

## TEACHING LISTENING THROUGH COLLABORATIVE WORK: CAN WE DO IT?

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### Abstract

Listening is one of the skills that should be mastered by any language learners. It usually defines as the ability to identify and understand what others are saying or talking about. However, it is not an easy task. It requires understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning. Therefore, in teaching listening, teachers need to pay attention on how to help the learner to master this skill. In fact, the way of teaching listening seems to be boring and stressful. The students just sit and listen to the text and fill the blanks or listen to the question. It is merely like a test. This paper aims at sharing the way of teaching listening by using group work or collaborative activities. Listening activities should be challenging and interactive. It must be taught integrated. These activities are aimed at encouraging and facilitating students to take advantage of collaborative activity in order to practice listening skills and communicate and negotiate with others.

**Keywords:** *collaborative listening, listening skill, listening for main ideas, listening for details, group work*

### A. Introduction

Listening is one of the skills that should be mastered by any language learners. It usually defines as the ability to identify and understand what others are saying or talking about. Among four language skills, listening is frequently considered as the most difficult subject by foreign language learners because they need to understand monolog or dialogue that is delivered in uncontrolled speed. Moreover, it requires understanding the speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar, his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning. However, there is lack of attention on this skill during learning activities (Saun & Ardi, 2013: 53).

Moreover, in teaching listening, teachers need to pay attention on how to help the learners to master this skill. In fact, the way of teaching listening seems to be stressful. The students just sit and listen to the text and fill the blanks or answer to the question. It is merely like a test. Actually, Brown has proposes some general steps for listening class from the simplest to the most difficult one, They are presenting (1) listening for main ideas, (2) listening for details, and (3) listening and making inferences help students develop a sense of why they listen and which strategies should be used to listen better (Brown, 2006:6). These activities are mostly conducted individually.

Moreover, in listening activities, it will be more stressful whenever teachers do not activate students' background knowledge before listening activities. It will make the students cannot anticipate what will be listened to. Brown (2006:2) says that people background knowledge has an effect on their cognition. Thus, He also recommends that teacher needs to activate students background knowledge in teaching listening. However, it cannot be neglected that not all students has the same information or experience in their background knowledge related to topic being listened. As the effect, it is not surprising that students sometimes never know what they are listening for? or what the speaker talking about. Sometimes, the students understand the meaning of some words used by the speakers, but they cannot get the general ideas. Therefore, a 'bridge' that can balance the same background knowledge is really necessary.

Moreover, in certain condition, the students can understand for the general information. However, some of the students still have problems in understanding for details. In fact, one of learning activities that facilitates students to share and discuss is group work or collaborative learning. Collaborative learning, grouping or pairing of students for the purpose of achieving an academic goal, has been widely researched as quite useful for the students to share their knowledge and discuss (Remedios *et al*, 2008; Soller *et al*, 1998; Gokhale, 1995). In group work, group members need to operate in two modes in participating collaboratively; they need to contribute to the group and they need to hear and learn from the contribution of others. In listening, it is not unusual to have discussion in the pre-listening activities in activating background knowledge (See Brown, 2006; Helgesen *et al*, 1997). However, it is hard to find some report on collaborative listening in whilst-listening activities.

Today, the demand on integrated learning is higher. However, can we integrate listening and speaking? In a research conducted by Remedios *et al*,(2008:15), they find that both the Asian and the local

Australian students perceived speaking as privileged over listening in how collaboration was done in the PBL classroom. PBL or Problem Based Learning is a kind of group work activities. Meanwhile, based on my experience in teaching listening through collaborative activities, I found that implementing group work in whilst-listening also helps the students in increasing their listening skill. It can increase students' comprehension. Then, is it possible to use group work or collaborative activity in developing students' listening skill?

Although group work is not a new activity, it is hard to find this information "group work in listening" in the literature. Therefore, in this paper, I want to share and discuss the use group work or collaborative activities in listening. The paper starts by reviewing listening and collaborative learning, then, it discusses the possibility through the ways of implementing and its advantages and disadvantages.

## B. Review and Related Studies

### 1. Listening & its character

Listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. Specifically, Madsen (1983:127) defines listening as the recognition of words, structures, and pronunciation features. This definition shows that listening is the activity of understanding of oral input. As a receptive skill, it includes understanding on some input, such as, words, phrase, sentence, paragraph & structure, and pronunciation. These things make listening rather difficult as the speaker has various pronunciation styles. Similarly, Howatt and Dakin (in Saricoban, 1999) say that listening involves understanding on a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning. This definition gives a complexity of listening skill that involves various aspects of oral input.

