

A Task-Based Approach to Speaking and Listening Skill Development: Improving Communicative Proficiency in Intermediate-Level EFL Students

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Abstract: Learning foreign languages has become more and more important for young people who want to study or work elsewhere in today's globalized society. This article examines useful speaking and listening tasks created for a group of English language learners at the intermediate (B1 level). The study emphasizes two linked tasks: a map-based activity to improve listening comprehension and a visual description task to improve speaking fluency. Learners are encouraged to increase their descriptive vocabulary, enhance their accuracy and fluency, and develop strategic listening skills through organized group projects and simulations of real-world situations. The findings show that both activities are pedagogically appropriate for the learners' level and considerably contribute to their productive skill development, as indicated by academic literature and CEFR recommendations.

Keywords: Productive skills, speaking task, listening comprehension, real-life communication, EFL learners, B1 level, task-based learning, CEFR, young learners, group work, vocabulary development, fluency, pronunciation, ESL pedagogy.

Introduction: Learning new languages becomes crucial part of young generation's life in our era as it opens the door of new chances everywhere. Especially English language is expanding and becoming essential language and a basic means of communication in foreign countries for the people whose first language is not English. The group that I have to teach consists of 10 students. They are 14 years old and study in the 8th grade of secondary school. Their English language proficiency is intermediate (B1). My students are independent users of the target language and can understand speeches on familiar situations such as work, travel, leisure, school and others. They can communicate on a daily basis and many topics related to daily situations and describe dreams, hopes, ambitions, events and experiences, their backgrounds and give reasons and explanations of the plans as well as opinions. My learners are also able to read newspapers, simple textbooks, assignments and their explanations (Using the CEFR: Principles of good practice, 2011). My students have been learning English language since the 5th grades. They are learning

language for educational purposes as well as preparation for IELTS examination. They have to improve their knowledge and level from B1 to B2, C1 and take higher scores in CEFR and IELTS exams. Their main aim from learning language is to improve their language proficiency, become fluent and study abroad after finishing the school.

My students are able to support their ideas with relevant examples and generate multiple questions to keep conversation, match 2 speakers' speeches and identify the main meaning, compare and contrast ideas, plans and information, understand daily announcements, reports and statements in a limited degree. My learners can understand texts with high-frequency vocabulary. However, they face difficulties with low-frequency words. Moreover, students have problems related to intonation, pronunciation of some words, fluency in speaking and vocabulary range is limited. My students are able to find main ideas and details from passages, identify the topics, connect people to actions based on oral descriptions in a detailed way. They can find relationship between main

opinions and details in paragraphs, identify reasons for claims and opposite points of view. They also can produce short paragraphs with essential ideas and some details, write dialogues based on personal experiences, provide feedbacks with acceptable explanations and examples and support their ideas with relevant samples (<https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/CanDo-KeyUses-Gr-6-8.pdf>). They need an improvement in speaking and listening skills as these skills are weak points of my students and also in writing, reading skills. Moreover, my students have good grammar knowledge.

Task 1-Speaking activity (describing a picture)-pronunciation- Communicative language teaching (CLT)

1. In the class, the teacher divides students into mini groups that consist of 4 or 5 students. Each group is given the same picture that shows several destinations such as shops, parks, restaurants, gardens and others within one area or city.

2. Students should describe each place briefly and using various adjectives and grammar structures. The teacher explains the rules of this activity to the students briefly. [L]

3. The teacher sets a time limit for groups to get preparation (5 minutes). Firstly, students have a look at the picture and may take some notes for themselves if it is needed. [W]

4. The teacher observe every group in order to check whether they are using only English language or their native language. It must be noted that students must use only English language even during the preparation time within their small group. [S, W]

5. After the time is over, students need to describe where the places are located and how they look with much details one by one. They can use various types of verb tenses. They have to produce original and expanded work. [S, V, P, F]

6. Each member of the group has to speak and a presentation must take maximum 4 minutes. [S, V, P]

7. The teacher encourages students to use various descriptive vocabulary, for example, color, shape size, position of the places and pays more attention to the fluency and accuracy of students' speech, pronunciation of the words and correct their mistakes if it is needed. [S, V, P]

8. After all students finish their presentation, students must compare their own work with the work of the opposite group. It helps to identify similarities and learn new vocabulary and way of describing. [L, V]

9. All students and the teacher discuss what was

challenging about describing the picture and strategies they used to do this task. [L, S, D]

The task that I chose belongs to real-life tasks category. It teaches to demonstrate streets ways and locations. I used it for pedagogical purposes. Describing a picture is appropriate for my target learners' level. Because my students are good at describing real-life situations and this task seeks to expand the knowledge within this area by making it impressive. They have enough vocabulary in this topic and skills to do this task (Bassano, 2013). This is because, my students do not face difficulties while doing this activity. The objective of this task is to make students more fluent, confident, enhance vocabulary range and explanation strategies. Describing something is one narrative that helps to enhance speaking skills, especially in intermediate level (Levis & Grant, 2011). Another key feature of this task is to compare and contrast other students' opinions and ideas. Jenkins (2000) states that the ability to note important features in spoken discourse is essential to intelligibility of the speech. Students can also learn many new strategies and words as well as phrases by listening other group members' speech in this task. One more aim here is that students can be aware of their needs in speaking (Basturkmen, 2011).

Task 2- listening -Audio-lingual method (ALM)

1. First of all, students are given a map which includes some streets but without the name of these streets. [C]

2. In this task, students must place each street on the map according to the teacher's definitions and instructions. [L, W]

3. The teacher tells instructions twice as it helps students to identify the facts clearly. [L, C]

4. At the end of the task, teacher show the answers and students check their work. [R]

5. Students tell the teacher where they made mistakes. By doing this, the teacher will be able to evaluate her students' strengths and weaknesses in listening. Students also can learn many new words by listening to the teacher's definitions [S, V, D]

6. Listening task is one that most EFL students sometimes find it difficult to achieve. It requires students to be comprehensible while listening and understand the meaning of the audio. Boyer (1987) states that to be successful in academic settings, students have to gain comprehensive listening skill. Listening is vital as students should share messages and receive them, use other instructors' examples to teach or inform their peers. Listening is needed in every field such as education, music, philosophy, psychology, nursing and others (Thompson, 2004). In the listening

task, students have to distinguish sounds in words, concluding meaning of some words which students are not familiar with, predict content of the text, write down or remember contradictions and ambiguities and most importantly recognize what is fact and what is opinion of the speaker. These things help listeners to understand what they are listening and complete the tasks successfully. The task which I chose is really helpful to put these subskills into practice.

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