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EFFICACY OF METACOGNITIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES IN SOLVING LISTENING DIFFICULTIES IN INDIAN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS

Pallavi Kaushal

**Research Scholar, Department of Education, Panjab University,
Chandigarh.**

ABSTRACT:

Listening plays central role in life of human beings. It is backbone of learning. With impact of globalization, English has become lingua franca of many tertiary education institutions. Despite studying English in schools for so many years' students face difficulty in comprehending academic lectures in English as most teachers still focus on developing reading and writing skills. Metacognitive listening strategies can greatly help students in managing their listening in second language. This paper sheds light on various advantages of equipping students with metacognitive listening strategies.

KEYWORD: Academic Listening, Listening Difficulties, Metacognitive Listening Strategies.

INTRODUCTION:

Human beings start learning from birth. Babies learn language by listening to their parents. Small children learn various things by listening to interaction between family members. In a nutshell we can say that listening is a core life skill which provides input for development of all other skills. Technology has permeated every aspect of life so lives of human beings revolve around listening to various things such as

announcements, TV, radio etc. However, listening is lifeline for students as it is important source of knowledge for students. Gilbert (1988), on the other hand, noted that students from kindergarten through high school were expected to listen 65-90% of the time. Students who listen attentively to teachers in classroom are able to study better at home as compared to their peers. Most of the people confuse listening with hearing when there is the fundamental difference between the two. Hearing is a

physical activity whereas listening is multistage process that starts from distinguishing between sounds and leads to absorption of the meaning of different words and sentences by the brain. Listening leads to the understanding of facts and ideas. Wolvin and Coakley (1988) concluded that, both in and out of the classroom, listening consumes more of daily communication time than other forms of verbal communication. The International Listening Association (ILA) was established in 1979 in order to



encourage listening research.

With the advent of globalization, English has become lingua franca of many educational institutions in India. English has become language of communication due to use of internet in every sphere of life. Knowledge of English has become mandatory requirement of job arena. The colonial rule initially imbibed English in our education system to produce educated workforce. Before independence the purpose of English education was limited to developing reading and writing skill. After independence, the educationalists made English an important part of curriculum so that Indian students could make their mark in age of science and technology. Despite studying English for twelve or fourteen years in school, students feel lost when they enter higher education institutions where English is used as a medium of instruction. The main reason behind students' inability to comprehend academic lectures is absence of knowledge of listening skill. Most schools in India still focus on educational goals of colonial era that is development of reading and writing skills. A little focus is given on speaking skill but listening skill is neglected completely. It is assumed that listening skill will develop as by-product of developing other skills. This scenario is worse in schools in rural areas where students cram English to pass examination. Lack of proper training in teaching English is major reason behind inability of teachers to develop various skills of English. The examination systems still focus on testing reading and writing skills. Many teachers fail to understand that listening is not only a core life skill but also an important tool for developing other skills. Such students feel lost when they have to use English in real life situations. English is till Achilles heel for many Indian students.

India is a multilingual country so it is not possible for higher education institutions to impart knowledge in different languages. Hence English is used as major language during teaching learning institutions. Most academic lectures are delivered in English only. Despite studying English for several years in school students find it difficult to understand academic lectures. In most of the colleges and universities, professors deliver their lectures in English irrespective of the subject matter. Hence students have to face various problems while listening to academic lectures in English. Firstly, they have to listen attentively to the second language to construct meaning. Secondly, they have to take comprehensive notes for exams. Thirdly, students have to assimilate large amount of new knowledge into mind. Academic lectures delivered in English have become a challenge for students. Inherent complexity of listening skill has made it difficult for researchers as well as teachers. Many studies skills (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Vandergrift, 2007) have shown that processes, instruction and assessment of second language listening are less well understood and researched than the other three conventional. Moreover, profile of research linked to academic listening is even lower. Lynch (2011) has highlighted the complexities which made academic listening research difficult for researchers. Various researchers have tried to study different aspects of academic listening. Jung (2003) found that students listening to lectures that offered discourse signalling cues were able to recall more main ideas and more supporting details as compared to students who listened to lectures without cues. Morell (2007) explored the conditions promoting interaction in lectures, through a survey of students and their lecturers.