Next, Meskill (1996:180) says that listening, actually, involves some processes. He states that listening as not a simply a receptive act-multiple physiological and cognitive processes are engaged simultaneously. He then proposes that the processes involved are: reception, interpretation, and response construction. It means that while listening, a listener receives the message, interprets, and constructs the meaning, then builds the response in his/her mind. Similarly, McLain (1999:78) states that listening is a two-way process. It involves reception or the decoding of input and production involving predicting and compensating. Thus, a listener firstly receives the message then gets the chunks of meaning from the input. Both opinions describe that listening is not merely a passive activity, it is an active process. McLain, moreover, states that it also involves production, such as predicting.

Meanwhile, Cramer (2004:138) says that listening is an indispensable tool to decode and is connected to word recognition. Based on Cramer, it can be said that in the listening activities, the listeners decode the message by having recognition of words, structures, and pronunciation from speaker's talking.

Based on these two comments, Meskill implied that listening is not only receptive skill, it involves interpreting, constructing, creating response or ideas in his mind to show his/her comprehension. Specifically, Willis (in Saricoban 1999) proposes a series of micro-skills of listening, which she calls enabling skills. They are:

- predicting what people are going to talk about
- guessing at unknown words or phrases without panic
- using one's own knowledge of the subject to help one understand
- identifying relevant points; rejecting irrelevant information
- retaining relevant points (note-taking, summarizing)
- recognizing discourse markers, e. g. , Well; Oh, another thing is; Now, finally; etc.
- recognizing cohesive devices, e. g. , *such as* and *which*, including linking words, pronouns, references, etc.
- understanding different intonation patterns and uses of stress, etc. , which give clues to meaning and social setting
- understanding inferred information, e. g. , speakers' attitude or intentions.

The quotation above shows us that there are some micro-skills that should be developed in listening activities. Listening is not merely answering to the question, or like a test. It also supports Meskill's opinion that listening is 'complex processes' (Saun and Ardi, 2013)

Furthermore, as a receptive skill, listening gives a chance to productive skills. It means that students can still show their understanding by producing words, sentence, etc. If we have our students produce something, the teaching will be more communicative (Saricoban 1999). This brings us to the must of integrating language skills. Furthermore, Saricoban (1999) says that at least there are two reasons for using integrating activities in language classrooms: (1) to practice and extend the learners' use of a certain language structure or function; and (2) to develop the learners' ability in the use of two or more of the skills within real contexts and communicative frame work.

Based on those review above, it can be concluded that listening is not a passive activity. It involves many processes inside. There are some micro-skills are being developed in listening skill that related to general & specific information, and also making inference. Then, as receptive skill, it does not mean listening is only listening to audible material. We can integrate with other productive skill.

## 2. Group Work as a Collaborative Learning Activity

Many researchers have reported that collaborative learning give good impact in the learning process. Some references explain that collaboration as requiring both the individual's contribution to the group learning as well as the individual's learning from the group (Bruffee, 1973; Chizhik, 1998; Soller *et al*, 1998; Remedios *et al*, 2008). Moreover, Soller *et al* (1998:186) reports their research has shown that classroom learning improves significantly when students participate in learning activities with small groups of peers. The nature of group work activities will encourage each other to ask question, explain and justify their opinion, articulate their reasoning, and collaborate and reflect upon their knowledge, thereby it will be motivating and improving learning.

The term "collaborative learning" refers to an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal (Gokhale, 1995). It means the success of one student helps other students to be successful. This nature that will help students who do not understand the material by scaffold each other to share the things they know with another member. Therefore, all members are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. This nature, actually, should be worked in listening activities. It hopes can help the slow learners by pairing or grouping them with the good students. It means that in collaborative learning each member can participate to help each other. Although, listening was less explicitly valued as a collaborative skill, and students' listening skills were rarely scaffolded.

## C. Discussion

Listening is usually treated as silent activity. The teachers usually ask the students to listen to dialogue or monolog and then followed by some questions or some individual activities, such as, checking true or false, ticking, following map, choosing pictures, etc. These activities are conducted in "silent" activities, without discussion or sharing with others. In fact, the students face some difficulties in understanding the monologue or dialogue and they left behind in their "not understanding". Although there "a classroom" discussion related to the "correct answer" and why those are correct related to the tasks given, it does not really share the ways the find the correct answer.

