

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

While this study focused on listening comprehension and note-taking in the EFL classroom, it also provided insights into the larger issues in teaching EFL to students of diverse backgrounds. This chapter discusses the challenges in teaching EFL students and the key findings pertaining to students' problems and teaching-learning strategies relevant to listening comprehension classes. It concludes by discussing the implications of these findings to relevant parties as well as by presenting my insights from the action research process.

Challenges in Teaching EFL Students

With the increasing demand from foreign students towards English language courses, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is fast becoming a significant field in this country where English is usually taught as a Second Language.

EFL courses offered by private educational institutions in Malaysia have attracted people from various countries which has actually brought together students from diverse backgrounds in the classrooms of such institutions. This marks a change from the scenario in the classrooms of local schools whereby a very large population of the students is made up of the three main races; Malays, Chinese and Indians. This also goes to show that teachers of EFL courses have to be prepared to face an experience which is slightly different from that of teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL). Unlike ESL teachers, most EFL teachers have to deal with students

who do not share a common language such as Bahasa Malaysia with them. This therefore necessitates that they use only English in the classrooms.

In most EFL classrooms, students are placed based on their proficiency level and not on their age group. This means that EFL teachers not only face the challenge of dealing with students from diverse backgrounds but also from different age groups in the same class. Very often these students from different age groups might have different needs for the English language. Thus, the field of teaching EFL which is relatively new in this country, requires a substantial amount of research to equip teachers, curriculum developers, institutions offering EFL courses and other parties involved with the necessary knowledge and expertise to ensure that they can contribute towards providing quality English language teaching.

This being the case, this study focuses on one very essential element in the area of teaching EFL which is the listening skill. Listening is a receptive skill through which the learner receives input of the target language. It is hoped that this study would draw more attention on the listening skill which I feel has not been accorded sufficient attention in the teaching and learning of English. This study provides beginning insights which may be developed through further research on other aspects of the listening skill. It will also hopefully evoke interest in researching other areas in teaching EFL such as reading, writing and speaking.

Key Findings

The key findings of this study discusses the problems EFL students faced in listening comprehension and in note-taking and the teaching-learning strategies undertaken to overcome these problems. The teaching-learning strategies are discussed in relation to the particular problems that emerged during the course of the study.

The following insights may be used to develop guidelines for teaching listening to EFL students.

Playing of Audio-tapes

One important insight that I derived from this study is when students listen to an audio-text for the first time, they should not be expected to take down notes because the process of writing can interfere with the mental processes of listening. Students should get an understanding of the content-matter of the audio-text before they take down notes. The tape should be played three times because in the first round of playing, students will be able to get at least a vague understanding of the content-matter and in the subsequent rounds of playing, they will be able to take down notes. I learnt that three rounds of playing were necessary because it not only reinforced the input that they heard through repetition but it also enabled students to confirm or check the notes they had already taken down.

Familiarity of Topic

This study revealed that familiarity with the topic was very important for EFL students to comprehend the content-matter of audio-texts. However, teachers should not give too much of the information found in the audio-texts as it might dilute the impact of the text and students might also grow dependant on teachers for information. Thus, students should be asked to research or read up for information on the topics of the audio-texts so that they will be able to contribute to discussions on these topics. This also shows that pre-listening is an important phase of a listening lesson because it is best that the topic of the audio-text be discussed right before

they listen to the audio-text so that the discussion is fresh in their memory and they are able to relate it to the content matter of the audio-text.

Dealing with the Language of Audio-texts

I learnt from this study that unfamiliar vocabulary and phrases were factors which hampered students' comprehension of the audio-texts. As such, it is crucial to familiarise students with words or phrases which could be new to students and also words and phrases which occur frequently in the audio-texts. I am able to conclude from this again that the pre-listening phase is a necessity in a listening lesson because these words and phrases should be introduced during this phase.

Inability to discriminate sounds led to students' misinterpretation of certain words and also their inability to spell words correctly. Problems in spelling words correctly could also be attributed to students' lack of knowledge of words. Although there are times when students are able to understand what they hear but their inability to put it down in writing correctly affects their performance in listening comprehension. Hence, it is useful to introduce the sounds or pronunciation and the spellings of words before listening to the audio-texts.

Note-taking Strategies

Writing down notes and answers in class text books or on a sheet of paper which has no lecture outline was found to lead to confusion when students referred to them later. Teachers of the listening skill must ensure that proper worksheets with the lecture outline and sufficient space to write down notes and answers are provided in listening activities which require students to take down notes. However, this may

not be necessary in tasks which only require students to circle or tick the answers or write out short answers.

