Principles of selection of educational material for developing English listening skills of high school students

Keywords: listening skills, high school students, didactic principles, problem-based learning.

Introduction

Owing to the constant changes in social, political and cultural life of all the countries in the world, intensification of international cooperation, there is a need for specialists who are able to speak a foreign language fluently (have good listening and speaking skills) in order to share information, exchange important experience as well as ideas. This fact determined the relevance of the chosen research topic.

Ability to communicate in English gives a perspective to work in international companies, ability to travel, opportunities to know the language which is one of the most widely known languages in the world. The ability to communicate a foreign language, and English in particular, comprises both the ability to perceive information uttered by a speaker and the ability to respond and maintain the conversation. According to researchers, of all the time a person spends communicating, the majority of this time is spent listening (45%) and speaking (30%). Reading and writing constitute only 16% and 9% of the time, re-
Thus, the development of listening skills is an integral part of mastering a foreign language.

The aim of the article is to analyze the process of teaching a foreign language and define the importance of proper selection of educational material in developing high school students’ foreign language listening skills.

The problem of the peculiarities of developing students’ foreign language listening skills was studied by A. Petrashchuk, O. Tarnopolsky, S. Vavilina, I. S. Nikolayeva, I. Borysenko, V. Ivanyshyna, Yu. Rybinska, C. Wallace and other researchers all over the world.

O. Tarnopolskyi defines listening as “a receptive kind of speech activity that provides understanding of what is being heard and belongs to the oral form of speech”\(^2\). He characterizes listening as an active process, emphasizing that anticipation or prediction of the information to be heard plays a significant role in it. However, prediction does not always contribute to an adequate perception of information, because if one is more focused on their own predictions than on the information they hear, it can lead to the loss of important details of the message and misunderstanding between the interlocutors. The listening process is further complicated by the fact that the difference in experience, interests and age of the interlocutors, as well as their attitude to the information being conveyed or discussed, can also complicate the process of understanding and, accordingly, responding to the information heard. Adequate perception and understanding of speech is an integral part of students’ foreign language communicative competence.

S. Nikolayeva defines listening as “understanding a person’s speech”, characterizing it as perceptual mnemonic mental activity\(^3\). Listening is a perceptual activity as in its course information conveyed through oral speech is perceived. The mnemonic nature of listening lies in the fact that a student, when listening to a certain part of text, recognizes words, juxtaposes them with the speech units he or she already knows and draws conclusions. Since the processes of analysis, synthesis, comparison, comparison, etc., take place in the process of listening and after the perception of a text, it can be stated that listening is a mental activity as well.

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Principles of developing students’ foreign listening skills

While organizing educational process it is important that one should take into consideration a number of methodological and didactic principles which determine the basic requirements for building up educational process. The adherence to these principles contributes to the achievement of learning goals and increases the effectiveness of study. Principles of teaching a foreign language have been researched by I. Bim, N. Gez, Yu. Passov, S. Shatilov and other scholars.

Principles of education are defined as the normative requirements and patterns of organization of the educational process, rules and norms resulting from them that enable to direct the learning process\(^4\). As S. Nikolayeva states, didactic principles of foreign language teaching include: the principle of active learning, realistic objectives, clarity, the strength of knowledge, systematic and consistent learning, accessibility, the principle of problem based learning, the principle of development through learning and the principle of collectivity. Methodological principles include the principle of communicativeness, consideration of the mother tongue, the dominant role of exercises, integrated teaching of different types of speech activity\(^5\), creativity and prevention of information redundancy\(^6\). Adherence to them in the process of forming a foreign language listening comprehension will allow organizing the lessons more efficiently and reaching the goal faster, will form students’ positive attitude to the process of learning in general and to mastering a foreign language as a subject. Further, some of the principles that form a basis for forming students’ foreign language listening skills will be analyzed.

