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# UNIT 8 EVALUATION OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING

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## 8.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we shall look at the importance, as well as feasibility of assessing listening and speaking skills for second language learners, within the context of a primary school. After you have been through this unit you should be able to:

1. Understand the need for evaluation of these language skills.
2. Appreciate the important role of evaluation in enhancing and not hindering the development of these skills.
3. Identify some important aspects of evaluation as an indicator skill area that need strengthening.
4. Understand the complexity of evaluating these skill areas, and identify some simple ways of doing so within the classroom context.

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## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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As teachers we need to be very conscious of the role as well as, complexity of evaluation, so that it helps us and does not become counter productive. Evaluation has often come to mean something threatening, and something that children and often teachers shy away from. We need to consider this very carefully. The skills of listening and speaking go a long way in developing fluency in the second language. However, we need to remember that listening and speaking are also social skills. Socio-emotional factors influence these. For example, the child's self image, the level of confidence, the willingness to experiment and make mistakes without fear of ridicule will effect the development of good listening or speaking. We need to keep in mind the personality traits of children. The assertive child or the shy and timid child will respond very differently on a speaking task, and their performance may have nothing at all to do with their degree of language competence. It may just be a reflection of their personalities. It is therefore extremely important to be aware of the purpose of evaluation, and

make sure that this purpose is not undermined in any way. Evaluation is useful if it is looked at positively, as a process which enables and enhances better learning. It is often more effective if students participate in this process, and it is made friendly and non-threatening.

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## 8.2 PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

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1. Evaluation is the tool through which a teacher can assess a child's areas of strengths and weaknesses. It enables a teacher to decide which skill areas need to be reinforced. Errors become like windows into the childrens' minds. They indicate the level of each child and which particular learning areas need strengthening.
2. Evaluation also provides feedback about the effectiveness of the teaching methods and classroom climate, in maintaining the learner centredness of a class. We need to realise the particular character of each class. What may work well in one class, may not work in another. Evaluation helps to give insights about the class character, and appropriateness of the teaching methods for that particular class.
3. It gives insights about particular learners such as their individual learning styles and personality traits, and which teaching-learning situations are effective for particular learners.
4. It helps throw light on group dynamics, by indicating how different individuals function within a group, as well as, how different groups function.
5. It helps a teacher to monitor the growth and development of language skills, and the functional competency in the second language.
6. It provides an opportunity for reflection and self-evaluation which lead on to the required modification in any of the following areas. A teacher is able to critically examine and suitably modify teaching-learning methodologies, classroom management techniques, class arrangement, the nature or type of the learning tasks or the time allotment on tasks. All of which are important variables in determining effective learning.
6. Evaluation is also a tool through which students learn to take stock of themselves. It is important to include children in the process of evaluation. We will look at some ways of doing this.

### Check Your Progress 1

In what way can evaluation help to develop the skills of listening and speaking?

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### 8.3 SOME TASK CONSIDERATIONS FOR LISTENING AND SPEAKING

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The effectiveness of a task is an important consideration for the purpose of evaluation. Learning a second language is not just a matter of memorising a different set of names for the things around us; it is also an educational experience. Learning is more effective if learners are actively involved. We find that activities for practising a second language have left the narrow path of purely structural and lexical training and have expanded into the fields of value education and personality building. The impact of learning a second language on shaping the learner's personality is slowly being recognised. As teachers we would like our students to be sensitive towards the feelings of others and share their joys and worries. The atmosphere within a class can largely be determined by the teacher who—quite often without being aware of it—sets the tone by choosing certain types of exercises and topics. Evaluation helps a teacher to develop opportunities for effective and real communication in the classroom, so that language functions and structures are practised in meaningful ways. For example, two devices which may help the teacher in making up communicative activities are: **information gap** and **opinion gap**. Information gap forces the children to exchange information in order to find a solution to a problem that they have been given. Opinion gaps are created by using controversial texts where the children are required to take a position and defend their views, or by letting children share their feelings about common experiences. Thus, by applying the principles of information gap and opinion gap to suitable traditional exercises the teacher can change them into more challenging and meaningful communicative situations. It is for the teacher to remain alert and use the feedback from evaluation to determine what is working well and what requires modification. The class then remains constantly alive. It is not a matter of repeating the same exercises year after year, but of constantly creating new opportunities to suit the requirements of each class and learner.

