

## IMPLEMENTING TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING TO IMPROVE STUDENT'S LISTENING SKILL

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**Abstract:** *Listening is the ability to accurately get, understand and interpret oral messages in the communication process. By developing the listening skills, students become more independent learners. Listening plays an important role in communication and is the most frequently used language skill. Without listening ability, oral messages are easily misunderstood and communication breaks. Developing of listening skills seems neglected by EFL teachers. That's why, the teacher should focus on listening skills development, whereas the application of listening strategies at EFL lessons will help students to decode English input and achieve bigger success in English learning. It is important for the teacher to choose different listening activities during the lessons to become actively engaged in the listening process. The article proposes a basic framework of a listening lesson based on task-based language approach.*

**Key-words:** *listening skill, active listening, oral communication, listening unit planning sheet, listening activities, task-based learning.*

Listening is the ability to accurately get, understand and interpret oral messages in the communication process. Listening comprehension involves not just mere decoding of the sounds, but also an active process of deciphering and constructing meaning from both verbal and non-verbal messages [3]. By developing the listening skills, students become more independent learners. The information heard and understood accurately; refine students' understanding of grammar and enriching vocabulary, etc. Listening is an integral part of effective communication. Without listening ability, oral messages are easily misunderstood and communication breaks.

Listening plays an important role in communication and is the most frequently used language skill. If underestimated, students encounter different kinds of listening problems and cannot effectively participate at oral communications [1]. Listening receives less attention in language teaching and learning process, because teaching methods tend to emphasize productive skills, so listening is characterized as passive activity. This is not quite so, listening process is not a passive skill but an active process of constructing meaning from a stream of sounds. (Richards & Renandya, 2010). According to Mendelsohn (1994), of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9%.

The basic framework of a listening lesson based on task-based language approach may be divided into three main stages (Figure 1):

**pre-listening**, during which the teacher prepares students to listen;

**while listening**, during which the teacher focuses students' attention on the recording and guides its understanding;

**post-listening**, during which the teacher integrates the learnt content from the recording into students' existing knowledge.

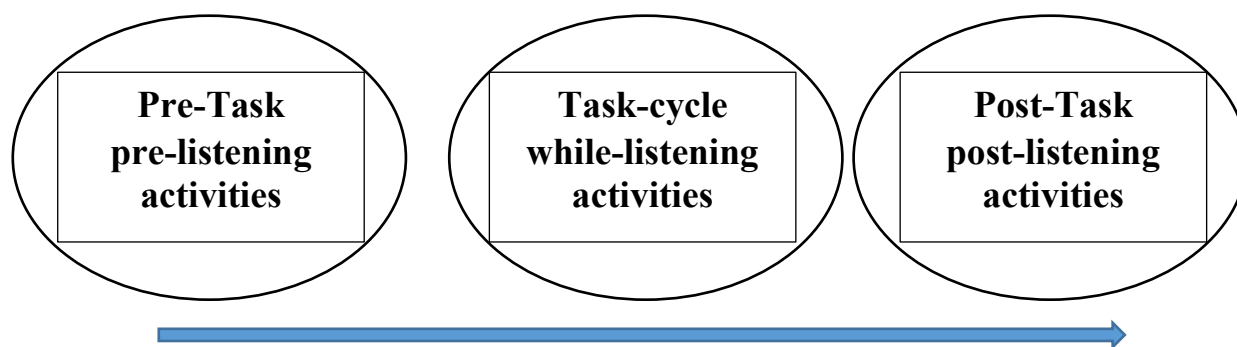


Figure 1. Three stages of the Listening Unit based on TBL

**Pre-listening stage.** At this stage, the teacher engages students with the listening topic of the lesson. Pre-listening activities activate the schemata and in this way students predict what they will hear. Activating schemata means activating students' prior knowledge.

The goals that should be achieved before listening the recording are: motivation, contextualisation, and preparation.

*Motivation* is important, so the teacher should select a text interesting for students and the tasks should arouse students' interest and curiosity.

Listening to a recording in a classroom is an unnatural process. So the teacher should select such activities that will place students into *contextualisation* based on their existing knowledge and expectations.

*Preparation* includes learning of specific vocabulary or expressions that students will need while listening the recording.

