

YOUTUBE: A TEACHING TOOL TO IMPROVE LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract : Listening skill is pivotal for successful communication which in turn promotes educational progress and career development. YouTube has risen to popularity among the masses within a short period of time. This article illustrates how YouTube can be used to teach listening skills to language learners. Infusing videos from YouTube in a language class makes it interesting and interactive, thus catering to the needs of the contemporary learners. YouTube videos provide audio-visual inputs to the learners. Listening and watching these videos exposes learners to various accents, speech rate, wide range of vocabulary, expressions and phrases. This exposure helps improve learners listening abilities. The students not only develop listening skills but also gain knowledge about topics which are trending on social media. While there is a massive amount of content on YouTube that can be implemented to teach listening skills, this paper focuses on how YouTube channels- BBC News Reviews and TED Talks can be utilized to teach Listening skills.

IndexTerms - Listening Skills, Learning Strategies, YouTube Materials

I. New Era of teaching English

There is no denial that social media has become part and parcel of our lives. Most students these days are digital natives. With the advancement in technology and the widespread availability of internet, accessing social media is no longer a challenge. Easy access to social media has facilitated language teachers to integrate traditional teaching with e-learning thus creating stimulating lessons. One of the best forms of social media to teach English in a language classroom is YouTube.

YouTube is an online video repository where digital video files are stored and exhibited without a charge. According to the latest statistics on the usage of YouTube in India, it has more than 60 million users who spend around 48 hours every month viewing videos and more than 70 % of the YouTube viewers are aged below 35. "At present the website with the largest market share is www.YouTube.com" (Duffy, 2008) According to Brunner (2013) YouTube is a top rated video website mainly among students. Its wide array of content from all over the world makes it a tremendous resource for the teachers to teach one of the most important yet often ignored skills in language learning - Listening.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Teaching listening

Listening skills help students develop their communication and critical thinking. These skills are essential in numerous avenues of daily life. Interactions take place at classrooms and at work place. Successful interaction depends on effective interactive skills (Thompson et al., 2004). Interactive listening skills play a major role in the student's interpersonal skills which in turn leads to healthy conversations. Listening skills are considered to be of utmost importance for employment. Swain et al., affirmed that "an estimated 80 percent of what we know is acquired through listening."(2004)This demonstrates the significance of interactive listening skills. According to Byrnes (1984) listening has sub skills too. They are, "the ability to follow the general trend of what is said, the ability to check a specific piece of pre-knowledge against what is said, the ability to understand the speaker's intention and attitude". Researchers have defined listening in various ways. Morley pointed out that listening comprises of six factors (2001). They include auditory discrimination, grammar, choosing the necessary information, remembering it, and making connections in the process between sound and form of meaning. Goss defined listening as a process of understanding and organizing what is heard into lexical

elements to which meaning can be assigned (1982). Listening is the process of receiving, making meaning, and responding to verbal or non verbal messages.

2.2 Authentic video materials and YouTube

In order to optimize student listening skills, a comprehensible input is also crucial. Listening activities can be modeled and implemented with the help of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). There is a dramatic increase in the use of computers in language teaching. While there is a lot of software that can be used to teach listening skills, the authentic material available on YouTube makes it a unique tool for developing students' listening skills. It promotes autonomous and student centered learning style. Studies have shown (Jon & Michael, 2011) that incorporating technology into a language classroom generates student autonomy and develops language learning skills. In addition, there is no time constraint on the learning process. Learners can learn anytime and at any place with a basic requirement of an internet connection. (Educause, 2006)

Quite a few studies have been done on the impact of online videos on learning a language. Visualization has been found to be an effective strategy that facilitates learning. One of the prominent studies was done by Berk (2009). Though his research focuses on education in general, his work sheds light on how using videos in the classroom could be engaging and enlightening to the students. According to Brook (2011) YouTube enhances students' confidence and encourages student participation. Sherman (2003) opines that the use of videos is in trend these days and people prefer audio-visual materials rather than printed material. Videos stimulate students' interest as it holds the attention of both audio and visual senses at the same time. Including YouTube videos in the classroom help students comprehend the lessons better. (Khalid & Muhammad 2012) It is also a source of motivation when they come across real situations online. Dwyers (1994) investigation points out that student achievement develops when visual cues are integrated with precise instructions.