Students act as subjects of the learning process and their active participation in the classroom depends on how quickly they are able to achieve their goals or how effectively they can improve the required skills. The principle of active learning is realized through enhancing students’ mental activity while developing foreign language speaking skills. With the appropriate organization of classes, students become active participants of the learning process. S. Nikolayeva\(^5\) distinguishes between emotional, intellectual and speech activity, and emphasizes that in order to achieve the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language their harmonious combination is important. The selection of interesting texts or videos, setting problem tasks, emotionality of lessons allow to involve students in active cognitive activity, which, in turn, promotes a steady interest in learning a foreign language and the effective development of listening skills.

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Effective development of a foreign language listening comprehension requires careful selection of materials. Texts or videos used in foreign language classes should be selected according to the principle of realistic objectives. S. Nikolayeva emphasizes that exercises should be appropriate to students’ foreign language level and the tasks should be understandable and clearly stated. The subject matter and volume of the texts influence students’ ability to perform the task assigned. Providing audio materials that would correspond to students’ foreign language skills and psychophysiological characteristics will allow them to effectively complete the task and achieve better results.

The use of visualization in teaching a foreign language allows creating situations of emotional perception of the material, which is the basis for the effective development of communicative skills and allows improving the ability to concentrate. The development of a foreign language listening comprehension is based on the use of hearing aids. The latter are closely related to, and can be combined with visual aids. Hence, in addition to using audio recordings, a teacher can demonstrate students feature films or video clips. The use of visual aids to form students’ listening skills will ensure a more successful development of listening comprehension and will enable students to become interested in learning a foreign language.

Studying a foreign language, students learn a large number of lexical units, grammatical constructions, set expressions and linguistic clichés. Achieving a good result in language learning has to do with how well these units or constructions are mastered, that is, with the strength of knowledge. The formation of listening skills is based on the principle of the strength of acquired knowledge, because in order to understand the text presented in an oral form, the lexical units or phrases necessary for this are actualized from the memory. It is possible to achieve the strength of acquired knowledge with the help of proper organization of the educational process, emotion-based learning of educational material, and systematic revision of the acquired knowledge. When learning new material, it is important to combine visual, auditory, tactile perception and speech. The processes of the formation of all language competences (auditory, lexical, communicative, etc.) are closely linked and the use of creative and problem based tasks, a sufficient amount of practice in using the material learned, constant and systematic control of students’ foreign language skills allow to effectively develop listening skills simultaneously improving students’ communicative and lexical skills.

The principle of strength is based on another didactic principle – the principle of systematic and consistent learning. It helps to ensure the systemic character of the process of learning a foreign language, the elements of which are

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organized in a clear sequence, result from and complement one another, creating a certain integrity. Learning lexical units and grammatical structures and including them in audio and video materials should occur sequentially, according to the principle from simple to complex.

A. Gavrilova emphasizes the need for a gradual organization of the process of forming students’ listening skills. The development of listening comprehension should begin with the process of adapting students’ hearing to the perception of foreign texts. Visual aids can be used to facilitate perception. Repeating the text perceived to yourself while listening to it will help students better remember the information they need. In order to remember the information heard in the text, students can retell it. The next step in the formation of listening skills will be listening to adapted texts with the possibility of re-listening and the use of visualization. In this case, the meaning of the lexical units unfamiliar to students is understood and remembered at the stage of listening to the text. At this stage, in order to remember the information perceived through listening, students can retell the text as well as answer questions, discuss what has been heard or take notes of the information heard. The next step in developing students’ listening skills is listening to authentic recordings that reflect situations of real communication (including background noise, unfinished sentences, fast speech, etc.). At this stage, key lexical units are explained to students, and the mechanism of anticipation is activated. After listening to the text, students should complete the missing information in the sentences, choose the correct answer, and define whether the proposed statements are true or false. Listening to audio material at this stage is followed by retelling the text, discussing it or performing problem-based tasks on the information heard. Gradually, the volume of texts and the complexity of lexical material increases, which ensures the consistency of the development of students’ foreign language listening skills.