**While listening stage.** While-listening activities are the main activities of the listening tasks. During this stage, students will need to listen to a recording a number of times – usually three or four and perform the task either during the listening process or immediately after the listening.

If the top down strategy is applied, students listen to an unknown recording first and try to identify the information without preparing, try to recognize words and phrases. Thus, the students listen for the overall picture the first time. The teacher checks students' comprehension of the unknown dialogue.

At the second listening, students are given the transcript, so they can follow the written text.

Before doing exercises, to be on the safer ground, students listen to the recording for the third time. This is a bottom-up strategy. If necessary, especially when some exercises are difficult, and the students are stuck, they may listen to the recording more times.

**Post-listening stage.** There are two common forms in post-listening stage: the reaction to the content of the recording, and linguistic analysis of the recording. Reaction to the content provided by the recording could be in the form of discussion, or reuse of the information they have heard.

Linguistic analysis involves focusing students on linguistic features. This seems more important in terms of developing their knowledge of language, but less so in terms of developing students' listening skills. The teacher may propose some grammar activities, like analysis of verb forms, degrees of comparison, prepositions, etc. Checking and summarizing is one activity type that can be performed in post-listening stage.

### **Listening Unit Planning Sheet**

**Teacher's name:** Radu Burdujan

**Topic:** Water conservation

**Learning Goal for the Listening Unit:** to help students understand the use of the common English phrases and their meanings in real-life situations related to the issue of wasting water (or other ecological problem).

**Unit Length:** Two lessons – 90 minutes

**Teaching Context:**

- Age group: 15 – 18 y.o. (High School), 19 – 24 y.o. (University).
- Students' English Proficiency level: Intermediate

**Overall focus of the listening unit:**

- learn some idioms using the word “water”;
- Talk about the issue of wasting water;
- Develop listening skill;
- Use new words and phrases in both spoken and written language.

**Focus of each listening activity listed in the table below:**

#1: Pre listening activity - Activate Students' schemata, Understand the topic and main idea.

#2: While-listening activity - Listen for new words (focus on adjectives) and phrases.

#3: Post listening activity - Practice pronunciation and intonation, work on phonology.

### **Lesson scenario**

#1: **Pre - listening activity:** The teacher begins the lesson with asking students (1) if they know the ways people waste water at home every day; (2) if the students do these things themselves; (3) students explain their answers and make a top from the most to the less damaging experiences.

This is a Top down activity.

- (1) The students list the ways people waste water at home every day;
- (2) The students share their experiences about wasting water at home; the teacher makes a longer list (on the blackboard) based on student's answers.
- (3) The students make a top from the most to the less damaging experiences written on the blackboard. Teacher writes idioms [5] from the recording on the black board, providing the context, and the translation in mother tongue if necessary:

“**blow someone out of the water**” = destroy or defeat, (Ro. = a distruge pe cineva complet);

“*The basketball game wasn’t even close. I mean, they blew us out of the water and beat us by 60 points.*”

“**a fish out of water**” = be out of place, (Ro. = ca pește pe uscat);

“*I went to the party with Sarah, but I felt like a fish out of water. I was at least 20 years older than most people there, and I had nothing in common with them.*”

### **Main objective of the pre-listening activity:**

The pre-listening activates student’s schemata.

To trigger Students’ background knowledge, for this stage of the lesson, the teacher should encourage them to speak about their experiences. So, for this lesson, Teacher asks students to remember the cases of wasting water at home. Students share their experiences to the class and discuss the issue raised in pre-listening activity.

### **#2: While - listening activity:**

(1) Students listen to the recording on water conservation “Saving water”.

This is a Top down activity. Students listen to conversation and try to identify who are speaking, what is the topic of the dialogue, where it takes place, recognizable words and phrases.

The teacher checks students’ comprehension of the unknown dialogue from a top-down perspective.

(2) The students are given the transcript [5] of the listened conversation. This is a Bottom-up activity.

The students listen to the recording following its transcript.