Meanwhile, there is an instruction method that involves collaborative activity that facilitate students to share. That is why collaborative listening can be an option to be implemented. As mentioned before, "collaborative learning" can be defined as an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal (Gokhale, 1995). However, it is hard to get the theory, research finding, or ways to implement collaborative listening. Now, can we implement group work as a "collaborative listening" in developing students' listening skill?

In the pre listening, it is common to recall students' background knowledge related to the topic being listened through discussion in a group work or pair work. They will ask the question or information as guided in the pre-listening activities. In this stage, we should be creative in creating question, showing picture, stimulating ideas to recall their memory related to the topic. It would be better if it involves the vocabulary being used by 'accidentally' elicit the vocabulary or purposively show them. It can be done classically, in pairs, or in group.

Then, how can we implement it in whilst-listening activity. In the main activity in listening can be done in various ways as stated by Maxom (2009:206), such as:

- (1) Working with a picture. Students can examine a picture to if it matches up to the listening text. Does the picture show the correct number of people in the right place?, etc.
- (2) Labeling. Students put labels on various parts of a diagram based on what they hear.
- (3) Following a map. After a description or direction, students mark the map.
- (4) Short teacher monologue. Tell a story about an episode in your life while students take note.
- (5) Traditional stories: Folk tales and fairy stories are great because there are often similar ones in other cultures so the students may want to tell their own afterwards.
- (6) Songs: Music is great for fixing words in your mind.
- (7) Physical response: Get students to follow instructions through movement. They can practice words like prepositions and parts of the body.
- (8) Dictation: This traditional activity can be livened up by dictating a diagram for students to draw.
- (9) True or false: Have a series of true or false comprehension questions after listening for detail.

- (10) Gap fill: Leave gaps in the tape-script or in the summary.
- (11) Putting information in order. The listening text may describe a process such as baking a special cake. On the students' worksheet you list all the stages in the wrong order. As they listen, the students can number the stages of the process from first to last.
- (12) Complete information on a timetable or schedule.
- Then, how can the students do a group work or collaborative learning for those activity?

#### *Teaching Listening through Collaborative work*

Similar with other collaborative learning, collaborative listening requires students to share and discuss. In general, the steps that I used in whilst-listening activity in my listening class can be listed as follows:

1. Play the material ask them to listen and answer them individually.  
 After pre-listening, let the students listen individually. Ask them to follow the instruction. This step is similar with common listening activities. At first, allow them to take note while listening, let them write anything they think as the important information. However, for the other meeting train them to memorize the material or the important things. It is because in the listening test mostly the testee is not allowed to take note or mark. Therefore, we should practice them to have short and long term memory.  
 In this step, don't forget to remind the students about the purpose of why they listen to. Remind their purpose is very important to get the thing they need to know. Remind the students about the activities they should do, such as, the activities mention by Maxom or Willis above.  
 In this steps you may play the material for several times so they have something to be compared or to be shared, including the problem or clue to share. You may play two or three times so they have their own answer to compare in the next step.
2. Discuss the Answer  
 Then, after playing for the first time, ask the students to share or compare their answer in group or in pair. Do not say the correct answer yet. Make them curious which answer is correct. The point here, they should get the way to get the answer. Let them share their note taking and how they get the answer, what expression help them, what clue. This steps is also intended to share the strategy in listening. Ask them to convince their friend by giving the clue to the answer (sharing ways for finding the answer).  
 Force them to discuss and lead to how they can get answer. It should be not merely give the answer to their friend. If they do not have the answer yet, play the material again do not start the discussion. So, they have something to be compared or to be share. After playing for 1-3 times force them to share how could they get the answer.  
 While discussion, it is better to build their feeling as "a team work". Therefore, they have to help each other. Each member of the group should must have good point by getting all the task done correctly. While discussion activity, check what they are discussed about. Mostly the students feel hard to begin the discussion. They tend to silent and do not want to share. In this case, try to compare their answer within a group whenever they have the same answer ask them to discuss why they have the same answer. On the other hand, whenever they have different answer provoke they to have negotiation or tell their argument to choose that answer to their partner. Provoke them to explore each other. If they still do not have a clear answer yet, it is OK. Just encourage them to listen more carefully, ask their friend how could they find. If both of them do not understand, encourage them to discuss what they know about in general. Check what their understanding by listen to their discussion.  
 In the first and the second meeting let them sit with their friends as they choose themselves. Try to see the result of this pairs or group work. Then, in the third or fourth meeting, try to change their partnert or group. Remember your fast and slow learners, try to put them together. It is hoped that, they can share their way or strategy in listening and how to focus their listening.
3. Re-check, play the material again  
 As their curiosity has increased to prove that their answer is correct and they have more focus what they should find in the material, re-play the material. Ask them to recheck their answer. After they have discussed in the previous step, the students will be more focus and re-check their answer. Ask them to listen carefully and open their mind in their discussion.
4. Reconfirm the answer in group  
 Again, let them reconfirm their answer in group. Let them change their answer as they understand or find the similar clue. Remember, it is not a test! You are not going to see or compare the achievement of our students. They are learning, they are not cheating but sharing their understanding. Therefore, allow them to change their answer, if necessary, ask them why they change? What clue makes them change?

