



# REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS

## TỰ NHÌN LẠI VỀ VIỆC DẠY KỸ NĂNG NGHE

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**ABSTRACT.** English listening is very helpful to all students to deepen or to improve their language skill although it is usually considered a passive skill. In high school, listening plays a minor role, which leads to big troubles in listening comprehension when students enter universities. To cultivate the students listening skill, the teacher is supposed to be imaginative and creative in developing their teaching methods to create good atmosphere and make English lessons more exiting. Therefore, teachers can aspire the learners' self-motivation and their enthusiasm. Through this paper, I would like to discuss some common listening comprehension strategies, student's hindrances and give some suggestions withdrawn from my real teaching experience.

**KEYWORDS.** *listening skills, listening comprehension, methods, hindrances, suggestions*

**TÓM TẮT.** Nghe là một trong những kỹ năng quan trọng khi học ngôn ngữ, tuy nhiên thông thường kỹ năng nghe vẫn bị gán mác “kỹ năng thụ động”. Cũng chính vì thế mà việc dạy và học môn Nghe cũng không được chú trọng trong chương trình học phổ thông dẫn đến một hệ quả là khi lên bậc Đại học sinh viên có khả năng đọc viết và ngữ pháp khá tốt nhưng lại gặp khó khăn rất lớn với kỹ năng nghe hiểu. Để giúp người học phát triển kỹ năng nghe, giáo viên cần phải phát huy được khả năng tự lập và chủ động cũng như sự sáng tạo của người học; từ đó sẽ nuôi dưỡng được niềm yêu thích cũng như sự tìm tòi học hỏi của người học đối với kỹ năng này. Và thông qua bài báo này, tôi muốn đưa ra một cái nhìn chung về các phương pháp dạy nghe, các khó khăn khi học nghe cũng như là một số rút kinh nghiệm của bản thân trong việc áp dụng các chiến lược để xây dựng niềm đam mê tìm tòi của người học cho kỹ năng nghe.

**TỪ KHOẢ.** *kỹ năng nghe hiểu, khó khăn, giải pháp, phương pháp dạy nghe*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Listening skill is usually labeled “a passive skill”; nevertheless, this is a misleading conception since an active involvement from the learner is one of the crucial factors in listening acquisition. Besides, in most second language classrooms, this skill has been most forgotten and neglected; as a result, it is not paid much attention to and taught inefficiently by the teachers. Teaching listening is not simply just turning on the audio recordings and let the students listen once, twice or three times. If they still cannot listen to these words or get the ideas, teachers will give clues or even the answers and ask them to practice listening more at home. Day by day, some students can really improve their listening skills unconsciously. However, some still cannot better their skill despite restless efforts, and then they gradually lose their interest and enthusiasm for this skill. Throughout my teaching period, I have recognized that arousing students' interest and inspiring their self-motivation are a lot more important and effective than teaching them theory or making them listen passively. Therefore, in this paper I would like to discuss some hindrances to students' listening skills and give some suggestions to change the learners from passive to active so that their listening skill can be enhanced dramatically.

### 2. CONTENT

#### 2.1 Common listening comprehension strategies

It is obvious that students should be taught listening strategies; however, to ensure that all the techniques can be obtained, students should have sufficient knowledge of vocabularies and grammar. According to most researchers as Conrad (1989), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), and Rost and Ross (1991) and Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul

Mart (2014), cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective are three main kinds of strategies in listening comprehension.

#### 2.2.1 Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are related to understanding and collecting input in either short-term or long-term memory for later use. Comprehension begins with the received data that is examined as consecutive levels of formation and a process of decoding. Cognitive strategy is a problem-solving method that learners apply to deal with the learning activity and facilitate the learning of knowledge (Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul Mart, 2014).

##### 2.2.1.1 Bottom-up strategies

These are word-for-word translation, arranging the rate of speech, repeating the oral text, and concentrating on prosodic characteristics of the text.

##### 2.2.1.2 Top-down strategies

They involve forecasting, guessing, explaining, and visualization. It seems that beginner learners do not use these strategies more frequently than advanced ones.

#### 2.2.2 Metacognitive Strategies

According to Rubin (1988), metacognitive strategies are management techniques used by learners to control their learning through planning, checking, assessing, and changing. Particularly, for metacognitive planning strategies, learners should have a clear objective of the listening task and use specific features of the aural language

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input that make easy the understanding of aural input. In this strategy, learners learn how to plan, monitor, and evaluate the collected information from the listening part. Wenden (1998) stated that learners who use metacognitive strategies can learn faster and integrate the knowledge outstandingly, can be constant receivers and deal with all situations, have self-confidence to get help from partners, teachers, or family, and can observe and assess themselves. Metacognitive strategies played an important role in listening comprehension. Henner Stanchina (1987) mentioned that skilled listeners can permanently explain and what they hear through (1) utilizing their prior knowledge and predictions to create theories on the text; (2) connecting new information with their continuing predictions; (3) making deductions to fill comprehension breaks; (4) assessing their predictions; (5) improving their theories.