#### Check Your Progress 2

What are the kind of tasks that are suitable?

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### 8.4 SOME LISTENING PROBLEMS

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Four common listening disorders have been identified.

1. **Acuity of hearing**

Some children have physical problems which prevent them from listening effectively.

2. **Discrimination and auditory perception**

Some pupils have problems with auditory memory (recalling what they have just heard) and sequential memory (recalling the correct sequences of words or utterances they have just heard)

**3. Attention and concentration**

Many pupils have difficulty in following instruction because of a low attention span and an inability to concentrate for more than very short intervals.

**4. Comprehension**

Many pupils have difficulties with different aspects of listening comprehension. Some have trouble with factual or literal comprehension (identifying what was said or what facts were stated); others have trouble with interpretation such as being able to see cause and effect relationships between facts. One way to overcome these problems is to help each child to identify some things that interfere with good listening for himself. Children can identify their problems as some of the following :

- |                        |                                       |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| day dreaming           | disinterest                           |
| fidgeting              | trying to do too many things at once  |
| interrupting           | not being able to pay attention after |
| misunderstanding words | a little while                        |
| fatigue                |                                       |
| not taking notes       |                                       |
| dislike of speaker     |                                       |

The children may come up with more once the problem has been identified, the child needs to be encouraged to consciously work towards overcoming it. It is however not easy for a child to overcome internal barriers and distractions. Quiet reflection and concentration may help, but different approaches work best with different children depending on their inclination. Some techniques that may help children to listen better are :

- a) Developing motivation - children need to be genuinely interested in hearing what is being said. The task should involve real communication about something the children are interested in.
- b) Following-up - listening tasks with open-dialogues so that children are able to assess their own responses in relation to the responses of their classmates.
- c) Specific listening tasks can be designed to take care of particular problems - for example a task may require a factual recall of information if the problem is merely one of lack of concentration. If the problem is one misunderstanding special tasks requiring interpretation or cause and effect relationships may be given.
- d) Development of listening skills may be consciously taken up as a part of the teaching of other subjects such as science, social studies or maths. The more the structured opportunities that are provided to children , the faster are they likely to overcome their problems with listening effectively.

**Check Your Progress 3**

What are some causes of poor listening?

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## 8.5 ASSESSMENT OF LISTENING SKILLS

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Measuring the development of listening is not an easy task. Understanding how listening ability develops requires a comprehensive view of what it means to improve. Listening involves cognitive skills such as recognising sounds, coding the sounds into meaningful units, processing a discourse in terms of cohesion and logical order (i.e. being able to connect the various sentences spoken with the logical order in they have been presented). Listening also involves being able to infer the speakers intentions, his purpose. It includes the ability of picking up non-linguistic cues such as gestures, facial expressions, intonation, etc. Social skills such as responding with attentiveness to a speaker are also aspects of listening. If we wish to describe the development of listening ability, we need to take all these factors into account.

Several assessment scales have been developed to show the range of listening abilities within a group or class. These scales look at aspects of listening comprehension, commonly used strategies and appropriacy of interaction. While the first two look at cognitive and intellectual skills, the third deals with social skills. Most scales are able to only roughly categories where a person should be placed . They are useful only because they are able to highlight areas of knowledge, not performance, in which the child needs to concentrate efforts for improvement.

One common way of assessing the development of listening skills is by rating or marking children on suitably designed listening tasks. These tasks need to be carefully planned so that they assess childrens' performance in various aspects of listening.

Based on the type of response that is expected from the listener, listening comprehension and listening perception, activities can be classified into two types.

- |    |                     |                            |
|----|---------------------|----------------------------|
| a) | Activities which    | - write words or sentences |
|    | require productive  | - make notes               |
|    | checks as responses | - reconstruct the story    |

Here the listener is expected to listen, comprehend and recreate what was heard. It therefore involves active mental processing on the part of the listener. Such activities measure higher order listening skills such as comprehension and understanding.

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|----|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| b) | Activities which      | - tick marks                   |
|    | require on-productive | - crossing                     |
|    | checks as responses   | - numbering                    |
|    |                       | - lettering                    |
|    |                       | - raising of hand              |
|    |                       | - showing a picture or object. |

Here the listener is expected to receive the auditory input and respond to the correct sound quickly in one of the ways mentioned above. These tasks measure lower order listening skills such as attentiveness, sound discrimination, concentration.

