

**Improving EFL Students' Listening Comprehension Via Using Task-Based Activities**

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**Abstract**

*This study seeks to examine the effect of task-based activities (five specific types of tasks: pictures, multiple choice, matching, fill in a form and short-answer questions) on English as a foreign language students' listening comprehension. The participants of this study consisted of (76) second year prep school students divided into two groups; an experimental group and a control group. Listening test developed by the researcher was used to measure such improvement. Before the experiment a listening pretest was administered to both groups. The experimental group students received treatment of listening comprehension via using task-based activities. A 8-session treatment was applied for the experimental group students, while the control group students followed their regular method. After the experiment, the same listening post-test was administered to the groups. A t-test was used to find the effect of using task-based activities on the students' listening comprehension. Findings revealed that task-based activities were effective in enhancing the listening comprehension of the participants in the experimental group. Findings also indicated that there was a significant relationship between the four tasks of " pictures, multiple choice, matching, fill in a form" and listening comprehension. However, no such relationship was observed between the task of " short-answer questions " and listening comprehension. Likewise, results showed that practicing listening with task-based activities can become a good way to prepare students to the advanced higher levels of comprehension.*

*Keywords: listening comprehension, task, task-based activities*

**Introduction**

Today teaching and learning English have become of vital importance. The main objective of teaching English is to permit the learner to communicate orally and efficiently. But by the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in language teaching methodology, communicative ability has become the end goal of any teaching and learning program. According to CLT, all four skills of language are equally significant and listening skill is not a secondary skill, but an internal and active one. Among recent writings on communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching (TBLT)

has appeared as an important point of language teaching which is based on using tasks as the core of language learning and teaching.

According to Rao & Jyoti, “teaching is communication” (2012, p. 311). It is through communication that education is achieved. Listening skill, as one of the most important skills in foreign language learning, has been disregarded for a long period of time “in research, teaching, and evaluation” (Hamouda, 2012, p. 1). It was believed that “listening is important to simplify the other English language skills; speaking, writing and reading” (Arosenius, 2011, p. 3). As it was indicated, listening plays a major role in communication as it is said that, of the gross time spent on communicating, listening occupies 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, nearly 9%. There are several language experts who support the idea of the significance of listening; for example, Gilbert (2005a, p. 97) believed that the skills of pronunciation and listening are interdependent: “if they are incapable of comprehending spoken English well, or if they cannot be comprehended easily, they are cut off from the language, except shape the written form”. Arosenius (2011), stressed that listening skill is no longer a cognitive procedure but an interactive procedure. By emphasizing the role of comprehension input, second language acquisition research has given a key boost to listening. However, learning and acquiring this skill is comparatively difficult due to its vague nature.

A lot of research shows that task-based learning has been accepted as an approach to resolve the crisis of teaching English. For instance, Muller (2006) states that after using task-based activities, teachers can be confident that they are facilitating the improvement of genuine communication skills between meeting institutional requirements and students. Task-based learning provides many advantages in TEFL because it offers language experience within the classroom. Moreover, task-based learning focuses on learners using language naturally in pairs or group work, allowing them to share ideas (Nunan, 2004, p. 12). Task-based learning framework, combined with texts and tasks, provides learners rich exposure to language plus opportunities to use it themselves. Throughout the task cycle, emphasis is on learners' understanding and expressing meaning to complete tasks (Ruso, 2007; and Xiongyong & Samuel, 2011). In short, the researcher simplifies that to overcome the

problem of teaching listening. Using task-based activities is expected to solve the problem and to bring a good achievement in listening. Therefore, there was a need to examine the effect of using task-based activities on listening comprehension.

### **Statement of the problem**

The problem is that second year prep school students have weakness in the listening skills and lack motivation towards it, so they perform poorly. Therefore, this study seeks to find a solution to the problem of their weakness in listening comprehension via using task-based activities.

### **Questions of the study**

To solve the problem of the study, the following questions were posed:

1. What is the effect of using Task-Based Activities on improving EFL students' listening comprehension?
2. What is the effect of using each of the following five specific types of tasks (pictures, multiple choice, matching, fill in a form and short-answer questions) on improving EFL students' listening comprehension?