YouTube is no longer a source of entertainment alone. It has been globally implemented as a basis for learning. University of California streams their lectures and events on YouTube making the University one of its kind. This practice has slowly been adopted by other educational hubs too.

III. Advantages of using YouTube

Using YouTube videos involves the students in the learning process. There are many advantages of using YouTube to teach English.

- One of the biggest benefits for beginners is the YouTube video-texts. The students can follow through as they watch the videos. This improves their listening comprehension. (Chang and Chang, 2014)
- YouTube is very instrumental in teaching English it is not space bound. It can be used both inside and outside of a classroom.
- It gives students exposure to authentic materials like native speakers' conversations in real life situations. For ex. Interviews and documentaries.
- Students not only learn the language but also learn more about the culture, habits and lifestyle of people around the world. For ex. Vloggers Channels. This enables the students to learn on their own accord.
- Students can watch the videos and determine which pronunciation and conversation skills need to be acquired and work on them.
- Audios backed with videos motivate the students to pay attention and listen. (Subramaniam et al., 2013)
- It is a great conversation starter. Students can question what they have viewed and express their views and opinions. This gives them an opportunity to have meaningful peer discussions.

- Further activities can be conducted after viewing the videos. Students can be divided to groups and asked to express their opinions on the video. The students can be given writing tasks based on the content or the language derived from the video.
- YouTube is not only a channel for viewing but also a channel which allows the public to upload their videos. This feature allows the student to make their own videos and upload thereby integrating language and creative skills.
- YouTube also being a search engine enables the students to find numerous videos on the same topic giving them multiple dimensions of the main theme. It connects them to external experts around the world.
- Another interactive feature of YouTube is the comment section below every video. The students can watch the videos and leave their comments which are read by other viewers around the world. This lays a platform for further discussions on the same topic and also gives an opportunity for the students to express their opinions.
- The teacher can also upload a video on YouTube for the student. This gives an opportunity for the teacher to keep the students engaged even beyond the classroom. The teacher can upload videos relevant to the students' requirement for learning
- YouTube Videos are free of charge making it easily accessible for students. (Alwehaibi, 2013) In addition, a recent feature of YouTube is the ability to download videos and then watch them later offline. This feature allows the students to download the videos and listen to it multiple times whenever required without connecting to the internet.

IV. Techniques of using YouTube to teach Listening Skills.

YouTube can be a very useful source to teach listening skills when the teachers integrate the videos into educational practices. This integration has had an impact on the learning paradigms. The teacher can make a class stimulating, interesting and meaningful to the students by implementing a tailor-made lesson which includes YouTube videos according to the level of the students and their areas of interest. A well planned lesson can make learning listening skills effective and efficient. The need of the hour is to equip students with good communicative skills which prepare them to face interviews and to develop employability skills. Students would not be able to respond appropriately if they are unable to comprehend what they have listened to. This can hinder ones communication. It might further hamper their career opportunities. Therefore teaching listening skills is equally essential as teaching other skills.

For a listening class to be productive, it is very essential to plan the classes meticulously. The class would bring about positive results in the students listening skills if the teacher can exploit the material to the best extent possible.

According to studies, students are willing to use online learning tools as long as they are familiar with them. (Fleck et al., 2013) Asking students their experiences, likes and dislikes regarding YouTube will give the teacher a fair idea on how familiar the students are with using YouTube. Most students use YouTube for entertainment. Therefore the teacher should clarify with the students the purpose of using YouTube in the class. (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

There are numerous channels dealing with various topics on YouTube. Two of the most popular channels which can be utilized to teach listening skills are BBC News Reviews and TED Talks.

