

Teaching And Learning Listening In English As A Foreign Language (Efl) Classroom: A Constructivist Approach

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify the effectiveness of the constructivist approach in teaching, learning and listening among EFL learners, using a sample of international students from INTI International College Penang. Four main purposes of listening: comprehensive, critical, appreciative and therapeutic listening were investigated in relation to the constructivist approach. In order to identify the efficiency of constructivism in teaching and learning listening in EFL context, various tests, questionnaire and classroom activities have been conducted. The results were compiled and recorded to analyse the significance of constructivist approach in teaching and learning listening skills in EFL classroom. The results were analysed through mean score and standard deviation. The results from the YLLS questionnaire and classroom observation reveal that listening and speaking become their preferred learning style while the pre-test and post-test show that the EFL learners improved well in their listening skills through constructive approach in listening classroom. In conclusion, constructivist learning theory that consists of prior knowledge, social interaction, motivation and construct meaning that relate to real world truly helps the students to progress with their listening skills.

Introduction

Listening is a communication channel that is most frequently used, but surveys show that listening skills are the least developed (Galvin et al., 1992). Conaway (1982) also states that listening has been regarded as the most widely used language skill in the

classroom, and that it plays an important role in one's academic success, more so than reading skills or academic aptitude.

A listening course for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners is a difficult task, but it can be made easier by activating prior knowledge, assisting students to identify the purposes for listening and using well-structured speaking tasks (Brown, 2006). There are various types of purposes in listening, such as discriminative, comprehensive, evaluative, appreciative, emphatic, relationship, reflective, interpersonal and many other. (Thompson et al., 2004; Weisglass, 1990; Rost, 2002).

The focus of this study will be only on four major types of listening: comprehensive, critical, appreciative and therapeutic listening (Kline, 1996). This is because teaching and learning listening among EFL learners is more to listening for understanding, gathering main ideas and supporting details, constructing meaning, integrating with people (either support or argue) based on a topic of the listening and also listening for enjoyment.

Flowerdew (1994), who agrees with Brown (2006), Weisglass (1990) and Rost (2002), suggests that to be a successful academic listener, a student needs a relevant background of knowledge, the ability to distinguish between important and unimportant messages, and appropriate skills such as note-taking. These recommended criteria are from the constructivist learning theory.

The constructivist approach allows students to construct meaning based on their prior knowledge and integrate with people. This approach is merely on students' active participation in problem-solving and critical thinking regarding a learning activity, which they find pertinent and applicable to the real-world context. According to this learning theory, the learners 'construct' meaning based on their prior knowledge and experience to apply them in new situations and integrate the new knowledge gained with pre-existing constructs (OTEC, 2007).

Definitions

Listening

Listening is an active process to receive, create meaning, and respond or react to spoken and or non-verbal messages that were delivered (Emmert, 1994; Underwood, 1989; Zhang, 2007). Rost (2002) defines listening by categorizing into four perspectives: receptive, constructive, collaborative or transformative. Listening as a receptive process