### **literature Review**

It is well known that listening plays a significant role in foreign language teaching. Listening is assuming a more important place in foreign/second language teaching and learning process. The present situation is far from satisfactory. Learners are still frustrated and helpless against listening (Yang, 2005). Listening is the process of taking information through the sense of hearing and creating meaning from what was heard. Listening comprehension prepares students for subsequent reading comprehension (Graddol, 2006; and Jalongo, 2008). This may be the cause why Valencia (2011) declared that it is crucial for a student to improve good listening skills so as to cope with the academic demands of school and to learn sufficient literacy skills. Listening skill helps students to conduct their self-inquiry and discover their individual possibilities. Students who are active listeners can combine the things they hear quicker in their framework of knowledge than a more negative counterpart. In his own view, Gilbert (2005b) observed that students can

also display better focus and memory when they develop good listening skill.

Listening can be seen mostly as the efficacious use of language to access other people's connotations. Listening is the receptive use of language and in efficacious listening, the aim of the mental work is to seem sensible and is hence naturally meaning-focused alternatively than form focused (Cameron, 2001; and Devine, 2013). As debated by Linse (2005), a major cause for the teaching of the listening skill is the fact that listening may be a basis for other language skills. The subsequent statements, (Linse, 2005, p. 27) help us to understand how other skills are constructed on the listening capability: *"You need to hear a word before you say it; you need to say a word before you read it; you need to read a word before you write it"*. Moreover as argued by Sharpe (2001), the advancement of students' listening skills lay at the heart of efficient learning in all subjects of the primary curriculum. Thus, the improvement of learners' listening skills should be a prime aim of primary teaching.

Studies performed on students' listening, both in and outside school, assessed that between 50 and 90 percent of students' communication time is dedicated to listening (Wolvin & Coakely, 2000; and Gilbert, 2005b). Listening is central to a student's development of other skills, comprising survival, social and knowledgeable skills (Wolvin & Coakley, 2000). As well, Listening is considered one of the skills that are most predictive of generally, long-term school success (Brigman, Lane & Switzer, 2001). If perhaps learners are to get into the rhythm of a language and develop a feeling for it, they need to have plenty of chances to listen to lengthier parts of texts, to hear a range of speakers of different origins and with diverse accents; native speakers, audio-recording also to work with a diversity of texts also, genres and registers; stories, letters, audio and video resources, and advertisements (Cheater & Farren, 2001, p. 26).

Wong (2005, pp. 25-43) in his paper argued that of the four English language skills that are frequently taught separately, listening needs more efforts from both course developers and students. Unlike courses for other skills, which are frequently paper-based, listening courses are a combination of paper-based materials as a course book, and sound-based materials in the form of audio on tapes/compact discs. Nonetheless,

learners get the chance to keep only the course book, and can access the course audio only in class, which basically sets teacher-centered lessons. In fact, it seems that the primary goal of L2 learners is to be able to interact easily with the target language speakers. Actually, the significant part of interaction is that it presents and makes receiving feedbacks available “from the listener to the interlocutor in order to classify meaning, social understanding, or advanced conversation”.

Contrary to the traditional and conventional activities which are designed based on a pedagogical point of view and mostly overlook authenticity and real life situations (Izadpanah, 2010), a task-based approach, by providing classroom experiences that are similar to the demands of authentic language use, copes with the real and on-line communication more directly (Newton, 2001). Indeed, task-based activities via facilitating using language in meaningful contexts can have profound influence on promoting learning process.

Task based learning (TBL) is learning primarily based on tasks. Through TBL approach, also known as task based instruction (TBI), students learn more effectively when focusing on completing a task. This type of learning helps students to improve their performance in class when dealing with a task or solving a problem (Harmer, 2007, p. 71). According to Edwards and Willis (2005), task based language learning and teaching inform language teachers about new techniques of designing tasks, enrich their existing experience and encourage them to use more task based activities in their lessons. According to Nunan (2004), TBLT has become a key element of many educational institutions worldwide. In TBLT a teacher effectively uses tasks in a classroom in order to activate students’ acquisition processes in second language learning (Edwards & Willis, 2005, p. 15). The main assumptions of TBLT mentioned by Edwards & Willis (2005) are summarized in a few points which are as follows: the focus of instruction is based on process; tasks and activities are sequenced according to their difficulty; they are based on communication and meaning, whereas learners learn language to a great extent by interaction; activities and tasks are achieved either in a real world or with respect to a pedagogical aim in the classroom.