Carrying out problem solving tasks in a foreign language class before or after listening to a text is the main point of the problem based learning. Such task organization will help prepare students for future professional activities, help motivate them to learn a foreign language, and improve their language skills as well as group work skills.

The development of any language or speech skills is subject to a sufficient number of exercises performed while learning. Adherence to the principle of the dominant role of exercises is necessary for the development of a sufficient level of listening comprehension. Listening skills and abilities will be on a good level

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10 Ibidem.
on condition that speech operations involved in the process of listening are constantly practiced. Therefore, a significant part of the educational process must be devoted to students’ performing a variety of listening exercises\textsuperscript{11}.

The sequence and types of tasks that students are offered to complete both in class and at home (as a part of their home assignment) should be organized in such a way as to reveal the students’ creativity. Reliance on the principle of creativity contributes to faster achievement of positive results by students in learning. According to Robert Weisberg, creativity is a mental activity that is inherent in all people\textsuperscript{12}. The teacher’s task is to organize the process of learning a foreign language in such a way that it activates students’ mental activity and, on the basis of it, to evoke in the students a feeling of being satisfied with their own work and its results as well as a positive attitude to foreign language as a subject. This, in turn, will help to generate sustainable motivation and to achieve better results in developing students’ foreign language listening skills.

Having analyzed the results of scientists’ research, we consider it advisable to adhere to the following additional principles of selection of educational material for the development of English listening comprehension skills that will supplement basic didactic and methodological principles: the principle of authenticity; the principle of novelty; correspondence to students’ communicative needs and their interests; informative content; national and cultural value; volume of the material\textsuperscript{13}.

The principle of authenticity emphasizes the necessity to use original audio recordings or texts in foreign language lessons. Original or authentic materials are considered to be those that represent real communication situations and are not created intentionally for educational purposes\textsuperscript{14}. The implementation of this principle requires from a teacher a thorough preparation for the lessons, because it is important not only to use authentic materials properly, but also to create authentic environment in the lesson. It is essential that such materials should be of interest to high school students and correspond to their foreign language level. Authentic audio and video materials help motivate students to learn the language, enhance students’ cognitive activity and foster the acquisition of new lexical units.

When choosing authentic materials for foreign language classes, the following criteria should be considered: perception comfort; the orientation to

\begin{enumerate}
\item S. Nikolayeva, \textit{Metodyka vykladannia inozemnykh mov u serednikh navchalnykh zakladakh}, Kyiv 2002.
\item Yu. Rybinska, \textit{Metodychni osnovy formuvannia inshomovnoi komunikatyvnoi kompetentnosti maibutnikh filolohiv zasobamy kreatyvnoho perekladu}, Ternopil 2013.
\item S. Vavilina, \textit{Metodyka navchannia maibutnikh zhurnalistiv profesiono orientovanoho chytannia na osnovi anhломовных пiar-текстив}. Dys...kand. ped. Nauk, Kyiv 2015.
\end{enumerate}
wards future as well as relevance to the curriculum and the content of learning. A text which is comfortable for perceiving is the one that contains new lexical material but is not overloaded with it. The principle of orientation towards future involves an opportunity to use the audio text for developing speaking skills and competence in the foreign language in general.

Authentic texts include speeches, interviews, reports, TV or radio broadcasts, comments, video reviews, and more. Authentic audio and video materials are designed not only to develop students’ listening skills but also to help them shape their own opinion of social phenomena, personal attitudes and aesthetic sense. Authentic audio materials make students become aware of the cultural peculiarities of the people whose language is being learned, their customs, traditions, behavior and mentality. Consequently, while developing listening comprehension skills, original materials contribute to the development of sociocultural competence and the improvement of communication skills. Discussing texts, films and videos, students learn to communicate in a foreign language, prove the correctness of their opinion, analyze events and phenomena, and deepen their own knowledge of the culture and peculiarities of the organization of life in other countries. Listening to authentic audio texts or watching videos followed by solving problem-based tasks teaches students collaboration and develops their group work skills which are important for high school students as they can be further used in their future professional activity.\(^\text{15}\)

Taking into account the criterion of the relevance to the curriculum and the content of learning allows selecting audio texts that will be useful not only during the classes, but will also contain information and describe situations which students will deal with in real life (at work, while on vacation, business trips, etc.).

