

Approach to Listening Skills Formation in Students of Non-Linguistic Schools

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Abstract—The paper presents the description of experimental research aimed at revealing the stages of listening comprehension skills development in students with low foreign language proficiency. The experimental group was formed as the result of a multi-component monitoring test. During the studies, special attention was paid to the facilitation of listening skills and a subsequent response to an oral message. The experiment was divided into three stages. The first one was dedicated to the formation of social language competence (the creation of neuron connections between a phoneme, a grapheme, and the acquisition of intonation of an English sentence). The second stage included listening comprehension training with both supporting texts and their gradual elimination. Such consistent transition made it possible to combine listening comprehension tasks with training active vocabulary and grammar, to accompany listening with visuals to include the cultural component in teaching the foreign language for specific purposes, to form skills to define the general idea of an oral message, etc. The third stage of our experiment proved to be challenging for students with low language proficiency. It was concluded that it would be more effective to proceed with the listening activities of the second stage but with the gradual introduction of oral responses to the listening activities.

Index Terms—foreign language competence, listening comprehension, listening skills, oral message, training technique

I. INTRODUCTION

In the modern system of education, students encounter a wide variety of opportunities for academic mobility. These experiences are beneficial for future specialists as they allow them to be more competitive and capable of intercultural communication in the labor market. However, one of the main challenges when selecting applicants for an international internship is possessing a letter of assessment of foreign language competence or a certificate of proficiency in the language that meets international standards. Unfortunately, on these language competence tests, listening often receives a lower score when compared to the other major language skills of reading, speaking, and writing. This leaves the selection commission to doubt the applicant's ability to perceive specialized material in English by way of lectures.

Experience has proved that even when students have a certain lexical and grammatical base and show the ability to work with a written text, they show unwillingness to respond to oral communication. Thus, in addition to mastering the language for specific purposes, there is a need to develop the skills of listening to a foreign text, understanding it, and further working with it.

Likewise, mastering listening skills also makes it possible to accomplish educational and developmental goals. Listening has a positive effect on the development of memory and auditory memory, which is important for learning a foreign language. Through listening, the vocabulary of the language and its grammatical structure are learned. At the same time, listening helps develop the skills of speaking, reading, and writing. As Nation and Newton (2009) state, the ability to listen is the key to success in learning a foreign language. Wenden (1986) and Rost (2002) point out that listening, used as a teaching tool, stimulates the educational and communicative activities of learners, and ensures the management of the learning process. It should be noted that in the process of teaching listening, feedback takes place, and favorable conditions for mastering a foreign language are created.

The analysis of scientific literature has shown that scientists have repeatedly addressed the issues of introducing listening into the educational process. Wenden (1986) revealed the approaches to teaching English through English. Berezneva (2022) explored some aspects of the listening training of military students. Brown and Brown (2011) revealed some myths when teaching listening. Zhen (2021) researched students' anxiety issues connected with listening and strategies for overcoming them. Domkin (2023) worked on the development of criteria for selecting texts for listening activities. Goh (1997) studied students' metacognitive awareness during listening. Movva et al. (2022) presented the effect of pre-, while-, and post-listening activities on developing students listening skills and so on.

At the same time, in the opinion of the researchers, current literature does not sufficiently cover approaches to the formation of listening skills in students of non-linguistic specialties with low foreign language proficiency.

Thus, the aim of this study is to present the results of the experiment aimed at developing listening skills in students of a non-linguistic school with low language proficiency.

To meet their goal, the researchers will complete the following tasks:

1. determine the essence of listening in the educational process and the stages of listening training;

2. describe characteristic exercises of every stage of the experiment; and
3. compare the results of the experimental group with the group taught according to the standard program.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on scientific literature, the researchers found that there is no unique definition of listening as an educational activity. Zhen (2021) states that listening refers to the perception and understanding of spoken texts, used primarily for training auditory comprehension, especially in educational contexts. Indeed, listening is the foundation of communication, as the mastery of oral speech begins with it. This process involves the ability to differentiate sounds, integrate them into meaningful units, retain them in memory, make probabilistic predictions, and interpret the sound sequence based on the communication context. Perception occurs at a natural pace characteristic of the specific language.

Lypchanko-Kovachyk and Tupytsia (2022) define listening as an activity that combines the perception and understanding of spoken language and emphasize that it is a perceptual activity closely linked to memory. The process of perception includes the analysis and synthesis of language units (phonemes, morphemes, words, and sentences) at various levels, resulting in the transformation of sound signals into meaningful records—thus enabling comprehension.

