



A review on the activity based approach to hone engineering student's listening skills

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Abstract

Listening is one of the crucial aspects of learning. God has given humans two ears and one mouth to speak less and listen more. "You have to do a lot of listening, you don't just learn out of yourself" affirms Ruggiero Ricci. Most of the primary and secondary education system sheds focus on reading and writing skills with minimum attention to active listening. Physically present and mentally absent is the dictum that goes with the class room behaviour of many Engineering students.

To trigger zest for listening is the need of the hour. A blend of traditional and modern methods in teaching listening skills is indispensable. English teachers need to hone their teaching methods according to the current trend. Technology is utilitarian if utilized skilfully. The present paper focuses on various activities the writers practise in classroom that has yielded best results.

Keywords: listening, listening skills, improve engineering student's listening skills, train students as the best listeners, activities for listening skills

Introduction

Ardent listeners: An asset to their firm and family

Engineering Students are expected to maintain rapport and connect worldwide. Potent listeners are no doubt the best entrepreneurs and professionals. They can convince and persuade their customers, produce more output and establish them as the gift to their recruiters. A good listener has better chances for selection in interviews. He is a good speaker, counsellor, effective team player and a distinguished scholar.

In order to oblige boss' commands or to learn a concept listening skill is a must. It helps to rectify one's drawbacks, adds worldly knowledge, analytical thinking and facilitates resolute decisions. "If speaking is silver, then listening is gold" adjudicates a Turkish Proverb. "To listen well, is as powerful a means of communication and influence as to talk well" articulates Marshall. "Listening skill supports effective relationship within the organisation an individual with good listening ability can increase knowledge, broaden experience, develop organisation. It is one of the best skills required for employees." (Aruna, 2008) [5].

Paul Tillich asserts "The first duty of love is to listen." This substantiates the significance of listening in one's personal life too. "Most of the times we assume we are listening well. But we may not. Mind wanders away, difficulties in understanding the messages occur and misunderstandings arise as a result" (K. R. Lakshminarayanan, 2009) [7]. A good listener is never a victim to misunderstanding. His rapport with his friends, social networks, excellence in academics corroborates his listening skills.

Shun your ego- Quench your intellectual quest

"Big egos have little ears" opines Robert Schuller. A mind filled with ego is not a receptacle to information. Socrates once answered his disciple, "I know that I know nothing." When Thomas Alwa Edison was appreciated for his 1300 inventions he humbly took a handful of sand and said that what he had learnt is handful and what to be learned is this

world. This civility and avidity would kick off anyone to be a good listener. Various activities handled effectively promote student's listening skills.

Delineate the attributes- Match the snap

Divide students into groups. Each group is instructed to have the softcopy of 5 photos. They should narrate the physical features of any one person in their photos to the class. After listening the photos are displayed one by one on the white screen. The other groups are asked to find out the photo that matches the description narrated by the student. This activity was very interesting while conducted and the output was well traced when the students were awarded marks based on their capacity of identification.

Identify-Tag line and portrait

Generally, students are interested in listening stories. A class of 60 is divided into six groups. In that three groups are asked to create a parable, along with 6 slogans and 6 pictures related to their story. The teacher mixes all the slogans and pictures designed by three groups. Each group has to narrate their short story. The rest three groups will listen to the three stories narrated by three groups. Once the narration is completed, the teacher gives title to each story and allots each story to each group. All the slogans and pictures are numbered and placed on the table (or displayed). I group of students view and identify the slogans and tag line related to their allotted story. Similarly does the second and third group. The group which identifies all the slogans and pictures exactly is given applause.

The teacher should not announce in advance the story that she is going to assign in order to facilitate the listening of all the stories. This activity triggers innovation improves vocabulary, written and spoken skills. A creative story, slogans and pictures is a bravura test to listening skill.

Implant headship skills through listening

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood" is the

statement of the renowned Stephen R. Covey the author of world popular book 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. An efficient leader lends his ear to know his fellow men. The present activity is the best chance to know one another in the class. Each student gives Self Introduction, the others are instructed to listen attentively. After the narration the teacher asks questions such as, "What is her/ his short term goal?" and to the other student "What is her/ his achievements?" and so on. This is an attention-grabbing activity that generates interest because students are curious to know each other's bio data. This activity hones one's professional skills. It is economical, feasible, with no task sheet or gadgets. As a variation the students may be asked to video tape their SD, relay and the same activity is continued.

Adjudge Denouement- Detective Story

"Listening requires voluntary attention and making sense of what is heard. It requires a conscious effort to interpret the sounds, grasp the meanings of the words and react to the message". (Raman, 2008) ^[13]. The following activity substantiates this. Students are divided into groups. Each group consists of 3-4 members. The teacher narrates half of the detective story to the first group. The rest of the story is narrated to the second group. The climax of the story is left to the students to decide. After narration the students are allowed to interact with each other in English and asked to decide the climax of the story. Likewise all the students in the class are divided into groups. The teacher can either narrate the story or act as a moderator and initiate the third group to create a story and narrate it to two groups. This can be conducted during 3 hours lab.

