

TEACHING LISTENING AS AN ACTIVE SKILL: APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract Early perspectives in language teaching treated listening as a passive skill that would develop naturally alongside speaking and reading. However, research and pedagogical developments over the twentieth century have demonstrated that listening is an active skill that can and should be explicitly taught. This paper highlights the role of comprehensible input, the importance of converting exposure into intake, and the application of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to enhance listening comprehension. The study underscores that teaching listening is essential for developing autonomy, improving comprehension, and supporting second language acquisition in both classroom and self-directed learning contexts.

Key words: listening comprehension, approach, communicative language teaching

Introduction:

Early perspectives on teaching listening considered it a passive skill that would naturally improve alongside speaking and reading. While there is some truth in this, as all language skills share foundational competencies, listening is now increasingly recognized as an active skill that can be directly taught. In the latter part of the twentieth century, teaching methodologies that emphasized listening more emerged[10]. These included the Audio-Lingual Method, which focuses on model presentation; Communicative Language Teaching, centred on authentic conversation; and the Natural Approach, promoting immersion in comprehensible input and minimizing speaking.

Table 1.2. Role of Listening in Teaching Approaches due to John Flowerdew

Approach	Role of Listening
Audio-Lingual Approach	Emphasizes listening for pronunciation and grammatical patterns, followed by imitation and memorization through drills.
Discrete-Item Approach	It focuses on phonetics, distinguishing sounds, stress, and intonation; listening is a structured activity for sound discrimination.
Communicative Approach	Integrates listening into real-life communication; students listen to authentic spoken discourse and respond in interactive tasks.

Approach	Role of Listening
Task-Based Approach	Develops listening skills through functional tasks, such as following instructions or gathering information to complete a task.
Learner-Strategy Approach	Encourages students to develop awareness of their listening skills and strategies; emphasises independent learning.
Integrated Approach	This method combines multiple approaches to teaching listening, including communicative and task-based approaches, to develop listening alongside other language skills.

This table provides an overview of how each approach incorporates listening in language learning. Obviously, language teaching methods initially did not recognise the need to teach, but subsequent approaches used various techniques to develop specific or general listening skills [5].

Moreover, other approaches, namely the Natural Approach and Total Physical Response, also centred the role of listening in the classroom. Total Physical Response, developed by James Asher, is a language teaching method that focuses on coordinating speech and physical movement. Rooted in early theories of memory and language acquisition, it emphasises listening comprehension before speaking, mimicking how children learn their first language. In Total Physical Response classrooms, learners respond physically to commands, which helps reduce anxiety and supports right-brain learning. In Total Physical Response, comprehension was prioritised as learners were given large amounts of language to listen to before they were encouraged to respond orally. Similarly, the Natural Approach recommended a significant “silent period” during which learners were allowed the security of listening without being forced to go through the anxiety of speaking before they were “ready” to do so [2].

Such approaches were an outgrowth of various research studies showing evidence of input's importance in second language acquisition. For example, Stephen Krashen, borrowing insights from first language acquisition, stressed the significance of comprehensible input, or the aural reception of language just a little beyond the learner's present ability [7]. At the same time, researchers stressed the crucial importance of the mental processes involved in converting the learner's input into intake, or what is stored in a learner's competence. In other words, you can be “exposed” to significant quantities of input, but what counts is the linguistic information you ultimately glean from that exposure through conscious and subconscious attention, cognitive retention strategies, feedback, and interaction. To conclude, converting input into intake is crucial in considering the role of listening in language learning.

Listening comprehension can be developed efficiently with the help of listening strategies. According to Jack C. Richards, “Strategies are how a learner approaches and

manages a task, and listeners can be taught effective ways of approaching and managing their listening” [6]. Anna Chamot defines strategies as

“Procedures that facilitate a learning task. Strategies are more often conscious and goal-driven” [4].

G. Buck identifies two types of listening strategies: cognitive and metacognitive strategies [3].

Cognitive Strategies- These involve mental activities used to comprehend, store, and retrieve information:	Metacognitive Strategies- These regulate cognitive strategies through conscious or unconscious management:
❑ Comprehension processes: Processing linguistic and non-linguistic input. ❑ Storing and memory processes: Retaining input in working or long-term memory. ❑ Using and retrieval processes: Accessing stored information for output.	❑ Assessing the situation: Evaluating knowledge, resources, and constraints before starting a task. ❑ Monitoring: Checking the effectiveness of performance during a task. ❑ Self-evaluating: Reviewing the success of performance post-task. ❑ Self-testing: Testing understanding and language use.

Fig. 1. Listening strategies by G. Buck

Cognitive strategies directly support understanding what is heard, while metacognitive strategies assist learners in improving their ability to focus, remember, and make sense of spoken language. Moreover, learners become more aware of how they listen and manage their learning. Metacognition is vital when teaching English as a foreign language[8]. It refers to the awareness and regulation of one’s cognitive processes. In listening comprehension, metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one’s understanding before, during, and after listening. These strategies are essential because they help learners become self-regulated listeners—able to recognise comprehension problems, adjust their listening approach, and reflect on their performance.

Conclusion

Listening in language learning has evolved from a passive activity to a skill that requires strategic instruction and active learner engagement. Modern teaching approaches recognise the central role of listening in language acquisition, emphasising comprehension, interaction, and the development of strategies that enable learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening performance. Effective listening instruction integrates both theoretical insights from research on comprehensible input and practical strategies that empower learners to become independent, proficient listeners.

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