Heredia-Arboleda et al. (2024) point out that listening is closely related to other types of speech activity. Both listening and reading involve the perception and semantic processing of information, explaining the shared language mechanisms that support receptive forms of speech activity. Furthermore, they posit that listening and speaking are two interconnected components of oral communication, representing two sides of the same phenomenon.

Brown and Brown (2011) specify that the distinctive features of listening are defined by the nature of verbal communication where: 1.) listening and speaking are language skills that facilitate direct oral communication (although information can also be transmitted through technical means); 2.) in the communication process, listening is a reactive type of speech activity, like reading; 3.) listening is oriented toward receiving or transmitting information (a verbal message); 4.) listening functions as a receptive form of speech activity (unlike speaking and writing); and finally, 5.) the primary form of listening is the internal mechanism of auditory perception, which relies on mental processes such as auditory perception, attention, recognition, comparison of linguistic elements, identification, prediction, grouping, and memory retention.

As previously mentioned, the act of listening is based on an educational situation. Its subject is the content of the text being listened to, and the communicative task expresses the purpose of listening. These are the key components that determine communication. Moreover, listening, like any other speech act, is preceded by awareness and acceptance of the need for it. Listening skills training is based on the systematic use of listening elements in classroom and online work with the sequential complication of tasks (Goh, 1997).

The researchers support the point of view of Hayrapetyan (2016) that teaching students listening skills should begin not even with listening to the messages themselves, but with preliminary work with active vocabulary and grammar, especially when students have quite low language proficiency. This process not only facilitates further perception of the oral text but also motivates students to work more, tunes them into the topic, and activates background knowledge. However, listening poses challenges for the teacher, such as:

1. challenges that are caused by the peculiarities of the act of listening and the student's linguistic competence.
2. challenges that originate in the phonetic features and pronunciation of the speaker.
3. misunderstanding of sociolinguistic and sociocultural components of communication (Berezneva, 2022).

In addition, there is an inability to concentrate on this type of work. Students need to listen to information and concentrate on the task as much as possible so that the oral message has the planned pragmatic impact (Srejon, 2024).

As for the first challenge, Hasan (2020) notes that instead of gradually introducing the listening element and considering the level of foreign language competence, teachers tend to give complex and long constructions for listening with complex instructions for completing the task after it. Challenges associated with phonetic features and pronunciation highlight the individual characteristics of the speaker who reads the text, as well as the ability to perceive the information by the student himself/herself. As Lypchanko-Kovachyk and Tupytsia (2022) point out, if the features of pronunciation and intonation are an objective obstacle that can be overcome through the formation of a graphic image of the word, different from the sound in the listener's mind, then the features of perception are a subjective factor, the solution of which depends on the specific problem with a particular student.

Based on the sociocultural components of communication, the solution to the challenges is suggested by Demkin (2023) and includes a number of preparatory measures, namely, the correctly chosen tempo of the audio message, the volume and duration of sounding, taking into account linguistic features and socio-cultural orientation, the authenticity of selected audio texts, their modernity and relevance to the age and level of English of the audience, and consideration and explanation of intercultural communication features.

Taking into consideration the challenges that may arise when teaching listening, the researchers of the current study tried to develop an approach that could simplify the acquisition of listening skills in students with low levels of English proficiency.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Hypothesis

The researchers assumed that if they divided the listening activities of the students with lower language competency into three stages, the learning outcome would be more effective. To achieve this goal, they introduced such stages as listening to a foreign text without further response, listening and giving a short answer, and listening and giving a long answer.

B. Participants

The study included 39 first-year economics students at H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University (Ukraine) during the 2023-2024 academic year. All the students participated in this study as volunteers. The detailed information on the students is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
INFORMATION ON THE STUDENTS WHO TOOK PART IN THE RESEARCH

| Variables | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 19 | 48.7 |
| Female | 20 | 51.3 |
| Age | | |
| 18 | 2 | 5.1 |
| 19 | 12 | 30.8 |
| 20+ | 25 | 64.1 |
| English as an Optional Part of Ukrainian National Multi-Subject Test | | |
| Passed | 26 | 66.7 |
| Chose Another Subject | 13 | 33.3 |

It should be noted that English is an optional part of the Ukrainian National Multi-Subject test, and that is why not all the students passed it to enter university. Those students who passed English as an optional part of the test had band scores between 149-162 out of 200 maximum possible, which corresponds to A2-B1 CEFR level. However, this test does not include listening tasks.

