

Writing for the Ears!

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Abstract

The conventional way of education, coupled with audio and video resources, can help in understanding and retention of subjects or concepts. The paper, with respect to challenges faced in the education sector, elaborates the impact of adding complementary elements of mass media technology. Further, it categorises the different factors on which learning is dependent.

INTRODUCTION

Education technology plays a significant role in the area of school education. In today's schools, teachers are encouraged to use teaching aids like audio, video, graphics, etc., to supplement their classroom teaching. The demand for such aids has considerably increased since the last decade.

The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), an apex body for promoting school education in India, has been working extensively in this area. The NCERT has six constituent units. One of which is the Central Institute

of Educational Technology (CIET). The CIET is a nodal agency dedicated to promoting the use of mass media technology for expanding and improving the quality of education at the primary and secondary school level. The Institute is funded by the Ministry of Education, erstwhile Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The CIET has many projects and programmes. One such programme is the National Repository of Educational Resources (NROER), a collaborative platform that brings together people interested in school and teacher education. Initiated by

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the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, the NROER is managed by the CIET. The Repository was developed to address the challenges faced by the education sector in our country. It offers digital resources for all school subjects and grades in multiple languages, such as educational videos, audios, graphics and images, documents and interactive modules. Besides, it allows one to contribute one's own resources.

LISTENING — A KEY SKILL

Listening is a key skill in language comprehension. Language teachers, in particular, are familiar with the concepts of LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing). If listening as a skill is developed among learners, it will benefit them immensely in learning not only a language(s) but in other subject areas as well. However, due to practical problems in making texts available (quality recordings), the listening aspect is largely neglected in schools.

A person will listen to an audio programme only if it seems to be of interest. In other words, it is important to capture the listener's interest. This requires an engrossing and attractive script. The script for an audio programme will be different from that of a newspaper article or report and even a video programme. In audio, one writes for the ears and lets the listeners' imagination to do the rest. This means one is

writing not for the eyes but for the ears. In print, a person can always get back to what was written in the earlier paragraphs just by turning the pages. Of course, one can press the pause and rewind button in audio programmes, but this process is slightly more time-consuming, and hence, distractive as compared to reading.

Few points that must be kept in mind while developing an audio programme are as follows.

Identification of content matters

The most important aspect for writing in any media format is the selection of content or identification of a topic. There are many subjects but the most important is selecting a topic suitable for an audio programme. For example, one must avoid writing on complicated calculations of mathematics, physics or economics for an audio programme. Instead, one must choose interesting parts from history, language or perhaps simple science concepts, and so on.

Length of sentences

Long sentences are tedious to listen to, and hence, boring. Most of the time, the listener loses track and forgets the context being talked about. Moreover, long sentences do not serve the purpose, which is to capture the listener's attention. A lengthy sentence would mean going through many words, which makes it hard to process the information. Besides, the original idea or overall message may get lost in this sea of words. If the script is heavy,

laden with long-winded sentences with complex words, the listener will switch off the recorder, and certainly not be attentive. Consider the following example.

We left the parcel in a narrow street by the church, while Navin, our leader, entered the shadowy doorway of a tall building, some of which consisted of residential flats and some seemed to be empty offices.

The above sentence has 38 words and cannot be considered short. But it is easy to understand. This is 'writing for the ears'. The main subject, 'we' is uttered right in the beginning. The sentence goes on to introduce the second subject 'Navin' and verb 'entered', providing clarity to the listeners.

A man stopped by the police in New Delhi more than two years ago on suspicion of drunk driving recently was lucky enough to have all charges against him dismissed by a judge.

The sentence is not only too long but lacks clarity as well.

You may think that long sentences need to be broken into shorter sentences so that the basic idea is conveyed effectively. The present generation tends to use shorter sentences. Perhaps, it is the influence of SMS and e-mails. It also reflects the lack of time in today's fast-paced world. However, the question is not whether to use long or short sentences, but whether a sentence is communicating what is intended to be communicated.

Too many long and complicated sentences, one after another, will slow the pace of comprehension. Yet, too many short sharp sentences, uttered in quick succession, will in all likelihood confuse learners. Consider the following examples.

My essay is not good. It's too short. It doesn't flow well. It won't interest anyone. They won't read it.

Notice how the writing in this example seems broken. Now, let us examine whether this writing can be improved by 'writing for the ears'.

My essay does not look good because it's too short and doesn't have flow. Readers are likely to lose interest.

Factors affecting listening comprehension

Long sentences loaded with alien words and relative clauses, usually, do not work well in the audio medium. We must try not to overwrite. Being concise is one of the important factors of communication skill. Some of the factors that affect listening comprehension are as follows.

