Improving Listening Comprehension in English: Diverse Approaches for Elementary School Children


This paper investigates effective approaches in improving listening comprehension on the basis of Korean learners’ English learning experience in America. First the paper summarizes some personal factors, problems and ideas related to the improvement of listening comprehension and then discusses different approaches for elementary school children and teachers in improving listening comprehension in English, emphasizing the importance of ‘multiple intelligences’ and ‘prior knowledge’ in particular. Next, the paper suggests how to improve listening comprehension appropriately in English: through developing multiple intelligences and through comprehending diversified materials at appropriate levels for those elementary school children and their adult teachers who have their poor prior knowledge, and the improvement of listening comprehension based on metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies by adult teachers who have a wide range of prior knowledge and positive personalities.

I. Introduction

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English was introduced throughout the elementary schools of Korea as a required subject in 1997. English curriculum in the elementary schools stipulates English as a foreign language from the third grade through the sixth grade, two times (total 80 min.) for each class per week, mainly focusing on listening and speaking. English education specialists emphasize the importance of each learner enjoying English classes and of every teacher being a good interlocutor.

In relation to this emphasis, an investigation on listening reveals it to be central to all learning. According to that investigation, more than forty-five percent of our total communication time is spent in listening; speaking takes thirty percent; reading takes sixteen percent; and writing, nine percent. Another report pointed out the difference between hearing and listening: hearing is passive–absorbing sounds without necessarily getting any meaning from them—whereas listening is active and requires attention, screening out distraction, thinking about what has been said. Recent research has given a new dimension to the importance of receptive skills like listening in gaining proficiency in language communication. Some researchers even insist that the key to achieving proficiency in speaking is the development of proficiency in LC.

Therefore, listening skill is a fundamental core skill which, first of all, has to be considered by learners and teachers on the basis of language acquisition order and the research above for effective English teaching and learning in Korean elementary schools.

If learners and teachers cannot receive, understand and follow the various exchanges or expressions in a classroom situation, they will not be able to