

RESEARCH IN USE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICT) FOR DEVELOPING LISTENING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCY IN FOREIGN/SECOND LANGUAGES: A REVIEW OF SELECTED TOOLS

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Abstract

In a foreign language classroom, use of ICT gives students a great opportunity to develop listening skill competency as there is a variety of these tools available to be used in and out of the classroom. Using of various ICT tools has found to be motivating learners making them independent in language skills practice because they can practice language out of the classroom also. This paper aim at reviewing some of these tools based on the previous researches.

Keywords: ICT tools for FL Listening, Listening Comprehension, Podcasts, Language development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Acquiring of Listening skill is compulsory for students of a foreign language as they need to develop their comprehension. Using Information and Communication Technologyⁱ in a language classroom helps learners to acquire the sustained forms of listening. There are a wide range of tools available that can be used for this purpose and ultimately developing the required communicative skills. Using of various ICT tools has found to be motivating learners making them independent in language skills practice because they can practice language out of the classroom also.^[1] Therefore, this paper aims at reviewing use of various ICT tools for developing listening comprehension competency in foreign language.

2. USING ICT TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Use of Information and Communication Technologies contributes very effectively to the developing of language skills including listening^[2] such as pronunciation problems for non-native speakers can be reduced through ICT in classroom and their own time.^[3] With the help of supplemental listening activities, additional practice can be carried out such as exercises, tests and comprehension questions for listening, and language learners can chose from a variety of activities that interest them.^{[4][5][6]}

3. VARIOUS ICT TOOLS USED FOR DEVELOPING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Benefits of using ICT for developing listening skill are conditioned with its use. It is necessary that appropriate tools of ICT be used according to the level and background of the class to make use of ICT effective for developing language skills.^[7] Researchers over the past years have found many ICT tools, which have been successfully used for developing listening skill:

3.1 INTERACTIVE WHITE BOARD (IWB)

While teaching listening, teachers focus on active and responsive participation by their language students in the class because through listening activities in language classroom, the students can become active listeners in real life. This is only possible with tools and materials that help students in taking interest in listening activities. Use of voice in the classroom is necessary for this purpose. For this purpose, Interactive White Board is or the SMART board is one of the most commonly used tools because it enables teachers and students in a foreign language classroom to perform a number of activities. The user of IWB can listen to language items in many ways e.g-pressing icons to hear pre-recorded sounds, listen, and watch simulations. IWB can also be used to show video clips to help explain concepts, present a particular student's work to the other class fellows. All this leads to extensive practice of listening by the whole class. Revision possible through use of ICT also gives dynamic dimensions to SMART Board to deliver a particular lesson about listening with touch of a finger. It is helpful in increasing student participation in any of the language skill taught and increases interaction and comprehension. It helps to compensate vision

problems as hearing to activities is also there. It is actually useful for developing an oral skill in a safety environment.^[8]

3.2 MULTIMEDIA

Listening competency is comprised of a many micro-skills, which are used by listeners to make sense of any listening material they encounter. One of these micro-skills is retention of language chunks in short-term memory, which is possible through use of multimedia, which allows listeners to have control over the speed e.g. start, stop, and review the language material so that they can understand and remember the text in a much better way. If the video is added, the listeners are able to remember new information and link it to old one. Multimedia helps the learners to distinguish the sounds of the foreign language. Beginning and ending of words, synchronized display of text together with aural text makes them distinguish phonetic groupings and boundaries. In videos, they are able to see faces of persons who are speaking and this listening becomes easier as they learn about corresponding facial expressions. To understand communicative functions of utterances with reference to context is possible through use of multimedia. Video always proves to be a rich source of context and when learners have control over speed and sequence of a video, the seeing and hearing of text corresponds to each other with reference to the context and thus learners experience and understand connections between utterances and their functions in a particular text. Multimedia helps to understand different speech styles, rates, and performance errors. Some multimedia softwares are also available which provide slowed down version of aural text also. The learners can switch to slower and simplified version of the audio to match their individual processing needs.^[9]