Perception comfort is an important criterion when selecting audio texts, as they should be interesting, encourage students to familiarize themselves with the information they are provided.

The principle of novelty involves the selection of audio material that will be not only interesting to listeners but will also differ from the texts heard previously. It consists in the revision of educational material without repetition of information and is realized through the creation of new conditions for the development of listening skills, new forms of organizing classes, new techniques and types of work.\(^\text{16}\) New conditions for the development of listening skills include a variety of materials used for listening, new content filling (various combinations of lexical units or grammatical structures in the texts offered to students for listening). This provides for the development of listening skills while at the same time improving students’ lexical or grammatical skills. The novelty of the

\(^{15}\) M. Zabolotna, Metodyka navchannya audiuvannia anhlomovnykh publitsystychnykh tekstiv starshoklasnykiv v umovakh profilnoho navchannia. Dys….kand.ped.nayk, Kyiv 2014.

conditions of the development of listening skills is achieved through the use of various tasks (listening and filling in the gaps in the text, completing statements, determining true or false statements, answering questions on the audio text, etc.) and new types of texts (dialogue, monologue, telephone conversation, conversation at the airport, etc.). The number of participants and the nature of their relationships, their individual characteristics (age, gender, nationality) and the subject matter of the conversation or a text for listening may vary. The principle of novelty is based on the use of new organizational forms of work, in particular, pair work, group work, individual tasks or their combination.

Texts for listening in class should be selected in accordance with the principle of correspondence to the students’ communicative needs and interests. They should be based on students’ preferences, offer information that can be used by them in their future professional activities, or reflect situations of either everyday or business communication that students may face in the future. At the same time, it is important that listening texts correspond to students’ level of knowledge and their language skills. Such material will be interesting and will encourage students to take an active part in various activities in class, will help generate motivation to learn a foreign language and will assist in achieving success in the development of their listening comprehension skills.

The principle of informative content involves the use of texts for listening with interesting and sufficient content. At the same time, they should not be overloaded with information, since they should assist the development of listening skills and create a feeling of confidence in one’s ability to achieve success. The principle of informative content is related to the principle of the sufficient volume of audio materials. The length of the text to be listened to depends on where it will be heard (in the classroom or at home while doing home assignment). Audio recordings for classroom work for senior students should last no longer than 5–7 minutes, while audio material for listening outside the classroom may be larger in volume as it is not limited by the timeframe of the lesson and may be re-listened by students. At the same time, too long audio recordings or videos will get the listener tired, resulting in decreased concentration, which will lead to more mistakes and a feeling of inability to perform a task.

Selection of texts for listening in class must be based on the principle of the national and cultural value of audio materials. The materials offered to students must be up-to-date and contain information that reflects the life and realia of the country whose language is being taught. Such texts will not only contribute to the development of foreign language listening skills, but will also introduce students to the peculiarities of foreigners’ daily life, professional ethics, norms of behavior, national character, values and ideals of the people whose language is being taught. All these elements are important for achieving the primary objective of learning a foreign language – the development of a foreign language communicative competence.
Principles of Selection of Educational Material for Developing English...

Study description

The review of literature demonstrates that there is a connection between how the process of teaching a foreign language is organized and the development of students’ foreign language listening skills. Some high school students demonstrated better results when being offered creative tasks and authentic materials for listening. In addition, when being set realistic goals that correspond to their foreign language competence level and carrying out problem solving tasks, students were more encouraged to participate in class activities and more success-oriented. Motivated by these findings, we designed a study in order to investigate the connection between the organization of educational process on the basis of main didactic as well as methodological principles and students’ foreign language listening skills development.

