Empowering language learning: the impact of TED talks on listening skills and beyond

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Abstract. This article delves into the transformative impact of TED Talks on the students’ listening skills. It explores how TED Talks captivate learners through their engaging and meaningful content, making language practice an exciting endeavor. By highlighting their attentive reactions to these talks, it reveals their role in enhancing listening comprehension. Through the marriage of visuals and sound in authentic video materials, TED Talks empower students to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world language usage. Moreover, this article uncovers their significant contributions in improving oral presentation skills and bolstering vocabulary retention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. It emphasizes the motivational aspect, as TED Talks inspire active participation and dynamic discussions. Instructors also benefit from these readily available resources, ultimately streamlining their teaching efforts. In summary, this article underscores the compelling and effective nature of TED Talks in enhancing students' listening skills and overall language proficiency.

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Various factors suggest the beneficial impact of incorporating TED videos into foreign language classrooms to enhance students' listening skills. Firstly, students display enthusiasm and excitement when it comes to honing their listening abilities through TED Talks. TED offers them engaging and meaningful content, which makes listening practice more enjoyable.

Furthermore, it has been noticed that students display a notable level of focus when viewing TED videos, which is evident through their facial expressions. These expressions reflect their comprehension, confusion, or moments of distraction. Utilizing authentic video materials in teaching listening amplifies students' listening comprehension. The visual imagery and audio components within these videos stimulate students' perception, thereby enhancing their ability to understand the spoken language. Moreover, the spontaneous tone and speech speed in TED Talks closely resemble real-life situations. Consequently, it can be inferred that TED Talk videos play a significant role in fostering the listening comprehension of language learners.

The connection that TED Talks establish between the classroom and the real world motivates students to recognize the relationship between learning and practical application. TED Talk videos are widely acknowledged for being more potent and comprehensible compared to other media sources for second and foreign language students. Additionally, these videos kindle students' motivation for engaging in discussions, as evidenced by questionnaire data. Unlike other English resources, TED Talk videos not only provide information but also incite questions, conversations, and even debates within the classroom.

Furthermore, TED Talks serve as a valuable tool for enhancing various skills, including oral presentation, vocabulary retention, and cognitive abilities. They also help alleviate speaking anxiety, particularly in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Research findings have demonstrated that students' oral presentation skills and vocabulary retention levels exhibit improvement when TED Talks are incorporated into their learning. Students become more motivated, enthusiastic about delivering oral presentations, and develop increased confidence while
shedding anxiety and tension. These resources hold great significance in EFL listening classrooms.

TED Talks offer several advantages: they are freely accessible and encompass a wide array of topics, speakers, and English accents. They cater to varying difficulty levels, lengths, and speeds. TED Talks can be viewed on multiple platforms such as smart TVs, laptops, tablets, and mobile phones both in and out of the classroom, allowing students to access them whenever and wherever they choose. These talks bring listening courses to life, enabling EFL students to engage their visual and auditory senses in the process of learning new concepts, exploring unfamiliar ideas, and gaining inspiring and motivating information. Importantly, TED Talks save instructors time and effort as they are readily available online, eliminating the need for instructors to create their own lecture videos or supplementary listening materials.

Instructors can share TED Talks they find valuable with colleagues teaching similar courses. The role of the instructor becomes that of a facilitator. They should provide support, address students' difficulties, encourage and model the listening skills students need to practice. Students should be encouraged to actively engage in listening activities, respond, and participate. Instructors can offer extra credit for participation and completion of listening tasks, even including excerpts from TED Talks in tests.

Lessons with TED Talks are highly regarded for their variety, interest, inspiration and support in developing oral communication skills. They promote the development of listening, speaking, and interaction skills when used as a supplementary resource in teaching English as a foreign language to university students. TED Talks are valuable due to their authenticity, variety, and suitability for various purposes, such as conducting listening comprehension exercises, observing body language during presentations, or serving as a basis for discussions.

TED Talks can be attended in person, or recordings of the talks can be accessed as videos or podcasts via the TED website [https://www.ted.com] or YouTube [https://www.youtube.com]. Visitors to the TED website can
select their areas of interest and browse videos by topic, language, duration, event year, speaker name, and description. For those interested in a particular topic, there are often multiple videos available on the same subject, presented by different speakers. TED is owned by a nonpartisan foundation with the agenda of making great ideas accessible and sparking conversations.

Despite the initial exclusivity of TED events, they are now open to all who wish to attend. The availability of TED Talks as online recordings, free of cost, makes them accessible to people around the world. TED welcomes people from all disciplines and cultures who seek a deeper understanding of the world, thus fostering a worldwide community with various events held throughout the year. TED aims to provide free knowledge from inspired thinkers and create a community of curious minds to engage with ideas and each other.

Students learn through listening in situations where the general meaning is clear and comprehensible. Eliminating the fear of speaking is also essential. Watching TED Talk recordings before discussions in lessons helps students overcome potential fears and engage in communication by observing inspirational presenters introducing interesting topics in a straightforward manner. Language teachers have long used technology to practice listening. From traditional tools like analog audio and language labs to contemporary online resources, technology elevates the learning experience, increases language exposure, and infuses excitement into the educational process.