### **Transcript:**

**Marie:** Hey, Andrew. Stop wasting water! Turn the shower off!

**Andrew:** What? I can’t hear you! I have the shower running.

**Marie:** Yes, **exactly**.

**Andrew:** What? Oh, okay. I can hear you now. What do you want?

**Marie:** Listen. You were in the shower for more than half an hour. That is more than enough water for 10 people. I mean, don’t you care about the planet? You used at least 60 **gallons** of water. That is a terrible waste.

**Andrew:** I wasn’t in the shower **THAT** long.

**Marie:** Yes you were. I timed you.

**Andrew:** You timed me?

**Marie:** Yes, yes. I timed you. Our water bill was **astronomical** last month. [*Really?*], and you don’t pay for any of it. It was a hundred and thirteen dollars (\$113). And it’s going up. [*Really?*] I . . . I mean, I know you lost your job, but **I am not made of money**. Please be careful. I mean, at least, maybe you could take one of your showers at the gym when you go in the morning. I . . . I don’t know how you can **afford** gym membership when you can’t pay rent. Please be careful. Okay?

**Andrew:** Okay, sorry sis.

Students recognize individual words, sentences, and clause divisions, recognize key linguistic features of the words and sentences. Students understand all the details of the recording. Students listen the recording for the third time.

(3) Students fill in the worksheet with a “multiple choice” quiz [5] so the teacher understands if they understood the information provided in the recording.

*Item 1:* The man was in the shower for \_\_\_\_ minutes.

a. 25; b. 20; c. 30;

*Item 2:* The man wasted \_\_\_\_ gallons during his shower. (A gallon is about 3.7 litres.)

a. 40; b. 60; c. 50;

*Item 3:* His water bill was \_\_\_\_ last month.

a. \$130; b. \$103; c. \$113;

*Item 4:* The man doesn't have a lot of money because \_\_\_\_.

a. he is paying for school; b. he has an expensive car loan; c. he's not working now;

*Item 5:* The woman suggests that her brother \_\_\_\_ to help them save money.

a. shower at their parents' house; b. take a shower at the gym; c. only shower on weekends;

The students will have to prove that they learned and can use new words / phrases in personalized contexts (related to their lives), so the teacher be sure they understood their meanings.

(4) As vocabulary practice, students do more vocabulary quizzes with the words from the conversation.

### **Main objectives of the while-listening activity:**

This while-listening activity is focused mainly on the identification of the words / phrases related to the saving water issue; identifying and using words / phrases that make up common expressions in the English language.

For this stage of the lesson, students will work on their worksheets with a "multiple choice" quiz. The teacher might need to play the recording more times so that students can solve the quiz correctly. The teacher monitors students to provide guidance and help and even explain some words / phrases they don't understand which were not mentioned at the lesson.

After students have solved the quiz and the listening is completed, the teacher should revise new words / expressions / idioms, write them on the board for students' better understanding and checking [1].

### **#3: Post-listening activity:**

Students think of some cases when they/their colleagues waste water at home or at school/university. They give specific examples and discuss what they could do better to save water. Students write short paragraphs in their notebooks.

Students practice the new words, the new expressions, pronunciation and intonation.

For this stage of the lesson, students answer the questions orally, and then all their ideas are written in short paragraphs, using as many new words as possible.

Students may look in their worksheets / previous course notes to check up how many words / expressions they use in their written paragraphs [1].

#### **#4: Individual Work/Homework:**

Students conduct their online investigation, using the Internet to find:

- 1) the source of the water they use every day to bathe, cook, and clean;
- 2) how water is used in their area (for example, agriculture, in businesses / industry, in homes, for watering personal gardens, recreational facilities like pools and water parks);
- 3) How the water is purified [5].

**Conclusion:** Some teachers consider that listening is the easiest skill to teach, while most students think it is the most difficult to develop. So, EFL teachers overlook improving of listening skill and pay more attention to the speaking one. The way to improve students' active listening skills is through practice. That's why, the teacher should focus on listening skills development, whereas the application of listening strategies at EFL lessons will help students to decode English input and achieve bigger success in English learning. Development of listening skill also improves other language skills such as speaking, reading, and writing. The teacher has an important role in planning the lesson because the wrong types of listening activities (and not only listening ones) may not attain the aim. The article proposes a basic framework of a listening lesson based on task-based language approach. It is important for the teacher to choose proper listening activities during the lessons so that students become actively engaged in the oral communication process.

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