared to adopt new roles and use the available technology in appropriate ways.

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