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STRATEGY TRAINING TO DEVELOP ENGLISH LISTENING SKILL OF ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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Abstract:-The purpose of the present study is to focus on listening problems of engineering students and to suggest strategy training to overcome the issues. The results of the study may set an example showing the usefulness of language learning strategies in language learning. The study may also, if well perceived by the target sample of the study, increase the intent of students to develop the listening skill. The study will contribute to the line of research on listening strategy instruction, especially within the Engineering College context where this area is hardly trodden by researchers. It may give insights about the conditions in which strategy instruction works best and what modes and circumstances are needed to ensure effective listening strategy instruction.

Keywords:listening skill, strategy training, engineering students.

1.INTRODUCTION :-

The importance of listening skill has been neglected or overlooked until the last few decades. Listening was not broadly acknowledged as a skill that needs to be developed in its own right or to be taught explicitly. However, after having long been in the shadow of other language skills, listening has recently started to float to the surface of attention. The view of listening has universally changed so that listening is now acknowledged as a skill that needs to be developed via systematic instruction, though some contexts like Learning English in Engineering colleges still need to recognise this issue and to demonstrate such recognition in all the different levels of instruction.

The educational system, especially in Engineering Colleges, the concern of this study, does not offer in-service training programmes to guide the teachers to improve listening skill of students. Examinations do not test the oral skills (listening and speaking), which are almost absent from the practice of teaching English. As a matter of fact, passing exams and getting good scores is the centre of gravity of all the efforts of all those involved in teaching learning processes. Examinations in this context dominate all the teaching practices inside the English classroom in Tamilnadu. Under this circumstance when average second language learner starts his B.E / B.Tech programme carrying with him the knowledge of English language learning, finds himself in a pitiable and pathetic condition when exposed to listening to English or taught how to learn it properly. Hence, in this study an attempt has been made to analyse the problems encountered by the engineering graduate students when they are exposed to English with special reference to their listening skill. This study proposes to explore the problems faced by them in this skill and suggest strategy training to solve those problems.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening is central to all learning as students receive 57% to 90% of their instruction via listening to teachers and to each other (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996; Feyten, 1991; Oxford, 1993). Brown (1980: 10) highlights the key role listening plays at all levels, stating: "listening ability lies at the very heart of all growth, from birth through the years of formal education. The better those learning skills are developed, the more productive our learning efforts". Although the exploratory studies contributed to some extent to creating a theoretical framework for learning strategies , they had a number of limitations.

O'Malley, Chamot & Kupper (1989) used think-aloud protocols with high school ESL students to empirically validate the three-stage model proposed by Anderson (1983,1985; 2.6.1), to examine what strategies were used at each phase. Findings revealed differences in the strategies reported by effective and ineffective listeners. One of the recent investigations was undertaken by Paulauskas (1994) to assess the effect of strategy training on the listening achievement of high beginning and low intermediate adult learners. Paulauskas recommended further research in ESL strategy training to examine variables seen as potentially crucial for designing effective training programmes.

3.AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to help graduate students in Engineering Colleges learn how to go about listening and how to get over their problems in listening to English. To realize this,   the study aims to design a listening instructional programme based upon strategy instruction and to probe its effects on developing listening comprehension among students. Thus, operationally speaking, the study sought to examine and compare the effects of three approaches namely strategy instruction, metacognitive instruction and pure exposure on high and low proficiency students' listening performance.

4.PROBLEMS IN LISTENING

Students in Engineering Colleges in Tamilnadu in particular Chennai District, the context of the study, are the outcome of teacher centered classrooms where teachers are active producers and students are relatively passive consumers whose needs must be completely satisfied. These values, which fostered the dependency assumption in students and rooted the belief that they cannot learn without teachers, completely contradict the active and interactive roles expected in strategy training. Students holding such values can be resistant, unwilling and uncooperative in the face of strategy training. Thus it was necessary to include the metacognitive knowledge component in the hope it might help reshaping and adjusting the students' attitudes and beliefs about learning and their roles. It is identified that students experienced a number of problems that hindered students' comprehension while listening. The most common problems reported by students were: combining words into phrases, changes in sounds in connected speech, rate of delivery, listening to and understanding every word, lack of concentration, unfamiliarity with the topic

These problems were by and large due to the fact that listening is the skill that makes the heaviest processing demands for second/foreign language. This is because students must store information at the same time as they are working to understand it. It is also due to the memory limitation as well as the lack of control over the message; listeners have almost no control over what is going to be said, how it is going to be said, and how quickly it is going to be said. The words are fast flying very rapidly leaving no control over the message, which force listeners to process the message immediately, whether they are prepared to receive the information or they are still processing what they have just heard. So the strategy training is needed for listeners to develop listening skill.

5.METHODOLOGY

The design of this study is to assess and compare the effects of three different approaches on developing listening comprehension among students of high and low listening proficiency. The investigation reported here is carried out for 60 hours with a homogeneous group of 72 third year B.E. / B.Tech undergraduate students in Engineering Colleges in Chennai District. All students are male with the average age of 20.4 and have Tamil as their native language. The study comprised listening comprehension tests. The MANOVA test is used to test the differences between the two experimental and pure exposure groups.