As Nunan (1991, cited in Oura, 2001, p. 71 ) asserts, emphasizing interaction and communication in the target language is the main

characteristic of a task-based approach. He believes that the focus of TBLT is on meaning and it engages learners in “comprehending, manipulating, producing and interacting in the target language”. The use of language is the principal way of promoting language and it is the main reason for applying more communicative tasks (Long, 1989, as cited in Brandl, 2007). Proponents of TBLT argue that the most effective method to teach a language is by engaging learners in real language use in the classroom. This is often done by designing tasks that require learners to use the language for themselves (Brown, 2007; Willis & Willis, 2007; Bantis, 2008; Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2011; Promruang, 2012; Hu, 2013; Hyde, 2013; and Ellis, 2014). At a major private Japanese university with approximately 340 first year students participating in a second-semester, speaking course, Bugler and Hunt (2002) conducted a study to examine how tasks can be used as a basis for teaching. The findings showed that the experience was rewarding, intrinsically interesting, and educationally beneficial for the students who participated in the task-based project.

In language teaching, in order that tasks can be useful in providing a rich context for promoting learners' knowledge and skills, and integrate improving fluency and accuracy, they should be employed systematically. Utilizing TBI and authentic materials accelerate students' progress and enable them to apply effectively their new FL in real world. According to Ellis (2003, p. 209), a task can involve any of the four English language skills including listening comprehension ability. Listening tasks can be applied for various purposes: 1) providing a non-threatening way to engage learners in a meaning-centered activity, 2) measuring whether learners have acquired a special feature targeted to be learned or facilitating learning a special feature through modifying the input for effective processing the feature, and 3) providing learners with the enriched input. In listening-to-comprehend tasks, learners use their schematic knowledge to perform the task.

Tasks are composed of various parts and can come in various variations. There are goals, input, procedures, roles of the participants and also the setting. An instructor should plan the various task components in order to follow a productive and successful task-based learning environment. According to Nunan (2004, p. 41), there are five elements

of task-based learning that are goals, input, roles, procedures and settings. Goals are the general intentions behind learning tasks. They are the connections between the larger curriculum and the task. To develop students' confidence in speaking and to boost their writing skills are among the examples of goals. The learners must achieve any course goals or teaching task. When completing a task, learners study spoken, written, auditory, and visual data as an input. The data mentioned here can be provided by a textbook, an instructor, or other supplementary materials. Procedures, on the other hand, as stated by Nunan (2004), "specify what students will actually do with the input that forms the point of departure for the learning task" (p. 52).

Roles are not only the parts that teachers and learners play through conducting learning tasks but also the professional and social relationships between the participants. Learners develop an active role and awareness in the learning process. By doing so, they simply adopt the task-based language classroom. Thus, teachers modify their role according to the learners' active participation. The optimal method of teaching tasks is the teacher's duty to stabilize what they feel which is anticipated from the students. Richards and Rodgers (2001) define the roles of teachers as the selector and sequencer of tasks, preparing learners for tasks and consciousness-raising. Additionally, learner roles are being a group participant, innovator, monitor and risk-taker.

Moreover, appropriate setting should be provided; setting means the classroom arrangements that are defined in the task. A wide variety of settings are possible in the classroom despite the fact that there are some constraints like class size in a real life setting (Nunan, 2004, pp. 42-71). As well, consciousness raising activities can be conducted to keep learners engaged. The learners are required to utilize consciousness raising activities to identify and process the language features they have noticed in the task. The teacher reviews each analysis activity with the class, bringing useful words, phrases and patterns to the learners' attention. Practical activities can be combined naturally with the analysis stage and are useful for revision and consolidation. In this section, the teacher conducts practice after analysis to build confidence.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that listening in an L2 has received relatively little attention by researchers despite its obvious

importance both as a skill in its own right and as one of the primary sources of language acquisition. In addition to the research reported above, there is some supporting evidence that a meaning-centred approach is effective in developing proficiency, and there is also growing experimental evidence that the attention to form that arises from the negotiation of meaning in task-based activity promotes acquisition. Under the highlight of the above discussion, the researcher has had a common sense to focus on the use of task-based activities to improve listening comprehension of EFL prep school students.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

The following two hypotheses have been formulated:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students and that of the control group in the listening comprehension of the post administration of the listening test, in favor of the experimental group students.
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students and that of the control group in the five task types of the post administration of the listening test, in favor of the experimental group students.