Through multimedia, learners learn to recognize patterns of stress, rhythm, and intonation. Learning about signaling of information and intent also becomes possible. Not only paralinguistic features are highlighted but also through logical breaks occurring in discourse, the learners acquire knowledge of patterns of sounds. The learners understand reduced speech as multimedia is specifically useful to understand reduced forms of target language. If written version of spoken text is available on screen, the learners can access to both the written and spoken texts simultaneously. Through this, the language learners easily understand both the spoken and written forms of the language and are able to decode the reduced forms also. Core vocabulary along with rules and patterns of words that are used to communicate are very well learned through use of multimedia. As the screen shows aural, visual, and textual information at the same time, so the students get help in problem solving where individual words or the sentence structures matter with the help of visual and contextual clues.^[10]

Redundancy in multimedia presentations is common to convey meaning and intention clear so that the viewer is able to understand that meanings in a text can be conveyed in different grammatical forms. In multimedia presentation, redundant phrases and sentences can be highlighted for learners through colorizing text, for example, so that redundant meanings and phrases can be recognized well by them. The learners then can infer meaning and make predictions from what they see and hear on the screen with the help of their personal knowledge, experiences, and strategies.

The ability to infer and predict, recalling background, and prior knowledge can be activated in learners apart from their personal experiences.^[11]

3.3 COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL)

In a language classroom, the computer plays many important roles such as teacher, tester, tool, data source and communication facilitator. As a teacher, computer teachers the students as new language and as a tester it already learned structures by the learners. Computer as a tool it assists them to do certain tasks and as data source it has information the learners need to solve their tasks. Computer in the classroom proves to be a great communication facilitator as it allows and facilitates the learners to communicate with others.^[12]

These are the software programs, which have been designed for teaching language despite the presence of other ICT tools like Internet. Their purpose is to promote learning which is student-centered.^[13] CALL helps students to develop their communicative skills and provide them a wide variety of different aspects of language e.g. grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to practice in any of the four language skills including listening. They can select topics, which interest them, and in this way they can develop a skill they want. Through CALL, the speed and pace of learning of students is also easily managed and they continue to learn at their own responsibility. Studies have been carried out concerning CALL and its effects on learners with respect to developing of language skills and the reports have shown significant effects particularly on reading and listening. The improvement in

speaking abilities through use of CALL is also notable ultimately leading to communicative competence. Outside the classroom, using of chat room and video conferencing has particularly been beneficial for mastering over facial expressions and other visual cues, which make listening and speaking, more authentic.^[14]

CALL turns learners into active listeners instead of being passive while listening. There are many instruments available, which can be used in CALL such as digital stories, Mp3 recordings, or podcasts. Through researches, it has been revealed that learners are fond of listening through digital stories due to their interactivity, visual aids, and repetition. These stories help the learners to acquire listening skill effortlessly which otherwise is very difficult to teach. Learners acquire linguistic structure, sound patterns, and prosody with fun and motivation, which ultimately lead them to be good listeners. Additionally, learners develop familiarization for nonverbal communication that includes gestures and facial expressions apart from pitch and tone of voice. However, this social experience takes place at learners' own pace. So the resources should not exceed linguistic level and technological abilities of learners. Thus helping the learners through technology is crucial because they through use of technology they learn to control their learning. "Planning and consciously executing appropriate actions" are very important to help learners acquire language successfully in technology-based environments. In case of listening, Meta-cognitiveⁱⁱ strategies help learners where they need improvement. Podcasts make listening simple, effective and easily available to maximum population of learners and teachers. They make learners motivated because through podcasts learners can self regulate themselves as each learner's pace is considered. A learner can listen to

podcasts as many times as he wants to and at any time at own convenience which ultimately results in developing of listening skill free of cost and trouble.^{[15][16][17]}

3.4 ONLINE RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILL

Authentic communication through social networking and various internet communication tools like Skype, podcasts, conferences etc. is available online. Audio and video lessons are found in abundance online to support teaching and learning of listening skill. Documentaries, music files, news, broadcasts etc. are there to help learners in gaining knowledge about any of the subject matter and accent of the speaker. Learners can also adjust and choose activities according to their time and interest.^[18]