Clarity

This refers to the structuring of a sentence, whether it is carefully thought out or a carelessly written one. Often, people use words carelessly. 'Carelessness' indicates not lack of knowledge or poor grammar but is symptomatic of deeper malaise mental laziness. In an audio programme, it is the words that speak. Errors in

punctuation, plural forms, etc., are easily prevented, provided one pays attention. The following are examples from various research papers and articles. Errors in the preceding examples do not require specialised knowledge of English to be identified.

A carelessly written sentence, for example, would be like this. Most Indian households have a number of children whose needs are much higher than their earning.

If the script is weak, the programme will collapse. But if the script is clear, flowing and strong, half the battle is already won. In other words, a quality programme cannot be made out of a boring script. However, the need of recapitulation cannot be denied. Thus, the length of a sentence is immaterial. It is the clarity of thought that counts.

Accuracy

The script must always convey accurate information. The act of processing information through the ears is different from visual and graphic inputs. Therefore, it is important that the script provides the required information in sequence. Further, the language used should be age appropriate with familiar vocabulary. Use words that correctly convey the intended meaning, for example, there is a difference between ‘starving’ and ‘fasting’, and ‘refuse’ and ‘deny’. Scientific or technical terms and jargons may be used only if relevant to the programme. Only well-known abbreviations should be used. One must follow what famous

English novelist George Orwell once said, “Never use a long word where a short word will do.”

Visualisation

Remember, audio medium is, in fact, talking to a blind friend. One does not have images, graphics, scenic elements, etc., which are available in a video programme. As there are no pictures to reinforce the words, the audio must be able to ‘paint the pictures’. The script should weave words in such a way that the listeners are able to visualise what they actually hear. The choice of words and the way they are delivered matter a lot. For example, ‘the dog’ would provide an image. But the words ‘brown hairy dog’ provide a richer mental image.

Tone

Some people think that using heavy and uncommon words in audio is education. This is a myth. The script must be conversational and the narration be natural as if a story is being narrated to a friend. One must use phrases and words that are commonly used. It must be remembered that while reading aloud the narration, the person must sound like oneself. The presenter must consider the ears of the listeners as their eyes so that the audio is able to create an imagery in their minds. It must be ensured to give the listeners a chance to imagine the people, places and things in the story being talked about in the audio medium.

Sound effects

In audio programmes, one can make use of voice, music and sound effects. The presenter is challenged to create mental images in audience just by sound. In an audio programme, words are spoken. Nuances of meaning can be added through voice modulation. Small sentences are registered easily and become powerful if spoken with emotion and voice modulation. One must always prepare the script in a way so that there is enough space for sounds to be accommodated. The script must have possibilities for using various sounds. Stories on forest, rivers, sea, volcano, aircraft, space crafts, birds, bird sanctuaries, wars, festival, public places, etc., is suitable for a radio script as these topics have a vast scope for the inclusion of different sounds. Undoubtedly, there are exceptions. Some other topics can also be included, in which only the background music or powerful rendering of eloquence plays a pivotal role, such as in a documentary, feature and radio magazine.

Try to draw the listeners to the story by setting up an interesting scene, raising a question, playing some weird noise or musical intervals while introducing a character. Use narrative elements like suspense and scene changes to move the story along. No one likes to be sermonised, so it is better to conclude a programme open ended and enthuse listeners to decide by themselves.

Gyan Vani, the educational FM channel of the government, is operating in more than 40 stations and broadcasting audio programmes. The major *Gyan Vani* FM stations are in Delhi, Lucknow, Bhopal, Patna, Indore, Mumbai, Jaipur, Prayagraj, etc.

These programmes have been developed in a way that they are easily incorporated into the day-to-day learning experiences of school going and out-of-school children. They can be used in the classroom, as well as, at home. These programmes are also useful to teachers as exemplar material in areas not elaborated in textbooks but being part of the curriculum. These are packages, especially meant for the teachers. The Audio Production Division of the CIET produces more than 600 audio programmes for children aged 3 to 6 years, 5 to 8 years, 8 to 11 years, 12 to 14 years and 15 to 16 years.

These programmes cater to the needs of the all areas of education, which are as follows.

- Pre-school, elementary, secondary, senior secondary education
- Science and mathematics education
- Social sciences and humanities
- Teacher education and extension
- Education of children with special needs
- Women's studies
- Value education

CONCLUSION

To cater to the existing requirements of the programmes, the CIET has been producing audio programmes for broadcast, as well as, non-broadcast modes to make learning an

interesting and engaging experience for children. The audio programmes are broadcast by All India Radio (AIR) and community radio, and thus, reach children in the remotest areas of the country.

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