Speed played an important role in students' ability in note-taking. Some students were able to understand what they heard but due to lack of speed, they were unable to write them down. As the words and phrases were purged from their memory due to an overload of information, they were unable to write them down later. In order to gain speed while note-taking, the use of abbreviations or short forms was necessary. The normal method of abbreviation was not very effective because students still had to write out the short forms which was time consuming, students forgot what the abbreviated forms represented when they looked at them later and it was difficult for students to determine the spellings of words based on the abbreviated forms. Another method of abbreviation was to draw simple symbols beside the words to be abbreviated on the worksheet provided and later use these symbols to represent the words while note-taking. I would not consider this method as the best method of abbreviation because students had to refer to the list of words and symbols and while doing so they got distracted from the audio-text.

Conclusion

Several valuable insights were derived with regards to the problems EFL students faced in listening comprehension and the strategies undertaken to overcome these problems from the findings of this study. These insights will not only help me to be more sensitive towards my students' needs in the listening class but they will also allow me to improve the teaching and learning of listening comprehension and note-taking.

Implications of the Study

Among the parties that will benefit from this study apart from myself as a teacher are other teachers of the English language, specifically teachers of EFL courses, curriculum developers of English language courses, educational administrators of institutions offering EFL courses and students pursuing English language courses mainly EFL courses.

Implications to EFL Teachers of Listening Comprehension

This study will be a guide to teachers of the listening skill because it not only exposes them to the problems students face in the listening component but it also prepares them to deal with these problems. This study has also uncovered certain areas which EFL teachers of the listening skill should give attention to. Among these areas are unfamiliarity of topic, difficulty with language of texts, unfamiliarity with structure of texts, inability to concentrate on text and take down notes, inability to organise notes and inability to abbreviate. Having an awareness of the areas in which problems in listening comprehension and note-taking are located, teachers can also be more alert towards other problems which may arise in these areas and also experiment further to identify other strategies which can produce better results in facilitating the teaching-learning process of the listening component.

This study can also create an awareness among teachers on the importance of giving students a sense of achievement in the listening skill without placing too much of emphasis on its assessment. Besides this, teachers can also draw the mechanics of conducting listening lessons through the description of the action research process and the outcomes of the study.

Implications to Curriculum Developers

This study will be beneficial to curriculum developers of EFL courses. A knowledge of the problems in the teaching and learning of the listening skill will give an idea of the aspects to be considered when designing the curriculum for the listening component of EFL courses. The findings of this study will also benefit curriculum developers when reviewing the efficacy of present EFL curriculum so that the necessary changes can be made for the improvement of the courses. Among the aspects from which curriculum developers can draw insights from this study are the time to be allocated for listening lessons, the materials to be used, the phases in a listening lesson and the procedures to be undertaken in a listening lesson.

Implications to Educational Administrators of Institutions Offering EFL Courses

Educational administrators play a crucial role in putting into practice the curriculum of EFL courses. This study prepares educational administrators to take the necessary measures to ensure the efficacy of the teaching and learning of the listening skill in EFL courses. Among other things, educational administrators will get an idea of the resources and facilities they have to provide for the teaching and learning of the listening skill and the procedures they have to administer to ensure that the listening skill is taught as planned.

Implications to EFL Students

In this study, the problems intermediate level EFL students faced in comprehending recorded lectures and in note-taking were identified so that the appropriate strategies could be undertaken to overcome these problems. It could be

safely said that the strategies undertaken were helpful to a certain extent in improving most of the students' listening skills. However, I am aware that this study was channelled towards helping students comprehend recorded lectures which is a slightly different experience from listening to real lectures. As most of these students aspire to pursue their education in colleges, they might encounter a different experience when listening to real lectures. Nevertheless, this study has set the first step in preparing students to listen to real lectures. Most importantly, it has given most of the students some sense of achievement in the listening class. This sense of achievement is vital in instilling an interest in the students towards the listening skill in particular and the learning of English in general.

Conclusion

As a teacher and researcher, I have derived some valuable insights from this study. As Hopkins (1985) has described, the action research framework helped me to recognise my shortcomings in my teaching activities and problems in students' learning processes. This enabled me to design and implement strategies which seemed appropriate, evaluate them and develop further strategies to get the desired results. Apart from helping my students to develop their listening skills, this study has also contributed towards my own professional growth and development as a teacher. I can safely say that in my efforts in researching and teaching the listening skill, I have been able to upgrade the quality of the teaching and learning of this skill to a reasonable extent. As the teaching-learning strategies produced by this study are viable not only for me but also other teachers of listening, it holds the prospect of contributing to improving the quality of the teaching and learning of this skill.

I have to admit that the results produced by some of the strategies undertaken were not up to my expectation. Besides, despite all the steps I undertook to help my students, I saw little improvement in four students right till the end. However, I can safely say from the improvement that I saw in most of my other students, that I was able to help them overcome their problems in listening comprehension to a certain extent.

Professionally, I would describe this experience as an enlightening one because it has made me more alert and sensitive towards my students' problems and my weaknesses as a teacher in the listening class. This study has given me the inspiration to do further research to probe into other problem areas in teaching EFL in order to improve students' performance and upgrade the quality of the teaching and learning to these foreign learners of English who present a particular challenge to Malaysian teachers of English.