There are many online listening activities, which are specific to learners of English language. The BBC World Service Learning English, for example, offers News in English and reports with summary, transcript, and notes on important vocabulary termsⁱⁱⁱ. In short reports famous people, pop music, entertainment news, and subject like these are covered. The learners can listen to all this online and download on their devices to practice whenever they want to. Likewise, BBC News website^{iv}, which is predominantly British English, is very useful as it contains recordings about different categories, which learners can choose and listen to. Similar to the BBC, the CNN site^v, which is predominantly American English, also gives learners an opportunity to be benefitted listening to the clips of news items. Apart from individual news items the learners can also listen to the whole programs. "Breaking News English^{vi}" is another site, which contains news articles along with a sound recording and a resource book on

different topics. For learners of English as a second or a foreign language, the reference books contain lessons and worksheets which are ready to use and learners work upon them in their own time. Another site "Monthly News Digest Online"^{vii} contains summaries of news stories, which are created from past 30 days in easy English with audio for learners of English language to listen and practice in their own time for practicing listening. However, this website not only provides opportunity to develop listening comprehension but for reading, writing, and even speaking, material is found. Posted on the first day of each month, these news stories include audio, texts, and exercises.

Randall Davis has created and maintains "Daily ESL"^{viii}, Randall's "ESL Cyber Listening Lab"^{ix}, and "EZSlang"^x for ESL learners based on the notion that often learners select very difficult information for reading which cannot be helpful to them in day to day communication. "Daily ESL" helps learners to become familiar with vocabulary and expressions that are commonly used. In this, the learners first choose a topic and then listen and read simultaneously and later on discuss its relevant questions with a fellow. Later on, they can compare their own thoughts to the recordings. The website "EZSlang" specifically helps learners which range from intermediate to advanced level in improving listening skill in various situations. It gives an understanding of slang for better communication. The site named "ESL Cyber Listening Lab" contains short as well as long listening activities for both beginners and advance level learners. These include pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening tasks and activities. The site also contains transcripts, and culture-specific video clips. The objective of this website is not to test listening skill but to help learners how to

develop listening through practicing various pre, while and post listening activities.^[19]

Website "Ello"^{xi} contains free, well-produced, and clearly-organized content like interviews, videos, games, and much more. This website contains various sections one of which is specifically designed with animated newscasts to help learners in academic English and develop their test taking abilities for TOEFL, TOEIC, and IELTS, etc. This section is called News Centre and it standardized listening components of tests. Other sections, "Mixer", "Views", "Points", and "Songs", also contain helpful material. Another website "Video Jug"^{xii} is considered most comprehensive library of the world that contains free fact-based video contents and thus provides opportunities to practice listening skills. Through this site, the learners become actively engaged in the process of listening.^[20]

3.5 PODCAST

Audio recordings, which can be subscribed to and downloaded also to personal and portable listening devices, are called podcasts. It is similar to radio or TV show, but the listeners can listen watch it according to own interest and suitability of time. A podcast can be created on any topic with inclusion of music or video. However, the podcasts that have videos are also called Vodcasts or PodClips. For listening to authentic material in the classroom as well as for self-study, podcasts are recommended. In tertiary education, lecture recording as podcasts is common today because students who have missed classes can download lectures for listening later on. Learners can make their own podcasts^{xiii}, which is a bit more demanding but ultimately rewarding.^[21] Making of podcasts is simple and learners who are interested to make their own podcasts can refer to "Fifty Ways to

Improve Your Business English Using the Internet." [22] ^{xiv}Podcasts are available on internet in abundance since it is not a difficult task to create podcasts. However there are good and bad podcasts so it needs to be judged carefully to choose the right ones. Searches should preferably start from Podcast directories. "Englishcaster^{xv}" is a podcast directory specifically created for English teachers and learners. There are a number of websites, which contain podcasts on vocabulary, grammar, idioms and slang while topics of business English, news, current affairs, and even jokes, songs and poetry etc. BBC^{xvi} is considered one of the earliest podcasts creators. It initially provided a limited number of podcasts in form of audio programs but when they expanded their list, they included everything be it a drama or news and sports. ESL Listening: Podcasts^{xvii}, which is a sub-page of the website "The Internet TESL Journal", contains podcasts of various categories that are good for practicing intonation, rhythm and intonation. It also contains jokes and songs podcasts and many other like these. Another site "Learn Songs^{xviii}" features various types of songs sung by native speakers of English. These songs include folk, campfire and group-singing songs. These podcasts, which are short in length, can be listened as many times as desired. In this way, the learners can listen and sing as many times as they want to. "English Feed^{xix}" which is a weekly podcast, includes reviews and grammar and vocabulary exercises specific to listening comprehension. For learning English at elementary level, it is a strongly recommended podcast because it gives learners an opportunity to study basic structures of language. Various topics covered in this podcast include listening comprehension quizzes. [23]