6.STRATEGY TRAINING PROGRAMME

The selection of strategies to be trained in the strategy training programme was done carefully. It was aimed at equipping learners with some effective strategies to help them maximize their limited processing capacity and in turn be able to deal with listening. The strategies to be taught included metacognitive strategies, which sought to help students direct and self regulate their learning as well as cognitive strategies which intended to help students actively manipulate the content. These strategies were selected in the light of the related literature. Therefore, the strategies to be taught under the metacognitive category were planning (by setting their goals for the task, identifying the task requirements and demands, and identifying resources including the strategies that will help realising the goals), monitoring (comprehension and strategy) and finally evaluating (comprehension and strategy). The cognitive strategies taught were SIMT (identifying setting, interpersonal relationships, mood and topic), prediction, essence of meaning, focus of meaning, elaboration, inferencing, and note taking. These strategies were selected for the Training.

6.1 Training

The research reported here was undertaken with the aim to compare the effects of three instructional approaches on students' listening performance. Students who participated in this study were not told that the three groups are receiving different kinds of listening instruction. The following section describes the training received by each of the three groups.

6.1.1 Pure exposure (Control group)

This group received the same input, the same number of texts, as the two other groups but with no direct instruction as to how to approach the listening task or the underpinning principles of effective listening. The lesson plans for this group focused on exposing the students to the same amount of listening as in the two other groups, leaving them to use their own approaches in carrying out the listening tasks; to do whatever they normally did to help them understand listening tasks without any intervention from the researcher who was with them in the language laboratory. The essential difference between this group and the other two groups was that they were given speaking and writing tasks on the content they listened to. It is worth pointing out here that to minimise the effect of difference in time of exposure to the texts, students of the three groups were allowed to listen to each extract not more than three times.

6.1.2 Metacognitive group

The metacognitive instruction group was mid-way between the pure exposure (control group) and the strategy training group. The main focus of the instruction in this group was to raise students' awareness about themselves as learners, their learning styles, their attitudes and beliefs about listening. Moreover, they were introduced to what the literature highlighted about listening in an attempt to correct some of the misconceptions. The essential difference between this group and the strategy group was that their lesson plans did not include any explicit instruction on using cognitive or metacognitive strategies . They were similar to the control group in that they both had to do written tasks based on the listening material content. However, they were different from them in that they were encouraged to have group discussions in which they discussed how they arrived at their answers and what helped them figure them out. They listened to the same number of listening texts as the two other groups, in the same sequence, and spent approximately the same amount of time on any given listening task.
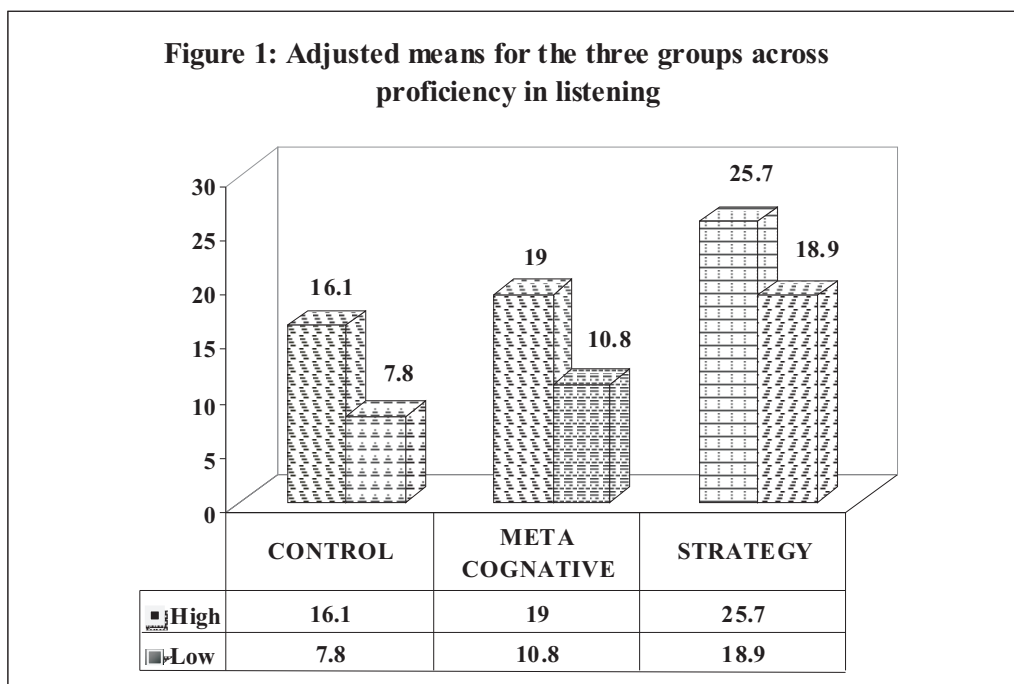
6.1.3 Strategy training group