Listening during teaching learning interaction requires both automated and controlled process as spoken text is only once heard. An academic listener while listening in second language has to rely more on controlled process as they not accustomed to automatically process input in second language. Listening strategies will help listeners to channelize their listening and maximise input. Mostly researchers categorise listening strategies into three types: Cognitive, Metacognitive and Socioaffective strategies. Cognitive listening strategies are utilized by listeners to understand the material to be learned or to apply specific techniques to a learning task. These strategies include techniques such as inferencing, repeating, deduction, imagery, elaboration, note taking, and translation. Metacognitive listening strategies are used by the listeners to increase comprehension and second language retention by thinking about the process of learning and the ways to go through this process successfully. This strategy includes techniques such as planning, monitoring, evaluating and problem-solving. Socioaffective listening strategies include social interactions with classmates which are helpful in understanding and acquiring new information. It includes techniques such as asking the teacher for clarification, or to apply specific techniques to lower anxiety (O'Malley, Chamot, & Kupper, 1989; Vandergrift, 1997).

Listening is central to the lives of students throughout all levels of educational development (Coakley&Wolvin, 1997). Many studies (Mendelsohn, 1998; Vandergrift 2005) have highlighted the critical role played by metacognitive listening strategies in the cognitive process of language learning. Wenden (1998) asserted that learners who used meta-cognitive abilities were more strategic and fast in learning due to improved quality and speed of their cognitive engagement. Hence equipping students with metacognitive listening strategies will offer following benefits:

- **Controlling their own learning:** Knowledge of metacognitive listening strategies help students in controlling their learning through listening. While applying metacognitive listening strategies students consciously monitor and evaluate their listening in order to maximise listening input. Vandergrift (1999) showed that strategy development is important for listening training because strategies are conscious means by which learners can guide and evaluate their own comprehension and responses.

- **Comprehending large chunk of new knowledge:** In most high education institutions, long value laden discourses by professors consume major portion of academic lecture. Students can read one or two books but classroom lectures can provide them with knowledge from several sources. Usually teachers consult various sources before delivering lecture providing students with different perspectives of same thing. This inflow of knowledge helps in widening thinking horizon of the students. However, students need to actively monitor their listening in order to gather maximise knowledge from academic lectures. Hence effective use of metacognitive listening strategies can help students in understanding large chunks of knowledge delivered during lectures. Knowledge of metacognitive strategies can help students in planning and evaluating their listening.

- **Maintaining attention in class:** Inattentiveness of students is usually a big problem for teachers. Sometimes students are physically present but mentally absent. Inability to understand classroom lectures can adversely affects attention of students in class. Main purpose of metacognitive listening strategies is to help students direct their listening in right direction by applying conscious effort. While applying metacognitive listening strategies during teaching learning interaction, attention of students is always focused on the teacher.

- **Higher level of motivation:** In schools, listening skill is not given proper weightage. Moreover, students are not accustomed to hear English as both school and home environment are dominated by mother tongue. Such students when they enter tertiary level institution where English is used as a medium of instruction feel disoriented. Orienting these students with metacognitive listening strategies can help them in listening and understanding classroom teaching which will motivate them to study harder. Vandergrift (2005) showed that students who made the most use of metacognitive listening strategies had a higher level of motivation, and they appeared to be more self-determined as compared to other students.

- **Contribution to academic success:** The main purpose of each student is to achieve academic success. But it is not easy to achieve academic success in higher education as the course content is more difficult and specialised. In school, students study basic subjects but when they join professional courses they have to study highly technical subjects. Hence it is very important for students to listen classroom lectures properly. Initially classroom teaching can help them in sorting their way out of maze of highly complicated course content. Both instructors and students acknowledge the importance of listening comprehension for academic success. (Ferris and Tagg,1996)

- **Active participation in classroom interaction:** Listening plays very important role in classroom interaction as well. If the students are able to understand the discussion in classroom only than they can respond. In normal conversation also, a listener should be able to comprehend linguistic content in order to respond. Hence teaching students listening strategies will only make them better listener but also an active participant in classroom discussion.

