**HRD Developing Listening Skills.**

**Master 1**

**Introduction**

Professional development accommodates teachers as learners, recognizes the long-term nature of learning, and utilizes methods that are likely to lead teachers to improve their practice as professionals.

Though the recipient of TPD is the teacher, the ultimate intended beneficiary is the student. There is general agreement that learning to teach is a lifelong process, and teachers must be equipped with sufficient knowledge, skill, and awareness in order to carry out their jobs.

According to Richards & Farrell (2005) teacher training consists of the process of focusing importance on the teacher’s current needs and activities, on the immediate goals they need to reach, may be in a short period of time. Also, it is the process that teachers who are about to start their teaching career, need to go through as a requirement to be able to teach, since in it, they recognize the principles and concepts that need to be applied in their teaching practice.

To become effective educators, teachers must become knowledgeable about the importance of language skills in the learning process.Listening is one of those vital skills in all areas of academic life. Effective listening is required so that students to understand formal lectures and tutorials, as well as to interact with other students in small groups, in project work, and in social situations.

Listening provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication.

Listening is the receptive use of language, and since the aim is to understand speech, the focus is on meaning rather than language **(Cameron, 2001).**

Listening changes spoken language into input (it is the first stage of learning a new language).

* The listening process involves five stages: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding.
* Active listening is a particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker.

EFL learners have serious problems in English listening comprehension due to the fact that universities pay more attention to English grammar, reading and vocabulary. Listening and speaking skills are not important parts of many course books or curricula and teachers do not seem to pay attention to these skills while designing their lessons. EFL English language learners have limited listening comprehension.

**O‘Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989)** offer a useful and more extensive definition that listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic resources to fulfill the task requirement **(p.19).**

**Listening challenges for English language learners**

There are many difficulties an individual may face in understanding a talk, lecture or conversation in a second language .The speaker, the situation and the listener can all be the cause of these difficulties.

Contributing factors include the speaker talking quickly, background noise, a lack of visual clues (such as on the telephone), the listener’s limited vocabulary, a lack of knowledge of the topic, and an inability to distinguish individual sounds.

While the challenges posed by the speaker or the situation may be out of the listener’s hands, there are a few skills or 'strategies' that English learners can use to help them along.

This misunderstanding may stem from the fact that superficially learners seem to only sit in a language lab quietly, listen to pre-recorded dialogues, and write the answers to some questions related to the oral stimulus. It is evident, then, that listening is not as passive as it has been claimed to be as it demands a number of complicated processes on the part of the learners.

**STRATEGIES OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION**

Teachers vary the methods and activities according to how well they know about the skill in question.Consequently, effective teachers require re-examining their basic principles, methodologies and trainings, such as, through a teaching reflection.

* **Choose Comprehensible Input**

The most important thing the learner must do when looking to improve his listening skills is **listening to material that he already mostly understands**.

This kind of material, known as **"comprehensible input",** is any audio content that is slightly above your current skill level.

Everyone's level is slightly different, so this is hard to quantify in objective terms; however, comprehensible input is any audio source that you can already understand at least 60%-80% of.

It may seem counter-intuitive to listen to material that is just above your skill level, but it is actually extremely important.

This is because if the language leaner listens to things that he mostly does not understand, he will spend the majority of his time frustrated and confused. He may decipher a few words here and there, but he will struggle to piece together the gist of what is happening.

To reach the kind of high level, it is necessary to build a "ladder" of comprehensible input. Start with what he understands, and then gradually listens to harder and harder audio materials as his level increases.

- **The top-down and bottom-up processing**

listening comprehension involves both bottom-up and top-down processing that are assumed to take place at various levels of cognitive organization: phonological, grammatical, lexical and propositional. In the bottom-up processing, listeners attend to data in the incoming speech signals whereas; in top-down processing the listeners utilize prior knowledge and expectations to create meaning. There are two subsuming cognitive processes: bottom-up (data-driven) and top-down (conceptually-driven).

**Bottom-upprocessing** uses the incoming input as the basis for understanding the message. Comprehension begins with the data received, and analysed. Listeners hear and analyze sounds, words, clauses, sentences, texts to understand the meaning of what he listens to. Comprehension is viewed as a process of decoding. A listener’s lexical and grammatical competence in a language provides the basis for bottom-up processing. The input is scanned for familiar words, and grammatical knowledge is used to understand the relationship between elements of sentences **(Clark and Clark 1977)**. Bottom-up strategies are, thus, text based; the listener concentrates on the language in the message (combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning).Use stress and intonation to identify word and sentence functions...

**The bottom-up processing**involves constructing meaning from the smallest unit of the spoken language to the largest one in a linear mode **(Nunan, 1998).**

**The top-down processing,** on the other hand, refers to interpreting meaning as intended by the speakers by means of schemata or structures of knowledge in the mind **(Nunan, 1998).** This view emphasizes the prominence of background knowledge already possessed by the learners in making sense of the information they hear. In the aural perception, the prior knowledge may facilitate their attempt to grasp the incoming information by relating the familiar with the new one, and significant lack of such knowledge can **hamper** their efforts to comprehend a particular utterance.

**In the classroom**  
In real-life listening, students will have to use a combination of the two processes, with more emphasis on top-down or bottom-up listening depending on their reasons for listening. However, the two types of listening can also be practised separately, as the skills involved are quite different.

**The Use of ICT**

Learners can use ICT (Information Communication Technology) in developing and improving their language skills, in particular listening comprehension for the following good reasons:

- Current university students have been characterised as the “Net Generation” **(Oblinger&Oblinger, 2005; Barnes, Marateo, & Ferris, 2007; Prensky, 2001)** and “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet **(Presnky, 2001).** Learners today have high expectations when it comes to technology and they expect a language school or programme to offer opportunities to use technology in their courses, for example via a well-equipped self-access centre **(Sharma & Barrett, 2007).**

- The use of technology outside the language classroom or in the self-access centre can make learners more autonomous. One key feature of using technology in learning is that it allows language practice and study away from the confines of the classroom at your own pace anywhere: a hotel room, the office, an Internet café, at home or, of course, in the self-access language centre.

New ICT skills learnt in the classroom (e.g. Internet search skills) can be transferred to real life. Using a range of ICT tools and a web-based environment can give learners exposure to practicing listening regularly, and consequently, become a more effective listener.

- While listening to digital audio or watching a video clip, learners have the opportunity to pause at will, and listen and read a transcript. Moreover, learners can get instant feedback on what they have done (e.g. you watch a video clip/listen to audio and check answers immediately after watching/listening).

Learners can access authentic websites, as well as websites for EFL/ESL learners. As learners become used to selecting and evaluating listening materials, they are able to plan out their own use of web-based materials in their own time. This helps them become effective listeners and independent learners.

**The role of in-service training**

**In-service training** is important for teachers to face new challenges and changes in the education world. In-service training is also a fundamental aspect to improve teacher professionalism. The effectiveness of in-service training is important so that teachers can apply the knowledge acquired in teaching and learning. Few factors that contribute towards the effectiveness of in-service training are role of administrator, attitudes of teachers, training needs and strategies in conducting in-service training.

Professional development takes many forms, such as: when teachers plan activities together; when a master teacher observes a young teacher and provides feedback; and when a team of teachers observes a video lesson and reflects on and discusses the lesson. These methods of TPD are all more effective models of teacher learning than simple training. Teachers need a wide variety of ongoing opportunities to improve their skills.

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**In-SERVICE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL**

**DEVELOPMENT PACKAGE (ITPD) IN**

**ENGLISH at SECONDARY STAGE.**