### **Significance of the Study**

The present study was, hence, an attempt to overcome the shortcomings in teaching the listening skills, which are considered basic skills. Besides, it emphasized the importance of providing EFL second year prep school students with activities and opportunities to increase their awareness of listening skills and help them to listen and comprehend.

### **Definition of terms**

**Listening.** Listening is an inferential process (Rost, 2002). Linguistic knowledge and world knowledge react as listeners create an intellectual representation of what they listen to. Bottom up and top down processes are put on reach this mental representation and attain comprehension. According to Rost (2002) listening is a process of getting what the speaker actually says, representing and building meaning, negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding, and generating



meaning through involvement, empathy and imagination. To listen closely, listeners will need to have the capability to decode the message, the capability to apply a diversity of strategies and reactive processes to make meaning, and the capability to respond to what is said in many ways, relying on the purpose of the communication (Richards, 2008). In the eight processes of comprehension (Brown, 2001) the listener, after obtaining the information, assigns a verbatim meaning to the utterance first and then assigns an intended meaning to the speech. A key to human communication is the capability to match perceived meaning with intended meaning. Operationally, the researcher defines listening as the act or ability of understanding what a speaker is saying and snatching the meaning, also listening activity means to hear, to receive and to respond the information.

**Task.** Prabhu in International Journal of English Studies/University of Murcia (2004: 47) defines a “task” as an activity that requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought allows teachers to regulate and control that process. Similarly, Lee in Sae-ong (2010: 7) defines a task as a classroom activity or exercise that has an objective obtainable only by interaction among participants, a mechanism for structuring and a focus on meaning exchange and sequencing interaction. One of the characteristics of a task is something that learners do or carry out using their existing language resources (Richards, 2006: 31). According to Willis in Nunan (2004: 3), tasks are activities in which the target language is used for a communicative purpose to attain an outcome. Nunan (2004: 4) defines a task as a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, interacting or producing in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. Also, the task should provide a sense of completeness, able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right. For the purpose of this study, the definition of Nunan (2004) is adopted.

### **Design**

This study used the quasi-experimental design of the pre-post test, control and experimental groups.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study consisted of (76) second year prep school students distributed randomly into two groups; an experimental

group (N = 38) and a control group (N = 38). The groups were chosen from El-Montaza prep school in Damietta. The control group followed the regular method, while the experimental group was exposed to the treatment of the listening procedure via task-based activities, designed by the researcher during the first semester in the academic year 2015-2016. Students' ages in the two groups ranged from 14-15 years. All students in the two groups spent about 8 years learning English. In order to assess the two groups in developing some English listening skills, the researcher administered a listening test before the experiment to ensure the equivalence of both groups. Results showed that the mean scores for the experimental and the control groups are close to each other (15.76 and 14.91) respectively, and that there was no statistically significant difference between their mean scores on the pre- administration of the listening test.

### **Instrument**

To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher used a pre-post listening test that consisted of (28) items; pictures, multiple choice, matching, fill in a form and short-answer questions. The test had five sections, each devoted to one of the five tasks. It was designed to determine the effect of the task types on the listening comprehension of EFL students and to see whether there were any significant relationships between the task-based activities and students' listening improvement. The participants were instructed to listen to the five separate sections and answer the questions as they were listening (See Appendix A). The test is marked out of 140. The study used the referee validity, the test was introduced to a jury of specialists in English language and methodology in the universities, Ministry of Education and experienced supervisors and senior teachers in schools. Then, The items of the test were modified according to their recommendations. The reliability of the test was measured by Alpha Cronbach which was (0.811). So, it was high and statically significant at the 0.001 level. The correlation coefficients also indicated that the test had a high level of consistency which ensured that the listening test was a reliable and applicable one.

### **Procedure**

The study lasted for eight weeks during the first semester in the academic year 2015-2016. Before the study, the listening test was

administered to participants in both groups as pre-test. The control group followed its regular method to listening. In contrast, the experimental group was treated through task-based listening activities, including different kinds of listening tasks such as pictures, multiple choice, matching, fill in a form and short-answer questions, interactive activities, etc. The researcher prepared students for what they were to hear by pre-listening activities that were probably the most important aspect of any listening sequence. Some pre-listening activities were recommended by the researcher at the beginning of first session. The pre-listening activities included looking at a list of items before listening, reading through comprehension checks, questions or completion activities, prediction, previewing new words, using advance organizers -pictures, charts, films or comprehension questions, and group/pair discussion about the topic. Next, the task stage began, the researcher first played the CD and then asked the students to perform the task individually. If they could not achieve the point individually, the researcher would play the CD a number of times so that the students could discover the correct words and compare their findings in pairs or in groups after each time of playing the CD. This strategy was repeated until students could discover the exact words and could have the researcher 's approval. Ultimately, if they could not find it, the teacher provided the exact word. The researcher asked the students if they had some difficulties in listening, they could solve it together. Then, the listening test was post-administrated to the two groups at the end of the experiment.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The first hypothesis**