Remind the students to share their strategy and clue to find the answer in the exercise. It will have all students to negotiate meaning and their understanding. It will also increase their strategy or micro-skill in listening especially in focusing the purpose in listening activities.

5. Check the answer  
After they finished discussing the answer and their strategy, then discuss the answer classically. Elicit their answer compare their answer whenever the groups have different answers. Provocate them to say their reason to choose certain answer. As they do it in group they will have more motivation to speak as they
6. Vary the group, change their partner  
As mention above, try to vary their partner after two or three times discussion. Consider to pair slow and fast learner. It will vary their discussion experience and share their strategy well.

After practicing this strategy in my listening class I found that most of my students feels that listening is not stressful anymore. It is easier. In more detail in my observation and interview the advantages can be listed as follow:

1. They ask for difficult word indirectly that lead misunderstanding,  
Within their discussion I found that they elicit some difficult words or homophone that lead misunderstanding. They discuss these words intensively and try to focus in the next listening stage. It trains them to be more focus in the listening activities. They try to pay attention on certain word that they think important. It does not only happen to good learner but also the slow learner as they share the same experience. Even the slow learner can add the new word as they can ask directly to their friend. It builds curiosity and critical thinking indirectly. Besides, it trains the good learner to be able to answer their friends question.
2. They share their understanding indirectly, summary  
In my observation I found they try to tell their understanding. Whenever they have different understanding they indirectly say their arguments and the reasons. Meanwhile, the other students also say their understanding based on the clue they noted. I found that they build their skill in creating summary based on the listening material they heard. As they have different opinion or understanding they try to convince their friend after that they ask for replay the material to prove their understanding. I found they have open mindedness as they have wrong answer.
3. They ask for details indirectly, it lead for  
Actually this skill refers to higher level comprehension in listening after they understand for general ideas. However, I found that after they get the general information they tend to directly their understanding on detail information. Of course it requires more focus and attention so it drastically increase their listening skill.
4. They share ways to listen, listening strategy  
In this discussion I lead them to share the strategy and the clue rather than the answer. I make their answer as the material to be proved that they are correct. I do not show that certain students is correct in the group or pair discussion. I just provocate them to convince their friend is correct. Indirectly, they share the strategy in listening and focus their purpose.
5. They increase their listening comprehension  
This is the most important advantage that I observed. After several meeting I check their comprehension it shows that their comprehension is increased. Some slow learner can get higher score compared to their previous test with individual work.

Based on these steps and advantages that I observed, I found that teaching listening through collaborative work is not impossible. Listening is not only a silent activity anymore. Students need to talk to share their understanding and discuss intensively. It should be a new trend that we should explore more in listening activities.

Collaborative work in listening practice will be more effective to build student's comprehension, as they can discuss and share their listening experience. They will share their experience and ask for their friend to help. Sometimes, the students do not share their problem to their teacher, therefore this make them can solve their problem. Based on condition above, I recommend and propose this activity to be implemented by other lecturer or teachers.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that teaching listening through collaborative work is quite effective in improving students comprehension, enriching vocabulary, and negotiation. It indirectly improves various skill in listening. They have more focus and eagerness in listening to the material as they

have the write recommends that the English teachers include collaborative listening in improving students' listening skill.

It is suggested that there should be a further research on the effectiveness of collaborative work in teaching listening related to students' listening skill. There is a need finding the an effective way in developing this skill since it listening usually left behind among other language skill.

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