# A MODEL OF EFL LISTENING MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** In oral communication, listening skill is important because communication does not take place successfully if the message stated is not understood. To master the skill, learners should learn it. Therefore, good listening materials are needed. However, English teachers often find it difficult to teach listening skills because the listening materials are not adequately available. Besides, if the materials are available, they are not appropriate with the students' needs and the curriculum. In that case, English teachers need to develop listening materials by themselves. For this, they should have knowledge of materials development. This paper presents ideas and tips for English teachers how to develop good and applicable listening materials.

**Keywords-** listening materials, developing, listening skills.

## INTRODUCTION

Besides an adequate mastery of English, an English teacher who teaches English as a foreign language (EFL) needs to have a practical and specific skill to facilitate students in learning English. Many things should be done to make the teaching of English run well. One of important components in an education program is instructional materials. Obviously, one factor which will influence EFL teaching program is the sources of instructional materials which can be selected and developed by a teacher.

In selecting and developing instructional materials, some aspects should be taken into consideration. Among the aspects is the purpose of the teaching of English. Through the teaching of English, the students are expected to be able to communicate in English both orally and in a written form to overcome their daily problems. To meet this objective, the mastery of four language skills is necessarily possessed by the students. (Depdiknas, 2006).

However, the teaching of listening skills is hardly ever conducted at schools because the listening materials are not adequately available. Besides, if the materials are available, they are not appropriate with the students' level, the existing syllabus and the curriculum. In that case, teachers find it difficult to use them to teach listening.

To overcome the problem, English teachers can select and develop the listening materials for their students by themselves without waiting until they become professional writers. For this case, they have to know not only the objective of teaching listening and the content suggested in the curriculum but also the criteria of good and applicable listening materials and the procedure of materials development.

The presentation of this paper is intended to give contribution of ideas and tips which might be beneficial for English teachers to be used as a practical guideline in selecting and developing listening materials.

## DISCUSSION

### The Importance of Teaching Listening

The degree of importance of four language skills is not the same, depending on the kind of communication in which one is involved. In an oral communication, listening skill is very important. Misunderstanding and miscommunication may happen when people do not have a good listening skill. As a passenger is asking another one, for instance, "Is this Wimberley?" (The name of a railway station). The second passenger replied, "No, it's Thursday." Whereupon the third person remarked, "I am too; let's have a drink" (Brown, 2001). From this situation it can be said that the second passenger misheard Wimberley. He heard it as Wednesday. The third person heard Thursday as thirsty. Because of this misunderstanding, the communication did not run well.

The example above gives an impression that teaching the comprehension of spoken language is therefore of primary importance if the communication purpose is to be reached. Without this skill, the communication is practically impossible. A foreign language learner who has memorized a lot of expressions necessary for communication in various contexts cannot continue the communication unless s/he can understand what is spoken by another person with whom s/he communicates. If a foreign language learner wants to have a perfect proficiency of the language, s/he must undergo intensive training and exercises to develop her/his language skills.

Teaching English as a foreign language means helping the learners develop their language skills. As each of the four skills is important in communication, each must get sufficient emphasis for development. But in reality, as stated by Brown (2001) listening

comprehension has not always drawn the attention of educators. Perhaps human beings have a natural tendency to look at speaking as the major index of language proficiency.

However, speaking by itself does not form a communication unless what is said is understood by the listener. The most difficult thing for a visitor to a foreign country is not that s/he cannot make herself/himself understood. Her/his first problem which can cause embarrassment is that s/he cannot understand what is being said to her/him. This shows that teaching listening cannot be neglected in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Nunan (1999) points out that listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, learning can not begin. He provides three other important reasons for emphasizing listening, and these demonstrate the importance of listening to the development of spoken language proficiency. First, spoken language provides a means of interaction for the learner. Because learners must interact to achieve understanding so that access to speakers of the language is essential. Moreover, learners' failure to understand the language they hear is an impetus, not an obstacle, to interaction and learning. Second, authentic spoken language presents a challenge for the learner to attempt to understand language as native speakers actually use it. Third, listening exercises provide teachers with the means for drawing learners' attention to new forms (vocabulary, grammar, new interaction patterns) in the language.

Rubin (1995) also emphasizes the importance of listening. He states that none of the four language skills should be neglected if complete English proficiency would be achieved. Also, if any of the four skills should get more emphasis, it is the listening skill, as it is the most difficult or that makes the heaviest processing demands for the foreign language learners because they must store information in short term memory at the same time as they are working to understand the information.

Cahyono (1997) states that listening skill is considered necessary because it has an essential role in facilitating learners to master English proficiency. Skills in listening, for example, can help learners participate well in oral communication, for communication cannot take place successfully if the message is not understood. Therefore, opportunities given to the students to listen to both non native and native speakers will train them to understand normal communication in unstructured situations.

Therefore, it can be concluded that teaching listening comprehension is very important in TEFL to develop the students' listening skill as an important part of the whole communicative skills. Therefore, listening materials which are suitable with the students' need is necessarily developed.

**The Nature of Listening Process**

Underwood (1993b) claims that listening is the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear. Physiologically, hearing is a process in which sound waves entering the outer ear are transmitted to the ear-drum, converted into mechanical vibrations in the middle ear into nerve impulses that travel to the brain. While the psychological process of listening begins with someone's awareness of and attention to sounds or speech patterns, proceeds through identification and recognition of specific auditory signals, and ends in comprehension.

In comprehending spoken English as a foreign language Gebhard (2000) indicates that there are two distinct processes involved i.e. bottom-up processing and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing refers to a process of decoding a message that the listener hears through the analysis of sounds, words, and grammar, while top-down processing refers to using background of knowledge to comprehend a message. In bottom-up processing, the successful comprehension relies on recognition of sound, words and grammar while successful top-down processing hinges on having the kind of background knowledge needed to comprehend the meaning of the message.

In addition, Nunan (2002) states that both bottom-up and top-down strategies are necessary in developing courses, materials, and lessons. It is important to teach not only bottom-up processing skills, such as the ability to discriminate between minimal pairs, but also to help learners use what they already know to understand what they hear. If teachers suspect that there are gaps in their learners' knowledge, the listening itself can be preceded by schema-building activities to prepare learners for the listening task to come.

Richards (1999) suggests that the listener's inability of using top-down process will make the utterance incomprehensible. On the contrary, bottom-up process alone often provides insufficient basis for comprehension. Further, he states that when learners first encounter a foreign language, they will depend heavily upon top-down processing, that is the working of background knowledge, especially in working out the meaning of the utterance they hear. Then, when their linguistic competence has developed, the listeners may analyze the utterance from the bottom-up process.

From the bottom-up and top-down processes suggested by Richards (1999) it is clear that the two processes cannot be separated. They do not act independently. When one process does not work effectively the other will assist to fill in any gaps. It is quite possible that in different context with different discourses, one type of process will work harder than the other. If someone has to listen to a familiar context or listening to a familiar voice, the top-down process will work harder than the bottom-up process. Besides, it is also said

that the level of bottom-up process needed by a learner is often determined by the amount of top-down process that a student can bring to their listening.

In conclusion we can say that listening includes both physiological and psychological processes, and goes through bottom-up and top-down processing or interactive process between bottom-up and top-down processes. Thus listening competence needs active efforts of improvement through listening practices of various types of tasks, activities and situations so that students will be more competent in using linguistic and background knowledge for comprehending various types of oral texts.