To test the first hypothesis stating that, " there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students and that of the control group in the listening comprehension of the post administration of the test in favor of the experimental group students", t-test paired sample was used to test the hypothesis, i.e., to investigate the difference between the post mean scores of the experimental group and that of the control group in their listening comprehension. The following are the results of the t-test for paired sample comparing the mean of the students' scores of the experimental group and the control one in their overall of listening comprehension.

Table (1): The "t" Value of the Experimental Group and the Control Group on the Post Administration of the Listening Test

| Groups | N  | Mean  | Stdv. | t     | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Effect size |
|--------|----|-------|-------|-------|----|-----------------|-------------|
| Cont.  | 38 | 14.67 | 2.86  | 8.153 | 74 | 0.00            | .893        |
| Exp.   | 38 | 18.71 | 2.97  |       |    |                 |             |

Results in table (1) show, there is a statistically significant difference ( $t = 8.153$ ) between the mean scores of the control ( $M = 14.67$ ,  $SD = 2.86$ ) and the experimental ( $M = 18.71$ ,  $SD = 2.97$ ) groups with. The t-test of the paired sample results about the difference between the students' mean scores of the overall task based listening activities of the post- administration of the listening test was statistically significant at 0.001 level in favor of the experimental group, revealing the effect of task-based activities on the experimental group's listening comprehension. Therefore, the first hypothesis that showed task-based activities had a significant effect on EFL students' listening comprehension is accepted.

### The second hypothesis

To test the second hypothesis stating that, " there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students and that of the control group in the five task types of the post administration of the test in favor of the experimental group students", t-test paired sample was used to test the hypothesis, i.e., to investigate the difference between the mean scores of the post administration of the test of the experimental group and that of the control group in the five task types. For more details about each task-type, the following table (2) compares the experimental and the control groups' mean scores on each task-type in the post administration of the listening test.

Table (2): t-test Results Comparing the Experimental and Control Groups' Mean Scores on Each Task-Type in the Post Test

| Task types             | group | N  | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Df | t     | Sig. (2- tailed) | Effect size |
|------------------------|-------|----|-------|----------------|----|-------|------------------|-------------|
| Pictures               | Cont  | 38 | 1.814 | 1.813          | 74 | 5.338 | 0.001            | .931        |
|                        | Exp   | 38 | 4.214 | 1.917          |    |       |                  |             |
| Multiple choice        | cont  | 38 | 1.264 | 1.473          | 74 | 3.896 | 0.001            | .695        |
|                        | Exp   | 38 | 3.649 | 3.367          |    |       |                  |             |
| Matching               | cont  | 38 | 4.322 | 1.498          | 74 | 4.658 | 0.001            | .894        |
|                        | Exp   | 38 | 4.555 | 1.434          |    |       |                  |             |
| Fill in a form         | Cont  | 38 | 7.549 | 3.278          | 74 | 2.629 | 0.001            | .584        |
|                        | Exp   | 38 | 9.911 | 4.126          |    |       |                  |             |
| Short-answer questions | cont  | 38 | 3.764 | 1.943          | 74 | 0.430 | No sig.          | .381        |
|                        | Exp   | 38 | 4.014 | 2.711          |    |       |                  |             |

Statistics in table (2) indicate that the higher means are for the post administration of the experimental group in the listening test. The t-test results showed that the difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students and of the control group on the listening test was in favor of the experimental group. This difference was significant for all tasks except the " Short-answer questions " task. Despite the fact that the mean scores of the experimental group on this task were bigger than those of the control group, the difference was not significant. That might be due to the lack of the adequate activities or to the atmosphere inside the classroom which prevented the students' concentration. However, the general result could be due to the use of the task-based activities in teaching listening. So, task-based activities was better than the regular method in teaching listening to second year prep school students.