- **Enhancing habit of self-study and self-analysis:** In schools, students are more dependent on their teachers for studying, however, students expected to become responsible for their study in college and universities. Some schools still rely on the habit of spoon feeding their students. This practice makes students handicap when they go for higher education. Metacognition means thinking about thinking. Metacognitive listening strategies revolve around planning and evaluating their listening. The main purpose of these strategies is to make students put conscious effort towards listening and assessing themselves as listeners. Studies have shown that skilled

students, who used metacognitive strategies, asked themselves several questions about the academic listening text, developed a mental framework of the information, and paid attention to new material to see if it matched the information that they had heard earlier. The skilled listeners were more active mentally and worked with the text (Vandergrift, 2005).

Suggestions for teaching metacognitive listening strategies to students for improving listening during teaching learning interaction

- **Preparing students to listen:** It is very important to mentally prepare students for listening. Teachers should tell students when and how to listen. Hence the new academic session should begin with orientation program. During orientation, teachers should make students aware of type of discourse or teaching that will take place during academic lectures.

- **Goal of listening:** In most schools English is still taught through grammar translation method so students develop habit of translating each word in order to understand it. However, it is not possible to apply this method while listening in academic lectures in university classrooms. Hence students should be made to understand that it is important to comprehend gist of classroom lectures rather than focussing on translating and understanding each word of teachers. When students try to translate each word spoken by the teacher, they often lose track. The main goal of listening during teaching learning interaction is to comprehend main points.

- **Assigning listening tasks:** Teachers should provide listening task to students so that students can familiarize with various linguistic traits of spoken discourse. It is very important to provide students with listening tasks before starting regular teaching as students lack exposure to academic listening in second language.

- **Teaching listening strategies:** Listening is that backbone of learning. Metacognitive listening strategies can help students in planning their listening. Listening strategies are like battle plans which will help students to comprehend meaning successfully from listening discourse. Brown (2001) suggests that students need to be taught listening strategies to overcome inevitable communication difficulties and maximize their potential comprehension.

- **Developing extensive listening:** Intensive listening means understand every word of discourse. Extensive listening means understanding the main content. Initially students try to understand each word by the teacher. In the beginning of new session, students should be encouraged to develop extensive listening by telling them to focus on main ideas during the lecture.

- **Student participation:** All students should be encouraged to participate in classroom discussion. This will encourage them to listen intently in order to discuss later. Students will try to remember main points for discussion which will improve their concentration.

- **Assigning writing assignments:** Teacher should give writing assignments to students based on classroom teaching. These assignments should focus on main points of the lecture.

- **Providing visual support:** With the advent of technology, it is possible to provide different types of visual support to listeners such as pictures, graphs, PowerPoint presentation etc. according to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), the visual support can help students to predict incoming listening materials easily by supplying cultural information. Visual support not only reinforces the aural message but also train students to listen to some difficult specific information.

- **Providing linguistic resources:** Listeners in order to comprehend meaning withdraw from linguistic resources. So teachers should equip students with knowledge of technical terms or words that would be frequently used in classroom (Prasad, 2014). This knowledge will help in enriching linguistic resources of listeners which are usually deficit in case of second language.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that it is very important to help students to understand listening. Despite studying English till graduation as second language students are unable to comprehend academic lectures in English. The major reason behind this problem is poor listening skill which is often neglected during learning English language. Need of the hour is to start proper orientation courses which will help students in adopting proper strategies for academic listening. In foreign universities, special courses are organised for students who hail from countries where English is second language. Indian universities where English is used as major language for teaching learning interaction should help students from different culture

and backgrounds to familiarize with academic lectures in English before start of actual classroom teaching.

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