The two main components of the programme, are the metacognitive knowledge and strategies. metacognitive knowledge is the information learners acquired about their learning. At the core, there are the metacognitive components that are central to strategy training. The second component, represented by the outer shell, is the strategies to be taught that included cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The programme consisted of 2-hour sessions on a daily basis, six days a week and for six weeks. The researcher, who was the instructor, followed four general steps in teaching a given strategy:(a) presentation,(b) modeling,(c) practicing, and (e) evaluation. The researcher started by presenting the strategy, its name, when to use it, how it would help and why. He, then, modeled the strategy under scrutiny in Tamil(students' mother tongue) by using the strategy in performing a listening task, thinking aloud as he worked so that students could observe how he thought, what he did while using the strategy, how he monitored his performance and checked his strategic approach. Modeling the strategies was eminent from the belief that unless these processes, which are by their very nature invisible, are made explicit, students can have no way of understanding what it is like to think like a good listener until they become actually one. The researcher in his modeling adopted an apprenticeship approach. This approach was founded upon the apprentice gradually taking over responsibility for a listening task the aims and nature of which had been clearly demonstrated as well as how to approach it strategically. In addition, the researcher involved the students in the modeling by asking questions, which aimed to help students understand when and where they might use the strategy as well as the steps involved in its use. During the phase of modeling, the researcher selected some of the willing students to report on their thought processes while listening, exactly as the researcher did, and it turned out to be a very good technique.

The researcher's modeling gave students insights on how to be strategic when listening, whereas their peers' modeling challenged them to do the same. The focus of the third step was given to practice, active applications of the strategy presented to listening tasks. Finally, the fourth step entailed getting students to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy and the difficulties that arose from the strategy use as well as the reasons for such difficulties in applying the strategy.

7. EFFECTS OF TRAINING ON LISTENING

The graph shows the differences in listening attainments (adjusted means) between the high and low proficiency students across the three groups. The adjusted means represent the mean scores on the post-test but have incorporated in the pretest and show the improvement in pure sense. The figure below shows, as might have been expected, that the high listening proficiency level students performed better than the low proficiency students across the three groups. Furthermore, it also shows that the high proficiency students in the strategy training group seemed to have attained the highest means (25.7). What is more interesting is that the low proficiency level students in the strategy training group (18.9) performed as well as the high proficiency students in the metacognitive instruction group (19.0) and outperformed the high proficiency students in the control group (16.1).This means that both the high and the low proficiency students in the strategy training group benefited from the training they received more than the two other groups. This, in turn, suggests that within the strategy training group, the improvement in students' listening performance is not dependent on their proficiency level, which is not the case in the two other groups.

Figure 1: Adjusted means for the three groups across proficiency in listening

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	CONTROL	META COGNATIVE	STRATEGY
High	16.1	19	25.7
Low	7.8	10.8	18.9

Table-1 Results of multiple comparisons across the training groups in listening test

(I) GROUP (J) GROUP		Mean differences (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.
Strategy	Metacognitive	7.284*	.567	.000
	Control	9.877*	.569	.000
Metacognitive	Strategy	-7.284*	.567	.000
	Control	2.593*	.568	.000
Control	Strategy	-9.877*	.568	
	Metacognitive	-2.593*	.568	

8. DISCUSSION

Given that there are significant differences in listening performance at P<0.01 between the three groups of

the study, multiple comparisons were run to establish where the significances lay. The results of these multiple comparisons showed that there is a significant difference at 0.05 level between the adjusted means attained by the strategy-training group (22.1) and the other two groups (the metacognitive instruction (14.8) and the control group (12.2)) in listening comprehension performance in favour of the strategy-training group. It also reveals that there is a significant difference at 0.05 levels between the adjusted means attained by the metacognitive instruction group and the control group in listening comprehension in favour of the metacognitive instruction group. The findings of the current study give evidence for positive effects of strategy instruction given that it attends to the principles of effective strategy instruction.

Therefore, it can be summarised that the training effect is observed in the following order strategy training > metacognitive instruction > control group. Several interpretations could be given for the superior performance of the strategy group over the two other groups in listening performance. One interpretation may lie in the principles of effective strategy instruction incorporated in this study. These principles were the inclusion of the metacognitive knowledge and adopting a direct instructional approach, which dictated that instruction should be informed, explicit (modeling), as well as providing sufficient time and practice. Other equally effective factors that emerged from the current study were the long duration of training, maintaining students' motivation and removing anxiety and fostering self confidence.

9.CONCLUSIONS

The study showed the positive effect of strategy training in promoting effective second language listening. So the study recommended that the strategy training, following effective strategy training principles is essential to overcome listening comprehension problems. Because strategy instruction l earners can be helped in four ways. They are

1. become aware of the strategies they already use
2.Able to apply task specific strategies that can make learning more efficient and allow them to compensate for nervousness, inability to remember and lack of wait time
3.Able to monitor for strategy effectiveness and
4.Can create new strategies or to weed out ineffective ones via meta cognition control.

Listening strategy training makes learning how to listen more effective through the use of effective strategies. The study indicated that strategy training is essential to overcome listening comprehension problems. The effectiveness of strategy use depends on a number of factors such as proficiency level, learning styles, gender, nationality etc. Only proficiency level has been addressed in this study. Further research can investigate strategy training in relation to other factors.

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