Tables (1-2) show that the mean scores on the post administration of the test are in favor of the experimental group in the listening test. This means that learning listening skill through using task-based activities increased most significantly for students. It may be because task-based learning utilized with the experimental group students gave them opportunities to learn by doing. "Learning by doing" is not a new concept in communicative language teaching methodologies (Doughty & Long, 2003; Barnard & Viet, 2010; Rahimpour & Magsoudpour, 2011; and Córdoba Zñúiga, 2016). It is based on the theory that a hands-on

approach positively enhances a student's cognitive engagement. Doughty and Long also stated that new knowledge is better integrated into long-term memory, and easier retrieved, if tied to activities and real-world events. As well, Task-based activities provided students with opportunities to use the English language contextually, and to explore it through situational activities. Because task based learning is student centered, students were relaxed and encouraged to use language creatively through the tasks they are asked to perform. Furthermore, task based learning helped students to practice English in an anxiety free classroom. So, the students in the experimental group performed better than the students in the control group who followed the regular method. The lack of opportunity for the students in the control group had lower mean listening score than the experimental group.

According to Ellis (2003, p. 222), tasks including pictorial input are easier and simpler to process than those that involved written input, as they make no demands on the learners' linguistic resources. The possible reason for the students' improvement on the tasks of " pictures, multiple choice, matching and fill in a form" might be attributed to the dependency of these task types on the context. These tasks supported by visual information in some form are mostly easier to perform than tasks with no such support. Also, these tasks supported by pictures, photographs, drawings, tables, and graphs provided learners with more comprehensible input. The participants of this study accomplished these tasks more successfully and with a greater amount of improvement in comparison with the " short-answer questions " task, which was presented through written inputs. Consequently, it was concluded that tasks of the same type with the same input features would have the same effect -the improvement in listening comprehension- on the participants' performance. Also, The students were allowed to listen to understand not to focus their attention on every word. They were trained on how to comprehend specific information. So the students' attention was directed toward the comprehension of information found in the listening content.

One of the rationales for choosing task-based syllabus was that they would encourage the engagement of students. Tasks-based activities established a reasonable challenge and were cognitively motivating, as accomplishment would provide students with a sense of achievement.

The researcher observed that when the participants performed the four tasks of "pictures, multiple choice, matching and fill in a form" they became more motivated to continue and to perform several more tasks of the same type. In a study by Bahrami (2010) the effect of task types on the learners of different levels was investigated and the findings showed that the labeling, matching, and form-filling tasks showed some degrees of effect on improving the listening comprehension of the learners at the intermediate level however the selecting task was not as effective as other tasks.

In the task-cycle phase, the students worked together and they shared their ideas, and exchanged information. The students were mixed as weak and strong and the successful ones helped the others by explaining the tasks and encourage these students. Moreover, the students provided feedback by saying that they enjoyed learning language through task-based activities. Saville-Troika (2006) states that "learners respond to linguistic input by practicing and repeating the language that they hear and when they receive reinforcement for their learning occurs" (p. 35). A close look to the task based activity, we find that the traditional PPP (presentation, practice, production) lesson is reversed. Instead of having the teacher authoritatively manage all the tasks of the lesson, students start with the task themselves. When they finish the task, the teacher draws their attention to the language used in the task, making corrections and modifications to the students' performance. Besides, students found task based activities challenging, motivating and fun. Findings of this research somehow paved the way for acceptance of the belief that instructing listening through various tasks might have a relative positive effect on listening comprehension ability of the EFL students.

### **Conclusion**

Listening comprehension is a complex psychological activity that includes various mechanisms. This study is an attempt to demonstrate the effect of five specific task types in teaching listening comprehension skill. Based on the discussed theoretical and empirical foundation, this study offered a relative degree of empirical support to the theoretical considerations relating to the positive role of task-based activities in the students' listening comprehension ability. Hence, adding a further piece of evidence on the nature of TBI and its effect on listening

comprehension ability to the few studies already conducted in this area. Therefore, tasks promote listening comprehension as Edwards and Willis (2005) argues “tasks provide better contexts for activating learner acquisition process and promoting L2 learning” (p. 15). Moreover, the researcher examined some task types to gauge most effective ones to implement in EFL classes. The study highlighted the importance of various tasks and their difference in listening comprehension ability of EFL students. The results provide evidence that tasks would be effective on promoting the listening ability of prep school students even though some of the tasks are not significantly more effective than the others.

In the study, the students were able to develop their listening skills over the course of the tasks. The most productive step was which the students asked questions to each other in exchanging roles of listener. Each phase of task-based activities was focused the need for students to use language authentically in real-life situations in order to attain the completion of the task efficiently. Another significant factor in this method was the stress-free class environment. This helped students to achieve the tasks. The instructor's friendly manner helped the participants feel comfortable and relaxed about their mistakes. The teacher always directed the students positively by giving suggestions and this resulted as the development in student product. As Rodriguez-Bonces and Rodriguez-Bonces (2010) state, “researchers believe there is less anxiety and learning is more effective if language form per se is not the priority. If task-based instruction takes place, language learning is more meaningful and natural” (p. 166). The focus of task-based learning on fostering a natural and comfortable learning environment is in harmony with the teacher manner (Erickson & Little, 2015). Also, the researcher after each task-based learning noted that the students were motivated and excited by the variety and challenge of class activities. The participants paid attention to and completed all tasks given by the teacher. The authentic use of language in the task-based activities related students' daily life routines and these topics motivated them because they had the opportunity to share their opinions with their friends.

In general, according to the obtained results, the listening comprehension of EFL students tended to improve through exposure to task-based activities. Incorporating tasks and task-based activities in EFL



classrooms enhance the listening comprehension skill of students and task-based teaching of listening may be a suitable and effective alternative for traditional methods of teaching listening. Of course, some tasks are more suitable for specific proficiency levels. The structure and the implementation of task-based activities allowed the participants to express themselves freely and to practice real-world language more than normal classroom environment. Task-based activities provided a chance to practice listening and the topics were interesting enough for student. It seems that the English course books of prep school do not adequately prepare students for task-based instruction due to the fact that they focus excessively on language forms and traditional methods of teaching listening. So, the finding of this study indicates that helping students make connections to authentic tasks and the real world might facilitate listening comprehension. All these points show why task-based learning is effective in improving the listening abilities of the students in EFL context.

### **Implications**

This study has implications for language teaching and syllabus designers. From a practical point of view, a fuller appreciation of the central process of task-based listening has important implications for foreign language teaching. On the basis of finding of the present study, it is suggested that some time must be devoted in listening stage to using different types of task-based activities. In fact, enough opportunity should be given to the listeners to follow the pre-task, task cycle, and language focus stages of task-based approach in the classroom. Similarly, certain kinds of task-based activities may be helpful to students in order to make them motivated and interested enough to increase the level of their general language proficiency, as some researches have pointed out (e.g., Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Littlewood, 2004; McDonough, 2007; Willis & Willis, 2007; and Pongsawang, 2012). Hopefully, this study may draw the material designers' attention to include special task-based activities sections in listening parts in the textbooks. By providing more opportunity for doing different kinds of task-based activities in the books, there may be more acceleration in the process of listening and also in motivating students to be involved in the interactions to improve their listening comprehension.

Concerning the results of this research and series of observations, the teachers could improve their lessons by creating more complex tasks. This technique can be beneficial for teachers who are searching for effective ways of improving listening skills. They can apply this technique to teach, practice, and enhance the listening abilities of their students. Teachers and students should be convinced of the importance of task-based activities to develop listening skills. They should be aware of their students' needs and abilities and choose the appropriate techniques for them to improve their listening. Also, teachers should be cognizant of their students' individual differences consequently, they introduce materials and use techniques which may foster positive attitudes towards learning English in general and listening skill in particular. They should provide a learning environment for the students that is free from stress and relaxed for supporting students' learning, and be more tolerant towards students' mistakes emphasizing that making mistakes is natural in learning process. To sum up, teachers could have more dynamic approach to teaching that practice task-based listening tasks and also involve the learners into active and engaged learning.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

In order to complement the findings of the present study, the researcher suggests the following:

- Investigating a hierarchy of listening skills for all kinds of students' levels: pre-university level and university level.
- Preparing authentic materials for the development of more complex listening skill for EFL students.
- Conducting a similar research at the primary and university stages to investigate the effectiveness of task based activities on developing the students' listening comprehension.
- Conducting content analysis research for the English textbooks at different stages to see how much task based activities are included in these textbooks or are required to be included in them.
- Training programs on how to devise task based activities for teachers should be conducted.

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