We need to provide a range of listening activities which cover the various aspects mentioned above. Children's responses can be marked and each child's progress assessed. If a child has a specific problem, the teacher would need to deal with it individually. Children enjoy listening tasks and these should not become fearsome things simply because they are being marked. Children should be able to see evaluation as an indicator of their own progress as well as an indicator of their strengths and weaknesses, so that they are able to make efforts to improve their listening abilities.

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## 8.6 A SAMPLE OF A LISTENING SCALE

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An Assessment scale developed by Michael Rost (1990) which outlines how listening can develop in terms of comprehension, commonly used strategies and interaction and appropriacy.

### **Competent Listener**

**Range of comprehension:** able to understand all styles of speech that are intelligible to native listeners in the target community; able to understand abstract concepts.

**Strategies for understanding:** able to seek clarification smoothly when speech is unintelligible; able to note areas where own knowledge is lacking to achieve an acceptable level of understanding and to note where the speaker is vague or inconsistent.

**Appropriate interaction:** able to understand and display appropriate listener responses in a wide range of social and specialised contexts in the target cultural setting.

**Applications:** able to perform acceptably any task requiring comprehension of oral language.

### **Listener of Modest Ability**

**Range of comprehension:** able to understand most styles of speech that are intelligible to native listeners in the target community; able to understand some abstract concepts expressed orally, but often requires repetition or re-explanation.

**Strategies for understanding:** attempts to seek clarification when speech is unintelligible, although attempts are not always successful or appropriate; able to note areas where own knowledge is lacking to achieve an acceptable degree of understanding and to note where speaker is vague or inconsistent, but occasionally is confused about the source of difficulty in understanding.

**Appropriacy of interaction:** displays listener responses in a wide range of social and specialised contexts in a target cultural setting, but often not appropriately.

**Application:** able to understand enough of the input to infer the gist of the communicative event and to participate adequately in many situations and many tasks.

### **Listener of Limited Ability**

**Range of comprehension:** able to understand limited styles of speech that are intelligible to native listeners in the target community; not able to understand unfamiliar abstract concepts expressed in target language without considerable non-linguistic support; usually requires repetition or re-explanation or multiple clarification exchanges.

**Strategies for understanding:** most often not successful or appropriate in attempts to seek clarification when speech is unintelligible; usually not able to note areas where own knowledge is lacking to achieve an acceptable understanding and to note where speaker is vague or inconsistent; often expresses confusion about the source of difficulty in understanding.

**Applications:** usually not able to understand enough of the input to infer the gist of the communicative event.

**Appropriate interaction:** cannot sustain understanding in an interaction; displays limited range of listener responses.

The above categories can be further broken down into six categories as: Limited, Limited +, Modest, Modest +, Competent, Competent +.

The advantage of such a scale is its simplicity. It can be used to roughly categorise where a learner can be placed. For a more precise assessment of a listener's abilities, we need to assess performance on several listening tasks over a period of time. The tasks should test various listening skills.

**Note:-** There are various listening assessment scales. The above scale has been presented as a sample.

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## 8.7 ASSESSMENT OF SPEAKING SKILLS

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Since speaking is a social skill it is not so easy to evaluate it. It is important that any evaluation should occur in a natural situation, where there is a spontaneous flow of speech. Any evaluation in an artificial set up cannot provide a true picture of the child's competencies in the spoken language. It can also be extremely threatening for a child and prove harmful for further speech development. It is therefore, essential that evaluation of spoken skills is done very carefully.

Speaking is a skill which can be improved by practice and training. Given below are some indicators, which need to be looked at while helping a child to improve her spoken skills. It is suggested that these are used as informal indicators, which give a feed back to the teacher in an on going way, rather than as indicators to be assessed formally.

1. **Articulation:** Articulate in Latin means "to join". Sounds are the joints of words. Listen carefully to students' speech. Show them how to properly use their lips, tongues, jaws, and nasal passages to improve this technique.
2. **Voice quality:** The power of persuasion often depends on convincing voice quality. Teach and show students how to use the voice to show feeling and have maximum impact on the listeners.
3. **Posture:** A straight well-postured body fosters attention on the part of the listener. Good poise gives the listener an air of importance. All 639 muscles of the human body become actively involved.
4. **Vocabulary:** Talk to your students about "Word Power." A strong, rich vocabulary makes the speaker more clear and persuasive. Use words which help to define and create clear picture in the mind of the listener. Children need to learn to use precise words.

