

APPLICATION OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES IN GJILAN AND DEÇAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss the application of the listening comprehension activities in Kosovo schools, grades VI-VII. Listening comprehension is a very important skill in the process of learning a foreign language, and it should be integrated and put in practice along with other skills, so that the students get a better and easier acquisition of a language. Developing only writing and reading skills in a language is not enough, because listening and speaking skills are the ones that matter when we communicate in the real world situations. That is why it is important to treat and practice all four of them with the same consideration while teaching a foreign language, in order to prepare students for a fluent communication in everyday situations. In my experience as an English language lecturer, I have noticed that many students that have excellent reading and writing skills have unsatisfactory listening skills. This is due to insufficient inclusion and application of the listening comprehension activities in the classroom, especially in the early stages of their education, which is a crucial period for development and enhancement of all communication skills simultaneously.

In order to have a better view of my hypothesis, I have chosen five lower secondary schools in Gjilan and Deçan Municipalities, because at this level of schooling students should be exposed more intensively to the listening activities, as younger stages are taught basics of English mainly through pictures, drawings and songs.

Keywords: language, skills, listening, learning, teaching

Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language is a complex process that encompasses a variety of methods and technologies used to implement the curricula designated for the particular age of school students and related to the four major components of teaching a language.

Listening is an important skill for the person who is learning English because in verbal communication we cannot communicate with each other without listening to the speaker's utterances and understanding them¹. Listening comprehension activities develop students' skills to understand and respond to a spoken language. This may be very demanding in English, and students may find it difficult, however, these activities should be designed according to the age and psychological characteristics of the students in order to make their comprehension easier. It is important to teach listening due to a number of reasons. The main reasons for getting students to listen to spoken English is to let them hear different varieties and accents – rather than just the voice of their teacher and enable students acquire language subconsciously².

English language is learned as the first foreign language in Kosovo, and it is a school subject from early grades up to the university education. As such, if it is taught properly Kosovo students would not have any difficulties in using English for communication in any area of life. This means that all four components; listening, speaking, writing and reading; are to be developed equally throughout the years of learning English at schools. Listening comprehension, which obviously is one of the core segments in learning English as a foreign

¹ Nihei Koichi, *How to Teach Listening*, Japan – 2002, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED475743.pdf> (visited: November, 23,2016).

² Jeremy Harmer, *How to Teach English* (New Edition), Pearson Education Limited, 2010.

language, has been incorporated in the curricula along with the changes that education system underwent with the approval of Kosovo Curriculum Framework 2001³. Prior to this date, listening activities were not used in English teaching/learning process, which was more of a traditional educational process where the student was the passive partner whereas the teacher was the active one⁴, and mainly involved memorizing and reproducing prefabricated information.

These changes introduced a new approach in the education system; including teaching/learning of English language; which were updated accordingly in the following years. Listening, which previously was a neglected skill in a foreign language, has been incorporated along with other skills within the Language and Communication area⁵ of Kosovo Curriculum Framework.

The methodology

This research was carried out in five lower secondary schools, in Gjilan city, as one of the biggest cities in the eastern part of Kosovo, and in Deçan Municipality, a small town in the western part. Schools were selected based on the general public perception as the best schools in the mentioned places. Participants were teachers and students of grades VI-VII of these schools. In total 120 students in, three in Gjilan and two in Deçan were included in this research. Separate questionnaires were distributed to the students and teachers, which were returned back upon their finalization within one week. Besides questionnaires, observations were conducted in the respective classrooms, according to the scheduled work plan for listening activities in English. Meanwhile, students and teachers were also interviewed about inclusion and application of listening comprehension.

Integration of listening comprehension activities in education system

Following the decision, which was taken in August 2000, on the change of the structure of education system in Kosovo from 4+4+4 to 5+4+3, new goals and functions were incorporated for different levels of education, and new outcomes were set to be achieved. This enabled the transition of teaching and learning methodology from an isolated to a more open one to international new trends of development.

English as a first foreign language becomes a compulsory subject from grade 3, with the overall objective, amongst others, to develop understanding, listening, reading, speaking and writing skills⁶.

Listening is listed as one of the key communication skills that should be developed along all stages of the curriculum aiming provision of effective listening (articulation of sounds, broadening of vocabulary⁷). This requires teachers to update accordingly teaching methods and techniques of English language regarding listening comprehension activities in order to achieve the goals as provided by the Core Curriculum for the appropriate stage of education system.