The study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What is the level of English language listening skills of high school students under conditions of organization of English language acquisition without using authentic materials and problem solving tasks?
2. What is the level of English language listening skills of high school students who were immersed in the process of mastering a foreign language with the consideration of the principles of authentic materials and problem solving learning?
3. Is there a difference in the level of students’ listening skills between the students who were taught by means of authentic materials and problem solving tasks and those who were taught without using authentic materials and problem solving tasks?

It is hypothesized that students who were immersed in the process of developing English listening skills on the basis of the principles of authentic materials and problem solving tasks will report a significantly higher level of listening skills in comparison to the students who were taught without taking into consideration the principles of authentic materials and problem solving tasks. Research questions 1 and 2 are exploratory questions; therefore no hypotheses will be made concerning them.

The participants of the current study included 69 Ukrainian high school students learning the English language, who were further divided into two groups. The first group of students constituted 34 high school students who were taught without using authentic materials or problem solving tasks. The second group of Ukrainian students comprised 35 high school students who were taught listening skills on the basis of authentic materials and problem solving tasks.

The non-immersion group consisted of 34 Ukrainian high school students who had never lived in an English-speaking country. The majority of the participants (53%) were 16 years old, 41% of the participants were 17 years old and 2 participants were 18 years old (6%). All of them started learning English in
primary school. Before the experiment, the non-immersion group students had to complete a test, which made it possible to assess their English listening skills. The results of the test allowed us to make a conclusion that 14% of the participants (5 people) had excellent listening skills, 59% demonstrated good listening skills (20 people) and 14% of the participants (9 people) had satisfactory listening skills. All of the students were studying in the same class of a high school in their last year.

The immersion group consisted of 35 Ukrainian high school students who had never lived in an English-speaking country. More than half of the participants were 16 years old (20 people) and constituted 57% of the general number of students in the immersion group. Students at the age of 17 years old constituted almost half of the number of sixteen-year-olds (29%), while 14% of the students were at the age of 18 (5 people). All of them started learning English in primary school. Before the study, the immersion group students had to complete the same test as the non-immersion group students in order to make it possible to assess their English listening skills. The results of testing made it possible to draw a conclusion that 12% of the participants (4 people) had excellent listening skills, the majority (54%) of the students in the immersion group (19 people) demonstrated good listening skills, while 34% of the students in the group had satisfactory listening skills.

The results of the pre-experimental testing are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Results of the pre-experimental testing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Non-immersion group</th>
<th>Immersion group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 year-olds=53%</td>
<td>16 year-olds=57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 year-olds=41%</td>
<td>17 year-olds=29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 year-olds=6%</td>
<td>18 year-olds=14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English listening skills</td>
<td>Excellent=14%</td>
<td>Excellent=12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good=59%</td>
<td>Good=54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfactory=27%</td>
<td>Satisfactory=34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own data source.

It should be noted that both groups exhibited similar characteristics and had similar level of English listening skills. In the immersion group there were more students with satisfactory listening skills in comparison with the non-immersion group, while the amount of students with good listening skills in the non-immersion group was slightly higher. The number of participants demonstrating excellent listening skills differed by 2%.

The study employed two research instruments: a questionnaire and a listening test. The questionnaire included personal questions concerning age, gender, education of the participants, the presence or absence of the experience of living
in English-speaking countries as well as 6 questions on the students’ interests and their perception and evaluation of the teaching methods used in their English lessons. The students were also asked to assess their English listening skills level according to 5-grade scale (from 1 to 5 points).

**Data analysis and interpretation**

Following the questionnaire, an experimental study was carried out. It lasted four weeks. The non-immersion group was taught using traditional tasks that did not include problem-based learning or authentic materials. The immersion group was taught listening skills on the basis of problem solving tasks and authentic materials. After the experimental study, the two groups were given the same questionnaire where they were asked to assess their own listening skills and methods used in their English lessons as well as a listening test that made it possible to trace any changes in the students’ level of listening skills.