There are various advantages to using TED Talk videos. Firstly, TED Talk videos are fascinating due to their wide range of themes, including technology, entertainment, design, business, science, and global challenges. Secondly, each TED Talk includes a unique "interactive transcript" feature, creating an enjoyable experience of combining reading and audiovisual materials. Furthermore, TED videos are easily shareable; learners can quickly share links on social media or save them as offline resources. They are also searchable in various ways, allowing listeners to choose topics of personal interest. Most importantly, TED Talks can be viewed
anytime and from anywhere with an internet connection. They are accessible on various devices, including tablets, smartphones, laptops, and PCs. TED Talks can excite and inspire individuals who want to learn independently, promoting self-directed and independent learning among students.

At present, the TED platform is one of the richest and most frequently updated sources of instructional videos. It offers numerous talks on relevant topics, making it ideal for students with upper-intermediate levels of English proficiency and above. Although most videos are about 20 minutes long, teachers may need to dedicate an entire lesson to one video. Therefore, TED Talks are particularly relevant for online instruction and self-paced learning. Another undeniable benefit of TED Talks is their easy integration into various learning platforms, such as Moodle and Google Classroom.

The effectiveness of utilizing TED Talks primarily lies in enhancing students' listening skills. Engaging in repeated listening exercises with video clips contributes significantly to the development of these skills. Teachers can create a variety of assignments to reinforce listening abilities, ranging from standard true/false tasks to gap-filling exercises, and assignments that are more creative.

The TED Talks website offers interactive listening comprehension exercises that further aid in comprehension. These exercises, such as the "think" exercise, focus on assessing comprehension of the video content. The "dig deeper" section provides additional thematic information, while the "discuss" option encourages students to delve into problematic issues and initiate discussions.

In addition to improving listening skills, TED Talks also play a pivotal role in building students' lexical abilities. The video content reflects the use of contemporary language, which may not always be found in traditional textbooks. TED Talks speakers offer an authentic linguistic experience, making them valuable resources for teaching vocabulary.

During the teaching process, teachers can leverage the text accompaniment provided with video recordings to compile a list of essential lexical units for pre-viewing, viewing,
and post-viewing exercises. In some cases, explanations for lessons are also included. To bolster lexical skills, instructors can create exercises that involve selecting the correct word in context or matching words with their interpretations.

Additionally, TED materials indirectly influence the development of students' grammatical skills. While this influence is implicit, it is noteworthy. When analyzing video discourse, teachers should pay attention to the grammatical structures employed, reinforce the correct rules, and clarify the features of the grammatical elements in use.

Moreover, students express their preferences for various activities related to listening. Many students find enjoyment in prediction exercises and vocabulary games during pre-listening activities. These activities not only enhance their language skills but also allow them to learn in an enjoyable and engaging manner. Furthermore, competitive formats of these exercises motivate students to outperform their peers in finding the correct answers.

Debate activities have also captured the interest of students. These activities involve case building, critical thinking, and debating pros and cons. Given that TED Talks often feature academic content and research-based topics, students are naturally inclined to engage in debates, especially when the subject matter relates to the cultural values of different countries.

Additionally, students find pleasure in post-listening activities such as discussions, role-playing, dialogue construction, and writing exercises. These activities provide them with the opportunity to express their understanding of the TED Talk content and engage with it on a deeper level.

The benefit of watching TED Talks lies in the various advantages they provide. These conferences provide a unique opportunity to engage with authentic speech, enrich students’ vocabulary, and enhance their listening comprehension skills. TED Talks are essentially narratives woven from the personal experiences of the speakers, their reflections on various issues, and practical advice that can be applied in real life. A significant benefit is that all TED Talks come with transcripts and subtitles, which are available in multiple
languages.

Furthermore, TED Talks often include a list of references. Nearly every TED speaker recommends books or articles related to the topic of their lecture. This serves as an invaluable resource for gaining in-depth knowledge and delving further into the subject matter. Watching these lectures can also contribute to the improvement of students’ public speaking skills. While watching them, they can observe how the speakers captivate the audience, the techniques they employ, their use of gestures and facial expressions, and the overall structure of their talks. This offers an excellent opportunity to study the English language in context, including the introduction, topic presentation, feedback checking phrases, and humor. Most importantly, TED Talks are a wellspring of inspiration. Unlike other educational videos, every TED Talk addresses something exceptional and significant. They serve as a powerful source of motivation, broadening students’ horizons and providing a more expansive perspective on the world.

In conclusion, the influence of TED Talks on students' listening skills is undeniably transformative. This article has illuminated the numerous benefits they contribute to the process of learning a language. TED Talks are instrumental in captivating learners through engaging and meaningful content, effectively bridging the gap between the classroom and real-world language usage. They enhance listening comprehension, motivate active participation, and inspire dynamic discussions. Additionally, these talks prove invaluable in developing oral presentation skills and reinforcing vocabulary retention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. The readily accessible and diverse nature of TED Talks further simplifies the teaching process, making them an attractive resource for instructors.

Incorporating TED Talks into language learning provides a dynamic and effective approach that enhances students' overall language proficiency. It fosters a deeper understanding of the language, stimulates self-directed learning, and inspires students to explore new horizons. Overall, TED Talks stand as a compelling and effective tool to elevate students' listening skills and language
competition, ensuring a richer and more engaging learning experience.

References: