Using Videos to Promote Active Learning in Teaching Listening Skills

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Abstract

Listening is a dynamic and complex process which can be considered as one of the most difficult skills for various reasons. Research has found that using audio-visual (e.g. videos) can help learners engage in listening and develop better listening skills as they were exposed to a richer language context compared to using audio materials only. Drawing on these perspectives, this article reports a study investigating the effectiveness of using videos to facilitate listening comprehension and promote active learning in teaching listening skills. This action research study was conducted over one semester with second- and third-year undergraduate students majoring in English with a TESOL concentration in one liberal arts college located at southern Guangdong province. In this study, the students took a pre-listening test, watched five HTML5 Package (H5P) videos, and completed a pre- and post-questionnaire. The results from the pre-listening test and post-questionnaire showed that the use of H5P videos tend to facilitate listening comprehension in classroom based learning activities and promoted active learning to some extent. However, some students reported that viewing H5P videos was less effective in promoting active listening due to unfamiliarity of the format of the video. This article also offers insights to pedagogical and research implications of using H5P videos as a tool to teach listening skills to language teachers.

Keywords: listening, active learning, audio-visual

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Teaching and Learning Context

Listening is one of the four skills in English language learning. Although it is as important as the other three skills (writing, reading and speaking), it is often neglected or forgotten (Long, 1987). Due to this oversight, Flowerdew and Miller (2012, p. 225) described listening as the "Cinderella skill". Listening involves a dynamic and complex process which is considered as one of the most difficult skills by second language (L2) learners due to various reasons: speed of speakers, length of listening materials, different pronunciation, use of performance variables, and genre and/or topic unfamiliarity. Listening in the real world often becomes more challenging because of background noise, other people's conversations and other audible interference which are not found in classroom listening materials.

Vandergrift (1999) attributes this difficulty to its complex nature which requires coordination and mental process:

> [Listening] is a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger sociocultural context of the utterance. Co-ordinating all of this involves a great deal of mental activity on the part of the listener. Listening is hard work, and deserves more analysis and support. (p.168)

According to Handelsman and his colleagues (2007), active learning suggests that students are engaged in their own learning when they do or produce something in response to learning opportunities designed by their teacher, which can be used to measure their understanding. Active learning, in this context, is defined as activities, particularly involving higher order thinking, that students do to construct knowledge and understanding (Freeman, et al., 2014). Because listening is an "individual activity" (Field, 2008, p. 37), technology allows learners to engage in active learning as well as to develop their listening competence and cognitive ability of listening at their own pace and time. Classroom based listening activities are different from the kinds of listening in real life. In real world communication, we never just listen; we also always draw on multiple contextual clues to make sense of what