5. **Body language:** Show your students how hand gestures and facial expressions are important assets for effective speaking.
6. **Positive thinking:** Stress the importance of a good self image. Through praise and an abundance of listening, attempt to build confidence in each student. Make each one feel comfortable and relaxed. This has a direct impact on effective speaking.
7. **Appropriate voice volume:** The children need to realise the importance of this. They need to know that everyone in the audience has the right to listen. Every speaker has the right to be heard. Physical distance from the speaker and auditory differences make this important. Children need to know how to change their volume appropriately.
8. **Concentration:** Children need to know that clear thoughts in an organised manner keep the attention of the listener.
9. **Repetition:** Repetitions need to be avoided as they confuse the listeners. They should only be used for emphasis.
10. **Pacing:** Tell children to avoid long pause. They need to make sure that they think first and then speak. Grouping for the proper word and creating stilted thought patterns can make the listener ill at ease. In the case of prepared speech there is no substitute for good preparation and rehearsal. Involving children in the process of evaluation is often very effective. Given below is a sample of a student's self-inventory. It may be changed or modified according to the needs of a specific class.

#### STUDENT'S SELF INVENTORY

**SOME QUESTIONS TO FIND OUT IF I AM A GOOD SPEAKER:**

Always    Often    Sometime    Never

1. Do I speak loudly enough to be heard by all those to whom I am speaking?
2. Do I speak at the right speed for my listeners?
3. Do I say all my words clearly?
4. Do I use the right vocabulary for my listeners?
5. When explaining something, do I:
  - a. organise what I am going to say?
  - b. make my point clear?
  - c. explain what I mean by using examples and details?
  - d. use good grammar?
  - e. use the words that can best be understood by my listeners?
6. Do I know what to say fast and efficiently when there is an emergency such as:
  - a. a fire

- b. an explosion
  - c. a robbery
  - d. a natural disaster (flood, earthquake)
  - e. an injury or accident
7. Can I describe common objects, events and people so that my listener is clear?
  8. Can I give simple, clear directions?
  9. Can I ask questions about information or opinions expressed by others?
  10. When I speak to anyone do I look for "signals" that the listener understands me?
  11. Do I vary my tone, and know which words to emphasise?
  12. Do I keep in mind my body and facial expressions while I speak?

Such inventories, as given above, are useful to focus attention on behaviours and skills which enhance good speaking habits.

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## 8.8 LET US SUM UP

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The evaluation of listening and speaking is to be done very carefully. Apart from being language skills these are also effected by social skills, it is therefore important to keep these in mind. While it is possible to assess listening skills through productive checks, assessing spoken language is far more complex. It is suggested that teachers make the children aware of the various factors and behaviours that enhance these skills. Children can also be helped to evaluate and reflect upon their own spoken language. This is not threatening and helps children to take responsibility for their own development.

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## 8.9 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Evaluation gives the teacher important feedback about the effectiveness of the teaching learning methods as well as the learning situations. It helps the teacher know which things need be modified. It helps the teacher to identify the special characteristics of a class or a group of students. It provides useful insights about individual learners as well as learner styles, and the appropriateness of the learning methodologies for these. Evaluation also gives a teacher an understanding of the areas of strength as well as areas of weaknesses of the children being taught. Future programmes can then be based on this understanding. For evaluation to be useful, it is important that it is non-threatening. It is often very useful to involve children in the process of evaluation, as this helps to make them responsible for their own learning.

### Check Your Progress 2

2. **Suitable tasks** are those that allow for real and meaningful communication. In such situations there is a real need for listening and speaking, and the child is not trying to use language in a contrived and artificial way.

### Check Your Progress 3

Poor listening may have a physical, psychological or pedagogical basis. Among the physical causes are : hearing loss, short attention span or fatigue (the child is tired or hungry). The psychological causes may include:

1. **Feelings of insecurity** - tension and worry make it difficult to concentrate.
2. **Poor self concept.** A child feels negative about herself and therefore does not want to relate to others.
3. **Over stimulation** - There are too many sounds, noises, people talking and the child gets confused in this bedlam of sounds. The most important pedagogical factors are lack of experience and practice. By using direct methods for teaching listening, teachers can set the stage for children to sharpen and enhance their listening skills.