Once the climax is decided, the teacher arranges the shattered class for listening. Two members from each group narrate the story to the rest of the class. This activity is an exceptional test to listening skill. The first activity is narration of story and enabling two groups to listen. Second activity is the interaction between two groups, where each student listens to the other. The final activity is addressing the whole class, where all listens to the story. If time permits, the teacher can ask any student to vary the climax of the narrated story. "Listening is a sustained effort to receive sounds and make meaning. It opens up possibilities for continuing interaction." (Lakshminarayanan, 2009) ^[8] The aforementioned activity as affirmed by Lakshminarayana enables to listen, comprehend and interact.

Utilize Technology- Amplify Listening Potential

"The goal of listening is to absorb the message and analyse the ideas to make critical judgement. This listening evaluates message at several levels; the logic of the argument; strength of the evidence and validity of the conclusions" (Aruna, 2009) ^[6]. The following activity tests Critical/Evaluative listening. With the help of the YouTube downloader videos on the inspiring speeches of Steve Jobs, Narayana Murthy, Sudha Murthy, Abdul Kalam, Shiv Khera or TED lectures, spoken by the eminent people can be downloaded and featured in the English lab. The teacher should have a comprehensive idea about the speech. She should motivate the students to make critical judgement on the content and present it to the class.

The significant feature of TED lectures is the type script that enables the follow up to the speech. It makes obvious the

difficult words used by the erudite of the world.

Chefs and cuisine- A witty activity

Ten students join as pairs. They are encouraged to shoot a video demonstrating the preparation of a cuisine of their choice. The recipe should contain the measurements of the different ingredients and its preparation. The video is played in the class. A group of students jot down questions from the 5 demos discuss and prepare the final list. The class is divided into two namely boys' and girls' team (excluding the students who made video). Questions are posed, answers elicited and the winners are announced. This is a very interesting activity and proves that learning can be a great fun. Even a regional medium student becomes attentive, listens and contributes to make his team win.

Be all ears and sketch

Teacher picks five students. One by one should relate instructions to draw a picture to the rest of the class. It may be an airplane, house, a cartoon. If the class is well equipped, audio on the same (pre-recorded) can be played in the class. If a student draws all the five pictures correctly he may be given a reward. This activity trains to frame sentences to recount and also to assimilate the given instruction keenly.

Listen and Riposte – Riveting Listening Activity

"One of the best listening methods is to concentrate our minds on the subject matter by taking notes" (Wright, 2006) ^[9]. The present activity is in line with the said notion. Students form groups, name themselves with catchy titles. Teacher instructs to either prepare a story or information on any particular aspect like Eifel Tower or on a reputed person with statistical details, followed by a few questions. Number of questions depends on the group division. The first group addresses the class; they share and narrate the information. Students are instructed to take notes while listening. Following this questions are posed to the rest of the groups on quiz basis. Scores are noted on the board. The highest scorers are crowned as the best listeners. This activity tests student's Informational Listening Skills and also trains in framing questions, presentation skills etc.

Spot Vigilant Listeners

"Who speaks, sows; who listen, reaps" is an Argentine Proverb. In line with this it is the obligation of a teacher to create better listeners. Students will listen to the recorded tape; if the facility is not available the teacher speaks in the class. "Good Morning! I would like to have a cup of tea, with a burger and a piece of cake. My brother would like to have a cup of coffee, sandwiches, and bread with jam, butter and cheese. My friends would like to have a few biscuits, chocolates, and puffs. Would you get me a glass of water and juice please?"

Students are given a sheet with the following words written on it. Sandwich, water, coffee, tea, noodles, burger, cake, bread, jam, butter, cheese, water, juice. They are instructed to tick the items that they have listened in the sheet. They are also asked to report the food items which were not included in the list. Students who can recognize the words which are not in the list are graded as active listeners.

Specify and give heed- An activity for selective listening

Divide students into groups. Distribute each task sheet to

every group. Then the students are made to listen the following. “The data is about the faculty working in a college. The total faculty in a college is 450. In that PG teachers are 150, UG 125, and Diploma teachers are 175. The teachers who have 1-2 years’ experience are 72, 2-4 years’ experience are 48. There are 58 lecturers, 44 grade-I senior lecturers, 46 grade-II senior lecturers. 48 Assistant Professors, 30 Associate Professors, 25 Professors and 34 clerks in the college working in various departments.” Then instruction is given to fill the task sheet.

Task sheet for selective listening

- No. of senior Grade- I Lecturers-----
- No. of senior Grade- II Lecturers-----
- No. of Professors-----
- 1-2 years experienced faculty-----
- 2-4 years experienced faculty-----
- Total no. of faculty in the college-----

As the task sheet is already distributed the students listen selectively and jot down.

In similar fashion announcements akin to the one made in railway stations, bus stand, airport, cricket compeering, route to a place can be enunciated by a few students or relayed in the class and the others may be asked to give heed to the same. The teacher prepares a few questions in advance. He randomly picks and asks questions from the prepared material. Students who give maximum answers are the best selective listeners.

