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Blended learning and listening lesson sequences for teaching listening in mixed-ability classes

Nowadays the teaching of listening involves a change in pattern, the application of new approaches and the use of a variety of audio and video materials.

Considering the requirements to graduates' proficiency in ESP, modern trends in education aimed at students' autonomy, interdisciplinary integration into education technologies, the limited amount of time allocated for classroom training and taking account of the fact that classes can consist of students with mixed language abilities, we believe that the implementation of novel listening sequences with the elements of blended learning – the use of both classroom listening teaching and online learning through the extensive and intensive listening to online professionally oriented materials – can help teachers optimize the learning process. Continuous listening to online authentic materials defines successful learning and teaching outcomes.

The current approaches to teaching listening involve 1) the implementation of blended learning, i.e. studying in the class and self-studying out of the class and 2) the development and application of totally new listening lesson sequences.

Under *a listening sequence* here we mean a set of tasks to one audio or video material arranged in a definite successive order with the aim to help students with different language abilities to get both global and detail audio text understanding, and improve their language skills and knowledge. After performing such a sequence students should get deep and full understanding of the audiotext.

Every listening sequence should include tasks for extensive (outside the classroom) and intensive listening (in the classroom) on a topic. Mixing intensive and extensive listening gives students more autonomy and provides opportunities for self-study. ESP and EAP listening sequences developers have to choose and evaluate audiotexts in order to decide what materials, in which order and what tasks to them

are suitable for performing in class (intensive listening) and which part of listening sequence is desirable to leave for homework. Due to extensive listening students who have lower language proficiency can listen to or watch listening materials at home as many times as they need, doing additional exercises in order to improve their listening [1, p. 303; 2, pp. 18-24] skills.

Moreover, we can also optimize the process of teaching listening through blending in listening sequences two types of text processing (top-down and bottom-up). In top-down processing the accent is on getting a general idea of the audiotext. In bottom-up processing students' attention can be focused on more detailed elements of the audiotext such as individual words, phrases or linking devices. The understanding in bottom-up processing is achieved by blending separate elements into a whole piece of information. In the process of listening sequences development it is reasonable to use both types of information processing. As Jeremy Harmer points out [1, p.270] there is an interaction between two types of text processing. Without a full understanding of a wide range of details through bottom-up processing, it would be difficult to come to clear general audiotext understanding. And vice versa without global topic understanding, it would be impossible for students to comprehend the text even if they understand its details. We can start with listening tasks for some general text understanding and then proceed to the tasks which will help students perceive the text with considerably more details, e.g. they can be asked to listen for some specific information or language points.

Developing listening sequences we should distinguish three stages of audiotexts processing: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening [2, pp. 18-24]. Different listening stages demand different listening tasks. And listening tasks are predetermined by students' language level and abilities.

Before-listening stage prepares students for practice in listening comprehension. The purpose pre-listening tasks is to create motivation and activate students' prior knowledge. The warming-up pre-listening activities can involve making predictions, reviewing key vocabulary and brainstorming ideas.

The while-listening phase is focused on the audiotext comprehension through listening exercises, which depending on the task, can require gist listening or/and selective listening. A wide range of listening exercises include: sequencing main ideas, answering multiple-choice questions, detailed note-taking, summarizing main ideas etc. Their choice depends on the text complexity and students' language level and abilities.

The post-listening stage involves audiotext comprehension assessment or can be used as a basis for speaking or writing competence formation. It can include both classwork and homework activities: giving opinions on the topic, more detailed functional and vocabulary language examining through a series of additional exercises.

Thus, the development and use of effective listening sequences with teachers' and students' guidance is a demanding and time-consuming process which 1) should be based on the novel methodology; 2) greatly depends on the availability of online well-recorded up-to-date professionally oriented video or audio materials, 3) requires teachers' special knowledge and skills for successful online search, processing, developing and application of such materials; 4) requires well-equipped classrooms with good acoustics and the Internet connection.

References:

1. Harmer, J (2007). *The practice of English language teaching*. 4th ed. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.

2. Lynch, T. (2004). *Study Listening: A Course in Listening to Lectures and Note Taking*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.