However, the findings show that a little effort was done related to this issue.

³ *The New Kosovo Curriculum Framework-preschool, primary and secondary education-Discussion White Paper* https://www.academia.edu/3040494/The_new_Kosovo_curriculum_framework (visited on November, 24, 2016)

⁴ Musa Kraja, *Pedagogjia*, Mileniumi i Tretë, Tirana, 2006,

⁵ Core Curriculum for Lower Secondary Education In Kosovo (Grades VI, VII, VIII and IX) <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/10/ang-working-2-masht.pdf> (visited on November, 25, 2016)

⁶ *The New Kosovo Curriculum Framework-preschool, primary and secondary education-Discussion White Paper*, https://www.academia.edu/2912975/The_new_Kosovo_Curriculum_Framework_-_White_Discussion_Paper?auto=download (visited: November 24, 2016)

⁷ *Core Curriculum for Lower Secondary Education In Kosovo (Grades VI, VII, VIII and IX)*, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/10/ang-working-2-masht.pdf> (visited: November, 25, 2016)

Application of listening comprehension activities in the selected schools

As mentioned above, apart from the questionnaires that were distributed to the students, I conducted interviews with the teachers and students in order to get additional information about inclusion of listening comprehension activities in the classroom. However, students' questionnaires were the primary research instrument employed and the data obtained, was carefully scrutinized. The results revealed that the students' listening skills were generally related to their home use of various audio-visual aids. The results also suggest that students' listening skills would greatly improve with their positive use of aids under the teachers' appropriate guidance.

The difference between all five schools is very slight, even though their geographical distribution is different. The teacher is mainly the only source of listening to English speeches for the students in the classroom. Instructions are mostly given in Albanian language, so the teachers use English only when reading texts. There was no audio/visual device observed in two out of ten classrooms, which could be used for the purpose of the listening activities. According to the teachers, CD-players are stored in the teachers' office and can be used by teachers as needed. In one of the schools it was stated they do not have one, therefore the transcript of the listening section is read by the teacher.

Teachers were contradictory about application of listening comprehension in the classroom. Two teachers of two different schools stated that they practice such activities on weekly bases, but only with the CD-player and the audio material of the student's book CD, since they do not have any other audio visual devices (such as projectors that would enable them to show authentic audio/video materials to the students). In one of the schools, there is a classroom with the projector installed that could be used for such purposes, but, according to the students, it is rarely used.

Teachers of two schools stated that due to the lack of functional audiovisual equipment, they are not able to practice listening activities. However, they are well aware of their importance in teaching/learning of English.

Students agree that these types of exercises would help them regarding English pronunciation and articulation as well as vocabulary, and that is why they practice these exercises at home through different audio-visual aids.

Textbooks used for grades VI and VII in Kosovo schools are Exploring English 2 and 3, by authors Tim Harris and Allan Rowe (Kosovar Edition). The set of the books consists of Student's book and Workbook with CD-s, and also Teacher's book with the instructions on the usage of Student's book. The CD attached to the student's book is to be used in the classroom along with the texts or various exercises included in the book. However, it is obvious from the results of the research that the teacher do not make the best used of them. Books are distributed by the Ministry of Education.

The teachers declared to be aware of the fact that listening comprehension activities are included in the curricula as one of the communication skills to be developed, however they are not able to practice it due to the lack of the resources (CD players or other devices).

Conclusion

According to the results presented above, listening comprehension activities are not sufficiently used in Kosovo schools. As one of the key components in learning and teaching a foreign language, it should be included on regular basis in the work plan, because it is crucial for a student to be able to understand an English conversation out of the school context and environment. English language is all about communication and one cannot speak if he is not able to understand. The only way to acquire and develop these skills is to be used by the teachers

at schools, because only then the students will be able to sharpen their listening skills and get motivated to develop themselves independently in this area.

According to my personal observations while doing this research, it is not the lack of the audio/visual devices that holds back teachers from practicing these activities, because with the development of the technology there are many devices available to us, which could be used for such purposes in the classroom. It is the conventional methodology that they are used to practice in the classroom, where students are asked to read, translate and write texts in a foreign language. Teachers pay more attention to reading and writing skills and somehow neglect listening skills, which in fact should be applied interchangeably in order to achieve the goals and objectives set by the curricula. More attention should be given to listening activities at schools, because good listeners grow up to become good communicators.

References

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