4.1 BBC News Review

BBC News Review is a part of BBC Learning English Channel on YouTube. This channel uploads a video everyday on YouTube. It aims at helping students learn English. There are various features which focus on pronunciation, vocabulary and examination skills. News Review in particular is useful to teach listening skills

as well as vocabulary. The videos are usually 5 to 8 minutes long. It consists of two British presenters who discuss how a news item has been covered by the newspaper or by the news channels. They highlight the language used to discuss the particular news item. These videos benefit the students in three ways making it an ideal tool to teach listening in the class. Firstly, these videos are interesting to watch and listen to. Students are not often self-motivated to watch or read news. However, these videos are accompanied by images and they discuss current affairs, recent trends, and unusual occurrences. Normal news channels use formal language to convey the news whereas the language used in BBC News review is informal and simple ensuring that the learners are able to follow it. Secondly, though listening comprehension would be the main objective of this lesson, students can also develop vocabulary. It familiarizes students with new words, phrases, expressions and idioms. In addition to improving their listening skills and vocabulary the students also gain knowledge about what is happening around the world. This can enable them to have meaningful conversations with people around them. Finally, the students can watch these videos and notice the difference between a native speaker's and a non-native speaker's accent. Post listening, students can work on their pronunciation, stress and intonation while speaking.

4.2 TED Talks

TED Talks as their website suggests is a global community that spreads ideas through short powerful talks. It initially covered topics to do with Technology Entertainment and Design. Today the topics range "from science to business to global issues." The videos of all the short speeches are available on the TED Talks YouTube channel. Unlike BBC news reviews where the speakers are usually British, speeches on TED Talks are given by both eminent as well as common people from India and other parts of the world. The speeches on TED Talks are usually between 5 to 18 minutes long. They are highly motivating, inspiring and thought provoking. These videos bring the students in contact with external experts on a particular topic. Using TED Talks provides teachers with unlimited opportunities to improve students' listening skills. The students are exposed to various speech styles which help them learn how to use stress, intonation and modulation while speaking. As the speeches cover a wide range of topics it makes this channel an ideal one for teaching students from different backgrounds.

4.3 Steps to follow while conducting a listening task using TED Talks and BBC News Review:

- Teacher Preparation

Thorough preparation is the key for a productive listening class. The teacher should select a video which is suitable to the students' level and keeping in mind the duration of the class. It is highly important to watch the entire video prior to the class to check for any inappropriate language. The students would focus while listening and watching the video if it is followed up by a task. A worksheet comprising of comprehension questions based on the video should be prepared prior to the class.

- Pre-listening activity

Based on the topic of the speech the teacher can brainstorm ideas on the same to see what knowledge the students might already have about the topic. This will give the students an opportunity to predict what they are going to listen to.

- While-listening

The work sheet can have two sections of questions, the first section comprising of questions to listen for the gist and the second section can consist of questions which require answers in detail. Questions can vary from multiple choices to fill in the blanks.

- Post-Listening

The discussion of the answers to the questions helps the teacher find out students improvement in listening skills. After the discussion the teacher can review the vocabulary learnt in the video. BBC News Reviews specifically focuses on new words that are trending, phrases and idioms that are

commonly used. After the discussion the students can be asked to write a piece of news using the words they came across in the video. TED Talks videos can open up to group discussions or debates. The students can be asked if they agree or disagree with what they listened to. They can also express their views and opinions on the topic or add on to the existing ideas in the speech.

V. Conclusion

Teaching methods have evolved with the evolution of languages. In order to keep up with the present fast pace of life and the students low span of attention, teachers should adopt innovative methods of teaching in a language classroom. Teachers should integrate technology with teaching. Using YouTube to teach listening makes the class interesting. It engages the students through its audio-visual feature and authentic materials varying from a wide range of topics. By enhancing students' listening skills their vocabulary and pronunciation will also develop, resulting in good communicative skills. At the same time teachers should exercise caution while conducting listening tasks using YouTube. The class would only be effective if the lessons are well planned. It is very important to structure the class and proper guidance should be given so that the students don't spend too much time perusing irrelevant videos.

In conclusion, YouTube is an effective and valid source to teach listening skills thereby enhancing students English speaking skills which is the need of the hour in all phases of one's career.

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