C. Instruments

Theoretical methods, such as generalizing and analyzing scientific literature on the issue under consideration, and empirical methods, such as pedagogic observations, questionnaires, conversations, and the analysis of the results of the tests to explore the development of listening skills, were used.

D. Data Collection Procedure

After explaining the purpose, procedures, and significance of the study and obtaining consent from the students who took part in the experiment and interviews, the experiment itself was conducted. Following an admission monitoring control, the students were separated into two groups based on their English proficiency. Then, the intermediate listening test control allowed researchers to monitor the students' progress in the experimental group.

E. Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Dean's Office of the School of Social and Behavioral Studies. Students' participation was entirely voluntary, with informed consent obtained after they were thoroughly briefed on the study's objectives and procedures. Their involvement had no impact on their course grades, and they were clearly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point or to skip any question they preferred not to answer.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

At the beginning of the academic school year, entrance monitoring control was conducted consisting of three sections:

1. a vocabulary and grammar multiple-choice test with three gaps and four answer options.
2. listening with multiple-choice tasks and establishing the correctness/incorrectness of statements regarding the text heard.
3. interview on everyday topics.

The test results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
MONITORING TESTING RESULTS

| Types Of Activities | Maximum Score | Result (Average) |
|---|---------------|------------------|
| Vocabulary and grammar test | 50 | 32 |
| Listening | | |
| • 10 multiple choice questions for 10 short statements or dialogues | 10 | 4 |
| • 10 True/False statements to a text of ~3000 printed characters | 10 | 6 |
| Interview on an everyday topic | 30 | 13 |

It should be noted that the most successful type of activity was the vocabulary and grammar test, which indicates students were specially prepared for this type of knowledge test, whereas listening and speaking were more difficult for the students; thus, they have lower results. Based on the results of the entrance test, the group of students was divided into two subgroups: students whose knowledge of English corresponded to the A2 CEFR level (23 students) and students whose knowledge of English corresponded to the B1 CEFR level (16 students).

For the B1 group, a pre-intermediate level textbook was selected, and classes were conducted according to the work program developed based on the teacher's book. For the A2 group, a textbook of the same level was used; however, listening tasks were modified.

During the academic year, listening training for the experimental A2 group was divided into three stages:

1. Listening to a foreign text without further response.
2. Listening and giving a short answer.
3. listening and giving a long answer.

A. *Listening to a Foreign Text Without Further Response*

This was the starting point for listening activities. This stage takes only 10% of the total time allocated to studying a foreign language per year. The purpose of this stage is to form sociolinguistic competence, namely, to create a mental connection between a graphic sign and the pronunciation of a word, as well as to master the intonational features of an English text in accordance with the structure of a sentence.

During this stage of learning, students listen to texts read by a teacher or to recordings with authentic speech, follow the text that is in front of their eyes, and repeat it, imitating intonation and pronunciation. The stage does not provide for control testing. The purpose of this listening is:

1. to establish the recognizability of lexical material, namely, the relationship between a graphic sign and its articulation.
2. familiarizing students with the intonational features of a foreign language.
3. familiarizing students with different ways of articulation depending on the timbre, speed of pronunciation, and dialect features.

These kinds of activities correlate with scientific research for the development of listening competence, helping students remember the spelling and pronunciation of new words, and can be considered as the primary form of listening that allows for the gradual introduction of more complex listening elements.

B. *Listening and Giving a Short Answer*

This takes up the largest part (60%) of the learning time allocated to mastering listening. This part is important since a short answer is the most common form of response in everyday communication; in addition, it allows for finding out whether the student understands both the general information provided in an oral message and the detailed information. The activities of the second stage of the experiment were targeted at:

1. combining listening tasks with training of current lexical and grammatical material.
2. combining audio-text with graphic support in the form of photos/pictures/maps, which included a linguistic and regional component in the teaching of a foreign language for specific purposes.
3. developing the ability to determine the general purpose of an oral message.
4. highlighting key information from an oral message.

