



THE IMPORTANCE OF VIDEO GAMES AND MOBILE PHONES TO INCREASE THE LISTENING SKILLS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

Listening is one of the most difficult language skills among the four communication competences; however, it has received much less time in English learning than the other three (reading, writing, and speaking). Also, listening is often claimed to be a passive skill in the classroom, as learners seem to sit quietly and listen to dialogues. As language teachers, we are constantly striving to create the conditions under which our learners can learn and succeed.

Keywords: listening skills, mobile phones, communication competence, self-studies.

ВАЖНОСТЬ ВИДЕОИГР И МОБИЛЬНЫХ ТЕЛЕФОНОВ ДЛЯ ПОВЫШЕНИЯ НАВЫКОВ СЛУШАНИЯ У МОЛОДЫХ УЧАЩИХСЯ

Аннотация

Аудирование является одним из самых сложных языковых навыков среди четырех коммуникативных компетенций; однако на изучение английского ему отводится гораздо меньше времени, чем остальным трем (чтение, письмо и разговорная речь). Кроме того, слушание часто считается пассивным навыком в классе, поскольку учащиеся, кажется, сидят тихо и слушают диалоги. Как преподаватели языка, мы постоянно стремимся создать условия, при которых наши учащиеся могут учиться и добиваться успеха.

Ключевые слова: умение слушать, мобильные телефоны, коммуникативная компетентность, самообучение.

Introduction

The fact of the matter is that mobile phones are a very real and important part of everyday life. In fact, people nowadays have a strong dependence on their mobile phones, whether they are aware of it or not. Therefore, why should we not make the best of the situation and allow for the effective use of mobile phones to study, especially if they can contribute so much to the learning process? Ultimately, the digital natives in our classrooms will expect us to understand and meet their expectations regarding the use of technology. Mobile learning (m-learning) is gradually being introduced in the field of English language learning.

Listening and speaking are the most difficult for learners, although a person engaged in communication devotes 30% of his/her time to speaking and 45% to listening. Podcasts as a form of



innovation technology are a means by which mobile phones can improve listening skills. They also allow a gradual transition to occur, from the state of a passive listener and doer of the comprehension tasks to a creator of podcasts, and give a birth to a new mobile technology in developing and improving both listening and speaking skills.

Listening is one of the most difficult competences in English language learning, as listening is the only kind of speech activity where practically nothing depends on the listening person. We have analysed references relating to listening comprehension and difficulties arising in listening. These papers outline potential problems that could hinder listening comprehension during English language learning in classrooms. In general, they include the speed delivery, impossibility for learners to have words repeated, the small size of the learner vocabulary, inability to recognize the signals that the speaker is using to move from one point to another, incapability to concentrate in a foreign language, etc. As we have introduced listening for self-studies via mobile phones outside the classroom, we have also carried out research to outline difficulties our learners face in listening. We have divided the variety of these difficulties into four main groups.

1. Difficulties connected with the peculiarities of the listening process and speech activity of a listener.
2. Difficulties connected with the speech of a native speaker.
3. Difficulties connected with the traditions and culture of the studied language country.
4. Difficulties connected with the composition of the recording.

Let's consider them in the order of appearance. It is a well-known fact that any activity, including speech, is comfortable for the doer if it corresponds with his or her abilities or if he/she is able to adjust to it, i.e., if a speaker chooses a topic for conversation which is interesting to him. In this case, a listener has to get the information a speaker gives. Sometimes the topic is not familiar, and is too difficult for a listener. Usually, a native speaker does not adjust his language to his listener, so the latter has to understand speech with a certain proportion of unknown materials. Moreover, contrary to a reader, a listener can neither listen to the message repeatedly nor use any reference literature to help himself.

The second group of difficulties is connected with the fact that the speech rate of a native speaker often seems too rapid to a foreigner. So, a listener is not able to repeat the message, and that is why he does not interpret it correctly. Moreover, it is a well-known fact that a listener prefers a rate of speech that corresponds to the rate of his mother tongue, which is normally slower. The process of hearing is unique and continuous; the listener can neither stop, nor listen to the message again. Hence, he has to get the message continuously, and only once. It is obvious that in such conditions, it is rather difficult to receive information, and that is why it is only partially understood. It is also shown that low male voices are perceived as being easier than females' and kids' voices, as the latter have much higher tones.

Next, we look at an example of a paradox in listening. It is amazing but true: a Russian pupil understands the English speech of his teacher and classmates, and as a rule, the English speech of his countrymen, while at the same time, he understands English native speakers poorly. What is the



reason? The first is that nowadays, the speech of native speakers differs considerably from written language, and tends to be less formal. The second is that the individual style of the oral speech, including its rate, can be rather varied, making speech difficult to be understood. In the mother tongue, this problem is compensated for by a huge amount of listening practice. This experience allows an accumulation in our memory of the majority of different variants of voices and peculiarities in pronunciation. Because of such experiences in listening to a foreign speech, including the fact that more often, a pupil listens to the same native speaker, individual voice peculiarities of native speakers such as their pronunciation, voice timbre, and rapid speech rate make it difficult to understand them. The third group of difficulties derives from one of the main principles of communicative competence, that claims that language, being a phenomenon of a certain civilization, should be studied in the context of this civilization. That is why pupils should know the culture of the foreign country. To master a foreign language, one should be aware of the rules of the foreign language in different everyday situations and professional areas. A pupil should perceive and understand an oral message from the position of cross-cultural communication.

Effectiveness in listening also depends on whether learners are interested in understanding or not. Experiments have shown that learners understand and memorise better texts which are difficult but rich in context compared to easy and primitive ones. Rich content texts contain new and useful information, but problems in understanding these texts will remain. That is because they usually contain facts connected with the history, ways of life, and the culture of the foreign country. These are so-called realities that are often unknown to learners. Results have shown that among them are geographical names, proper names, the names of the organisations, the press and works of fiction, and also historical facts, political and military terminology, and terminology connected with various fields of art, pithy sayings and expressions, and quotations from fiction. Moreover, topic action in the recording also influences its understanding.

High-speed mobile Internet has revived podcast technology. It has become possible to listen to podcasts not only by means of audio players, but also on mobile phones and tablets based either on iOS, Android, and Windows. Modern life makes youths adjust to its new rhythm. Learners have a lot of opportunities to study outside: they can listen to podcasts anywhere and at any time they want, sometimes using even one headphone (as stereo is not so important in podcasts).

In conclusion, this paper has reviewed difficulties in listening and how podcasts via video games and mobile phones help to address them outside the classroom. The mobile phone can serve as a “portal” of sorts, expanding our learners’ vision of what they see, feel, or hear through the use of podcasts. This means that teachers should not rely on the activities and tasks that are presented in the podcast in a “classical” way, but rather, constantly find ways to enhance content, with their own creative twist. Mobile phones can serve that purpose well.



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