The website "ELT Podcast^{xx}" offers basic conversations for those learners who are learning English as foreign or second language because it presents common conversation in each episode normal, then slower and then less natural speed to help with listening comprehension along with transcript. In Elementary Podcasts on British Council website^{xxi}, listening activities on topics like family, pets, clothes, travel etc. are available and the learners can do these activities on their computers while listening to podcasts. Learners can also print them for later practicing. In Professional Podcasts on British council website^{xxii} provide a series that helps English learners to improve English for career and workplace. These podcasts are thematically formulated on various business and workplace topics and are principally useful for learners of intermediate to advanced level. "Business English Pod^{xxiii}" provides weekly MP3 podcast free of cost for intermediate and advanced level learners of business English. Each lesson on this site is focused on particular workplace skills^{xxiv} and language functions^{xxv} can also be learnt through these podcasts. The website also provides "Video Vocab^{xxvi}" that is a video podcast useful for those learners who need to improve their business vocabulary and expand it studying different business topics^{xxvii} with simple definitions, examples and pictures the meaning is explained. "Splendid Speaking Podcasts^{xxviii}" is a site for upper-intermediate and advanced level English language learners to develop speaking and communication strategies. Users of this site receive transcripts, comprehension questions, daily quizzes and task sheets and vocabulary worksheets. [24] ^{xxix}

3.6 VIDEO CLIP TOOLS

Due to growing majority of net users, the websites with videos are very commonly used. These sites provide learners ample opportunity to improve listening skill. It has become enormously popular in a very short time. It provides a huge multimedia library in which language is used in real circumstances by native speakers and that why the site has been greatly welcomed by foreign language learners. ^[25] Videos of almost any topic of education, medicine, politics, science and technology etc. are available, which are spoken in standard, foreign accented and other varieties of language with different levels of difficulty. ^[26] These websites are very advantageous from foreign and second language learning aspect because these offer everyday use of language. ^[27]

4. CONCLUSION

There is a wide range of tools available for developing listening skill competency in foreign language. All these tools can be used according to learners' choice, learning environment and learning setups. The teachers should chose these tools wisely considering various aspects and levels of learners in isolation or with combination of other tools. Using ICT tools makes task of learning and teaching listening comprehension and developing competency in foreign language listening easier as these tools can be used in as well as out of the classroom.

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ⁱ ICT henceforth

ⁱⁱ methods and strategies which are used to help learners understand the way they learn

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/newsaboutbritain/and>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/newsextra/>

^{iv} http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/video_and_audio/

^v <http://edition.cnn.com/video/>

^{vi} <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/>

^{vii} <http://www.englishclub.com/listening/news.htm>

^{viii} www.dailyesl.com

^{ix} www.esl-lab.com

^x www.ezslang.com

^{xi} <http://www.ello.org/>

^{xii} <http://www.videojug.com/>

^{xiii} <http://www.podcasting-tools.com/blog.htm>

^{xiv} Author of the book is Eric Baber

^{xv} <http://www.englishcaster.com>

^{xvi} <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts>

^{xvii} <http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcasts/>

^{xviii} <http://www.manythings.org/songs/>

^{xix} <http://www.podcastdirectory.com/podcasts/7538>

^{xx} <http://www.elpodcast.com/>

^{xxi} <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/elementary-podcasts>

^{xxii} <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/professionals-podcasts>

^{xxiii} <http://www.businessenglishpod.com/category/esl-podcast/>

^{xxiv} Various topics included for workplace on the site are meetings, presentations, receiving and answering telephone calls, the skills of negotiating and socializing with people around. The topics about travel and various types of conversations are also included.

^{xxv} The language functions covered on this website are numerous such as how to clarify, agree, disagree, question, explain opinions, and persuasion etc.

^{xxvi} <http://www.videovocab.tv/>

^{xxvii} Topics like economics, finance, accounting and project management etc are covered.

^{xxviii} <http://www.podcastdirectory.com/podcasts/21609>

^{xxix} <http://www.splendid-speaking.com/subscribe1.html>