At the beginning of this stage, listening is still accompanied by a printed text (it allows for accomplishing preliminary work with active grammar and vocabulary) but with some omitted elements. Thus, the researchers suggest our students complete the exercise on filling in the gaps. For example:

1. You are on a student _____ program in England. At the end of the _____ year, your classmates would like to buy a thank-you present for your teacher. Your partner wants to buy a bottle of wine, but you do not think this is a good idea. You decide to persuade your partner to present some _____ literature (exchange, academic, scientific).
2. Many companies, especially in the US, now offer games and sports facilities to attract _____ people to work for them. They want a _____ workforce because the young learn _____ and can accept change

..... In the past people took all the decisions, but now young workers often have a lot of responsibilities (young, younger, faster, more easily, older).

The examples demonstrate the possibility of combining listening skills training with the lexical process material (Example 1 – vocabulary related to academic discourse) or grammatical (Example 2 – morphological features of the English adjective and the construction of degrees of comparison).

Next, the textual support is not completely removed, but the volume of printed text in relation to the oral message is significantly reduced. One of the proposed activities is to establish the order of the given statements/sentences. In this case, the students learn to scan reading since they have a small amount of time to familiarize themselves with the task before completing the exercise. When preparing this type of task, the teacher must make sure that the selected statements/sentences cannot be put in the correct order without first listening to the text (Movva et al., 2022).

The next step involves removing the reference text and performing exercises, which are widely used types of testing listening skills. Among the proposed tasks, the researchers will define:

1. Listening to a short message or dialogue and determining the correct answer.

Script: Good morning. I'd like to make a complaint. I bought these shoes here a week ago, and the heels came off. I'd like to return them.

What is the speaker's intention?

- a. To buy a pair of shoes
 - b. To walk on a hill
 - c. To take the shoes back to the shop
 - d. To talk to the shop assistant
2. Listening to several messages and establishing correspondences between the speaker and his/her main intention.

Speaker A: I do, but not as often as I'd like to. It's a pity that supermarkets don't have a better range of Fairtrade products in stock. All they have ...

Speaker B: Fairtrade... to be honest, I've never heard of it.

- You have, Rooney. It's those things Oxfam sells, from Africa...

- Oh, this one... No, we don't buy it.

Speaker C: No, I don't; they are too expensive. Anyway, I don't believe in it. If those farmers can't get a good price for their products ...

Match the speakers to the following:

1. The speaker is negative about the products in question. (Speaker C)
2. The speaker is unaware of the products in question. (Speaker B)
3. The speaker regrets the lack of the products in question. (Speaker A)

Further use can be modified by complicating it, for instance, by adding a distractor (an option that will not be used). As the types of tasks become more complicated, the length of the oral message also increases. Starting from this point, the researchers have introduced complex exercises into the training that contained several options for activity; for example, up to five multiple-choice questions, up to ten questions to determine the truth or falsity of information, and matching concepts with a graphic image were some of the questions introduced. Here is an example of the last exercise:

Script: Oh, hi! Are you a new guy here? George? Great! I'm Veronica. I'll show you around here everything. As you enter the office, you'll have a cloakroom on your left, well, you know, to leave your coat or jackets. Don't worry. It's really warm here! After that, you go left, and in there, just in front of you, you'll see our desks. We don't practice hot-desking here, so everyone has their own workplace. Yours is in the middle, just next to Andy. Well, I don't envy her. She is such a chatterbox! Anyway, I sit behind you in a row. Your place is important—you'll tell when the boss comes so that he can see us working... You asked where the boss sits. He has a separate office. It'll be on your right as you go to your desk. Oh, I have to warn you. That place between you and the boss, just next to his place, which is supposed to be a lounge zone... well... we don't talk there; he can hear everything. But we can chat in the copy room; it's just in front of the entrance....



Figure 1. Example of an Exercise on Matching Concepts With a Graphic Image

The example shows an exercise that tests detailed understanding of the text, the ability to concentrate on a long statement, and the ability to correlate a graphic image with an oral text.

The second stage of the experiment involved intermediate control, in which the listening part consisted of three types of activities:

1. listening to five short messages and comparing them with a statement summarizing the speaker's position.
2. listening to the message and filling in seven gaps with 1-2 words.
3. listening to the text and choosing seven correct statements from the ten proposed.

Developing the test, the researchers tried to consider the findings described by Demkin (2023).