The results of the post-experimental questionnaire demonstrated a more positive attitude towards learning English among the students of the immersion group. They were more motivated to learn the language, found the authentic material used for listening tasks more interesting. However, the results of the students’ attitude to learning English in the non-immersion group remained almost the same as before the experiment.

The testing results demonstrated an improvement in students’ listening skills in the immersion group. In comparison with the pre-experimental testing results, after the experiment more students in the immersion group demonstrated excellent skills (6 students), which constituted 17% of the amount of the students in the immersion group (in comparison with 12% according to the results of the pre-experimental testing). The number of students demonstrating satisfactory listening skills slightly reduced (31% in comparison with 34% in the pre-experimental testing).

The non-immersion group demonstrated very similar results to those acquired in the pre-experimental testing. The amount of students demonstrating excellent listening skills has not changed in four weeks and constituted 14% of the total number of the students in the group. The amount of students with good listening skills slightly increased (21 students in comparison with 20 students in the pre-experimental testing) and constituted 61%.

**Conclusion**

Thus, the results of the experimental study enable us to draw a conclusion that students who are offered authentic materials while being taught listening
feel more motivated and are willing to actively participate in the lessons. Adherence to the principle of problem solving enables a teacher to encourage students’ active participation regardless their English language level and the level of their listening skills as well as form a more positive attitude towards mastering a foreign language, which leads to better results and makes it possible to develop students’ foreign listening skills in a more efficient way. As a result, achieving more positive results during the lessons, students are more motivated to participate in various activities and understand the significance of learning a foreign language, which gives them more opportunities to travel, to get to know the latest information and in the future, will assist in pursuing the career they will choose.

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Shatilov S., Metodika obuchenia nemetskomu yazyiku v sredney shkole, Prosveschenie, Moskva 1986.
The article deals with an interesting issue of learning English – it describes the process of teaching the language and shows different ways of understanding skills which are required in this process. The Author indicates the importance of language learning for the communication process, emphasizing the role of social competences. The article increases the reader’s awareness of the importance of language learning in modern world and raises medical issues related to learning. It is worth mentioning that the study was conducted in the form of an experiment, which is much more labor-intensive than single quantitative studies.

The development of international collaboration in the various spheres of human life requires from modern specialists not only to be professionals in the sphere they work at, but also to be able to communicate with residences of other countries with the aim of exchanging information, sharing experience and doing important scientific research that will bring positive results and benefits both for them personally and for people in their country in general. Communication in the foreign language cannot be possible without the ability to understand foreign speech and respond to it properly. The research demonstrates that students mastering a foreign language regularly report difficulties in understanding other people’s speech. This paper addresses the important but often neglected issue of the proper organization of the process of teaching a foreign language listening skills to secondary schools students. It focuses on the importance of taking into consideration didactic and methodological principles of teaching a foreign language and possible ways of incorporating them into the organization of the process of a foreign language acquisition.
Rozwój współpracy międzynarodowej w różnych sferach życia wymaga od młodych specjalistów nie tylko profesjonalizmu w sferze, w której działają, ale i umiejętności komunikowania się z mieszkańcami innych krajów w celu wymiany informacji, dzielenia się doświadczeniem prowadzenia badań, które przyniosą korzyści obu stronom. Porozumiewanie się w obcym języku jest niemożliwe bez zrozumienia obcej mowy. Badania pokazują, że uczniowie opanowujący obcy język informują o trudnościach w zrozumieniu mowy innych użytkowników języka obcego. Artykuł odnosi się do często zaniedbanego zagadnienia odpowiedniej organizacji procesu nauczania języka obcego w szkole średniej w zakresie nabywania umiejętności słuchania. Skupiono się w nim na regulach dydaktycznych i metodologicznych w nauczaniu języka obcego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** umiejętność słuchania, studenci, zasady dydaktyczne, uczenie się problemowe.