Lend an ear, jot down and appraise

Let the students give ear to the following. “Mr Ratan’s wife is Ratna. They have 6 children. The first boy is good in Physics but poor in English and Social Science. The second boy has good communication skills but poor in academics. To the third girl Physics is a lovable subject but not English. She gets good marks in Social Science too. The fourth boy has a good skill in Drawing and art with less attention and concentration on studies. The fifth girl is studious and loves all the subjects. The last girl is versatile, who shines in all the three namely academics, drawing and communication.” After listening, students have to fill the following task sheet. He puts a tick mark or a cross according to the content listened. (Good= √ poor= ×) If the teacher is smart she can type the table and display it for the students to answer.

Table 1

	Physics	English	Social Science	Communication	Drawing
I child					
II child					
III child					
IV child					
V child					
VI child					

This activity also promotes selective listening. As a variation, students can be encouraged to prepare activities and a task sheet as the aforementioned. This would make the language class riveting and also enriches vocabulary and listening skills. To avoid printing and photostating task sheets (with concern to eco-friendly teaching learning method, the need of the hour) white board can be used or through the soft copy pasted in the lab’s server the clients (students) can see from their respective computers.

Hearken- Nouns and Pronouns

The teacher narrates the story and then displays the task sheet which does not contain the names of the persons as well as the pronouns mentioned in the story. It is left to students to fill in and complete the task sheet.

For Narration

“A poor woman Anis was lying half dead on the road. There came a Samaritan Mr. Zexuis. He got down from his vehicle and went near the woman lying half dead. He pitied her. He washed her wound with olive oil. He made her drink some wine he had. He put her on his vehicle and took her to an inn. He paid the inn-keeper Mr. Jeffer some Dinars and asked him to spend whatever amount the poor woman needed. He also said that he would pay him whatever he spent on her. The poor woman thanked Mr. Zexuis for his timely help.”

Task Sheet

A poor woman----- was lying half dead on the road. There came a Samaritan ----- He got down from--- -----vehicle and went near the woman lying half dead. He pitied ----- He washed -----wound with olive oil. He made ----- drink some wine he had. ----- put her on ----- vehicle and took her to an ----- He paid the inn-keeper ----- some Dinars and asked ----- to spend whatever amount the poor woman needed. ----- also said that he would pay ----- whatever he spent on her. The poor woman thanked -----for ----- timely help.

Transform- Superficial to Passionate Listeners- Activity on Appreciative Listening

An English song with beautiful lyrics can be played and the following aspects can be tested to enhance Appreciative Listening Skills. Students may be asked to pronounce the words from the song. For example words like “Be’cause, Can’t, A’bout, A’lone, Without, Go, So, Pray.” Focus on contractions like I’m, you’re, It’s, isn’t can be made.” They may be asked to repeat the first two lines/ last but one line of the song. Questions like “Can you fathom the emotions expressed in the song?”, “How does the singer feel? - Anxious/Nervous/Crazy/Agonised and Gap filling questions may also be elicited.

News Bulletin

Students are instructed to gather news on any topic and report it in the class. They should also prepare some critical questions from their news article. The questions may be multiple choice/ true or false/ question and answer, filling the gaps, questions pertaining to names, years and places. After the news reading, task sheets are given. The student whose maximum answers are correct is recognized.

Who are the aces of intonation/ listening?

“Important aspect, which plays a role in understanding an utterance, is the stress and intonation pattern. When a listener encounters tones he can easily guess the unsaid part of the sentence” (Krishna Mohan, 2008) [12]. After teaching intonation, the following activity on Discriminative Listening can be practiced. Students work in groups and prepare different types of sentences. It may be declarative, question, question tag, exclamatory, question that begins with ‘I think’, choice questions, questions that give ‘yes’ or

'no' answers etc. Quiz is initiated. I group students read out their list of sentences to the II group and then to the III group and so on. They should identify the sentence and find out its type and category namely, fall-raising tone or falling or raising-falling etc. The group which gets the highest score is titled as "Masters of Listening and Intonation." This activity aids in pronunciation and trains to frame different sentences. It is a very productive practice for attentive listening.

Conclusion

Metamorphose- Persons to personalities

"Wisdom is the reward for a lifetime of listening" avers D.J. Kaufman. "It is the job of the teacher to provide training in listening with a focus on listening as a thinking skill" (Dhanavel, 2012) ^[3]. MNCs give regular listening training to their employees. A teacher's success lies in enhancing perspicacity in her individuals. Make learning a fun is the modern dictum as exhilaration in learning is enjoyed by every student. Activity oriented listening triggers a zest for listening, encourages being alert and develops listening skills. It would metamorphose Engineering students from being a person to personality to be venerated by manifold. It helps them to become the best orators and whizz at conversation and negotiation skills. "To listen closely and reply well is the highest perfection we are able to attain in the art of conversation" authenticates Francois de La Rochefoucauld. "You learn when you listen. You earn when you listen, not just money, but respect" declares Harvey Mackay. It is the duty of a teacher to mould the present generation as respectful citizens by honing their listening skills with the help of the aforementioned activities that were practised on a regular basis and proved successful by the writers.

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