The results of the intermediate control on listening are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF THE INTERMEDIATE LISTENING TEST

| Types of Activities | Level A2 Students' Maximum Score (23 students) | Level B1 Students' Maximum Score (16 students) |
|--|---|---|
| Listening to five short messages and matching them with a statement that summarizes the speaker's opinion (max. 5) | 5 91.3 % (21 students) | 5 100% (16 students) |
| | 4 8.7 % (2 students) | |
| Listening to the message and filling in the seven gaps with 1-2 words (max. 7) | 7 4.3 % (1 student) | 6 56.25% (9 students) |
| | 6 30.4% (7 students) | 5 31.25 (5 students) |
| | 5 34.8 % (8 students) | 4 12.5 % (2 students) |
| | 4 21.7 % (5 students) | |
| | 3 8.7 % (2 students) | |
| Choosing seven correct statements mentioned in the message from ten given. (max. 7) | 5 30.4 % (7 students) | 7 6.25 % (1 student) |
| | 4 52.17 % (12 students) | 6 81.25 % (13 students) |
| | 3 17.4% (4 students) | 5 12.5 % (2 students) |
| | | |

The intermediate monitoring control showed significant progress in the application of listening skills by students of the group with a lower level of foreign language competence, whereas the level of the students who completed listening activities only from their students' books hasn't significantly changed. The most difficult task for students was the task of filling in the gaps, which indicates insufficient mastery of the spelling component of thematic vocabulary and the inability of a small number of students (8.7%) to listen and take notes at the same time. The variation in answers in the third task is explained by inattention, inaccuracy in understanding the statement, and inability to paraphrase foreign language statements while preserving the original meaning.

C. Listening and Giving a Long Answer

This is an integral component of teaching listening skills since it is this type of activity that stimulates independent speech and motivates students to discuss and search for additional material. Starting from simple questions to the content component of the message, the teacher gradually moves on to the analysis of the conceptual component of the oral text. This type of listening is based on the use of large-scale oral messages (7-10-minute tracks). Among the tasks that are relevant for teaching foreign languages for specific purposes, the researchers suggest some extracts from business programs, interviews with famous people, parts of lectures of English-speaking professors, etc. A feature of this stage of listening training is its combination with teaching oral or written speech. In accordance with the task, a

work program is formed, which indicates which type of activity (oral or written) will check the understanding of what was heard. During our experiment, the emphasis was placed on oral speech. The final control of this stage involved listening to the text and forming one's own oral expression. The assessment considered the proximity to the topic of the oral message that was listened to, understanding of active lexical material, the correct structural construction of the student's expression, and the accuracy of the selected grammar constructions. Thus, checking the assimilation of the material and understanding of the audio text also allows avoiding the use of artificial intelligence during control.

Even though the researchers introduced preliminary work with the vocabulary and defined key words for the A2 group, the students still had some problems with completing this task. A comparison with the group that followed the standard program showed that students in the B1 group demonstrated better results in speaking, namely, the fruitful use of connective constructions that form the structure of the expression, greater awareness of the contextual component of the question that was put up for discussion, which is due to the orientation of the selected textbook and its program. Students of the A2 group were unable to master their listening skills to give a complete, detailed answer in the allotted time, which proved that giving such difficult activities was not effective.

Among the advantages of the third stage are the inability to guess the answer; educating children to focus on a long message and draw their own conclusions; mastering the correct structural composition of the text; and the capacity to mix its pieces organically.

However, listening and giving a long answer as an educational activity has the following disadvantages, including a long-term evaluation of the group's skills; when listening to one text at the same time, some students have more time to prepare, whereas with sequential listening, it is necessary to prepare a separate message for each student, which is time-consuming; and if you use one text, there is a possibility of recording the text with its subsequent transfer to other members of the group, which contradicts the principles of academic integrity.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The experiment showed that, with a consistent approach to using various types of listening, progress is observed in the performance of the written type of control. This approach allows forming necessary skills even with a small number of practical hours per week (4 hours – 2 classes). The second stage is the most important in acquiring foreign language listening competence, which involves not only the linguistic aspect but also the country, social and psychological studies, since the use of photo material contributes to interest and the ability to determine the main intention of the speaker. Training during the third stage brings students to a higher level of language competence, but it is successfully provided if the student has internal motivation to build an expression on the proposed topic independently. The control at the third stage is too long and is not prescribed in the planning regulations, which makes it impossible to include it as a separate activity for the final control (test/exam).

Thus, the researchers wouldn't recommend introducing long listening activities that require oral answers from the students with low language competence, as they are still too difficult for the students. Instead, the researchers would advise practicing the format of the listening activities of the second stage but adding an oral response to tracks or videos. This approach would eliminate the usage of artificial intelligence and develop oral skills without stress.

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