### 2.2.3 Socio-affective Strategies

Vandergrift (2003) and Abdalhamid (2012) expressed that socio-affective strategies are techniques that listeners use to cooperate with others, to check their comprehension, and to reduce their apprehension. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) said that affective strategies are very significant because the learning situation and learners' social-psychological factors are closely related to each other. O'Malley and Chamot (1989) represented that among the strategies of listening comprehension, social and affective strategies had the most effect on the learning context. Wilson (2003) said that socio-affective strategies are related to students' interaction with other speakers and their reactions towards learning. Habte-Gabr (2006) said that in socio-affective strategy, students should know how to decrease anxiety, feel confident during listening activities, and raise motivation in improving listening.

## 2.2 What are the common hindrances to learners' listening skill?

Listening is learners' nightmare because if this skill is poor, it can lead to poor communication and failure in mastering the language. After talking with many students asking me for advice to better their listening skills, I have recognized that they have common problems such as: vocabularies, wrong pronunciation, unsuitable materials... Those factors can be divided into two main types: subjective and objective.

### 2.2.1 Subjective factors

Insufficient vocabularies have been the common problem for the students. If one does not know a certain word, they of course cannot recognize it when listening. Moreover, students tend to find out the meaning of a new word rather than infer it from the context. In addition, the wrong pronunciation of the word can lead to serious misunderstanding the recordings. If learners mispronounce the words, they cannot recognize those sounds when they listen to.

Another problem of learners is that they have the habit of listening to word-by-word rather than guessing or predicting the ideas. They do not pay attention on the hints or cues which can help them predict what will be talked about although in most listening tasks, cues are provided indirectly.

Effective note-taking and good short-term memory will help learners record information quickly; hence, lacking

note-taking skill and short-term memory also let students face some difficulties. They cannot write down what they have just listened to as quickly as they can, so they will miss the other ideas. Long sentences and numbers will be the big hindrances to those who are not good at remembering.

### 2.2.2 Objective factors:

Listening materials are considered as the main cause of students' inability in comprehension. Unfamiliar topics with full of terminology, especially, specialized topics usually bring about a problem in understanding the content.

Furthermore, variety of accents also make students unable to recognize and comprehend the materials. For example, if students are used to listening to American accent, they will have difficulty in listening and understanding Australian accents.

Besides, authentic materials cause great difficulties to students. Most teachers use materials that are designed for the aim of teaching listening purposes. Hence, the language in those materials have been modified and included less colloquial English or "real" English.

The length and difficulty of the recordings are also supposed to be students' obstacles in listening. When students practice their listening at home, choosing a suitable level is very important. The problem also comes from the poor quality of the tapes or disks or the noise from the surroundings. Obviously, when the students do the listening for a long time, they will be under pressure. Moreover, if the listening text is too long and difficult, the listener is required the skill of note-taking and good short-term memory which most students lack.

Last but not least, there are many problems with traditional models of teaching listening skills, in which the responsibility of learning were not upon the shoulders of the students. Teachers are the persons to set goals, select the material and control the equipment. There was little room for student's preferences. Learners in this model are regarded as passive over-hearers rather than active participants in the listening process. They frequently have to listen to audio or video tape that they cannot pause or interrupt. It is essential that listeners interact with the speakers to ask for unsure things or resolve the misunderstanding like in real life situations, listeners can show interest in the conversation, ask more questions or ask the speaker to repeat, and even cause the speakers to modify some parts of their talk.

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

By means of my real teaching experience, I have some recommendations to improve not only the teaching methods but also the learners' abilities.

1. The most important thing is to engage the students in the subject and make them active in the learning process. To do this, teachers should enable students to:

-  choose their own materials of listening through various activities in class
-  make their own listening text by designing the task or exercises for them and/or their classmates
-  adjust and control the recordings according to their own speed
-  reflect on their problems in listening

2. Besides, teachers should conduct some surveys throughout the course asking about their real problems in listening so that teachers can have appropriate strategy and

adjust the course outlines and the level of teaching material accordingly.

3. Various teaching methods should be applied by teachers since the competence of the teacher in teaching learning process will also influence the success of students in their study. Teachers should choose the role as facilitators by assisting the developing person at those points where help is needed. Teacher should have a set of exercises, tasks or other activities for the students in their classes. It is really beneficial and positive experience to try various classroom activities because successful materials of the subject matter depend on the use of teaching method.

4. Listening should not be taught alone. There are numerous sub-skills need to teach along with listening skill such as note-taking, short-term memory... to sharpen listening skill. Students should be instructed to guess or even to ignore the new words to make sure that they do not spend much time on guessing the unfamiliar word or they will miss the speaker's next point.

Through this paper, I would like to convince the readers that renovating teaching methodology should be taken. Traditional methods need to be accompanied by new approaches that will develop learners' language knowledge as well as their language abilities. The aim of teaching listening should be making students have the true competence in listening in real life not having all the correct answers in every exercise. Teachers should also encourage and inspire students to take more responsibility for developing their listening ability.

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