**Microskills of Listening**

Brown (2001) lists a series of microskills of listening, which are useful in helping teachers to break down what it is that the learners need to actually perform as they acquire effective listening strategies. Those skills are as follows: (1) retain chunks of language of different lengths in short-term memory; (2) discriminate among the distinctive sounds of English; (3) recognize English stress patterns, words in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, intonational contours, and their role in signaling information; (4) recognize reduced forms of words; (5) distinguish word boundaries, recognize a core of words, and interpret word order patterns and their significance; (6) process speech at different rates of delivery; (7) process speech containing pauses, errors, corrections, and other performance variables; (8) recognize grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, rules, and elliptical forms; (9) detect sentence constituents and distinguish between major and minor constituents; (10) recognize that a particular meaning may be expressed in different grammatical forms; (11) recognize cohesive devices in spoken discourse; (12) recognize the communicative functions of utterances, according to situations, participants, goals; (13) infer situations, participants, goals using real-world knowledge; (14) from events, ideas, etc., described, predict outcomes, infer links and connections between events, deduce causes and effects, and detect such relations as main Idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification; (15) distinguish between literal and implied meanings; (16) use facial, kinesics, body language, and other nonverbal clues to decipher meanings; and (17) develop and use a battery of listening strategies, such as detecting key words, guessing the meaning of words from context, appeal for help, and signaling comprehension or lack thereof.

Through a checklist of microskills, the teachers can get a good idea of what the techniques need to cover in the domain of listening comprehension. As the teachers plan a

specific technique or listening module, such a list help the teachers focus on clearly conceptualized objectives. And in the evaluation of listening, these microskills can become testing criteria.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the seventeen micro skills apply to conversational discourse. Less interactive forms of discourse, such as listening to monologues like academic lectures, include further, more specific microskills. Students in an academic setting need to be able to perform such things as identifying the structure of a lecture, weeding out what may be irrelevant or tangential, detecting the possible biases of the speaker, critically evaluating the speaker's assertions, and developing means (through note-taking, for example) of retaining the content of a lecture.

**Models of Materials Development**

In developing listening materials, teachers should use a certain model of materials development. They might adopt or adapt a model which has been proposed by materials development experts such as Richards, Tomlinson, Dick and Carey, Denise Finney, and Hyland.

According to Richards (1999) curriculum development processes in language teaching comprise needs analysis, goal setting, syllabus design, methodology, testing and evaluation. While, Tomlinson (1998) points out that there are seven steps in the process of materials writing. The steps are identification of need for materials, exploration of need, contextual realization of materials, pedagogical realization of materials, production of materials, student use of materials, evaluation of materials against agreed objectives.

Dick and Carey (2001) propose a model of instructional design which is called a systematic instructional design. They offer ten steps i.e. identifying instructional goals, conducting instructional analysis, identifying characteristics of the students, writing performance objectives, developing test-items, developing instructional strategies, developing instructional materials, conducting formative evaluation, revising instructional materials and conducting summative evaluation.

Similarly, Finney (2002) describes a framework of instructional materials development consisting of four stages of decision making, i.e. curriculum planning, ends/means specification, program implementation, and implementation in the classroom. In the first step, the competences, objectives, and indicators which have to be achieved by students need to be set up. After that, the specification of the product is determined including the development of the materials. The next step is related to the development of the lesson plans which will be implemented in the teaching and learning process. Then in

final stage, the materials are tried out to the students. She, however, believes that evaluation is not a stage in itself, but as necessary and integral part of each and all of the stages already mentioned.

Hyland (2003) suggests nine steps of materials development related to course materials namely consideration of the students (personal goals, proficiency levels, interest, etc.), consideration of learning context (duration, resources, relationship to other subjects), consideration of the target context (future roles of learners and the text and the tasks they need), establishment of course goals and objectives, planning the syllabus, devising units of work and lessons, creation or evaluation and selection of materials, teaching the course, evaluation of learners.

All of the models proposed by the experts might be applicable and might be well employed in developing listening materials. However, it is possible for teachers to make an adaptation. The adaptation is done to suit particular instructional needs, purposes, and available resources. Therefore for the practicality, the writer proposes a model of listening materials development as follows: first, conducting needs analysis, second, selecting materials, third, developing materials, fourth, expert and practitioner's validation, fifth, evaluation and revision, sixth, conducting the try-out, and seventh, evaluation and revision. (See Figure 1)
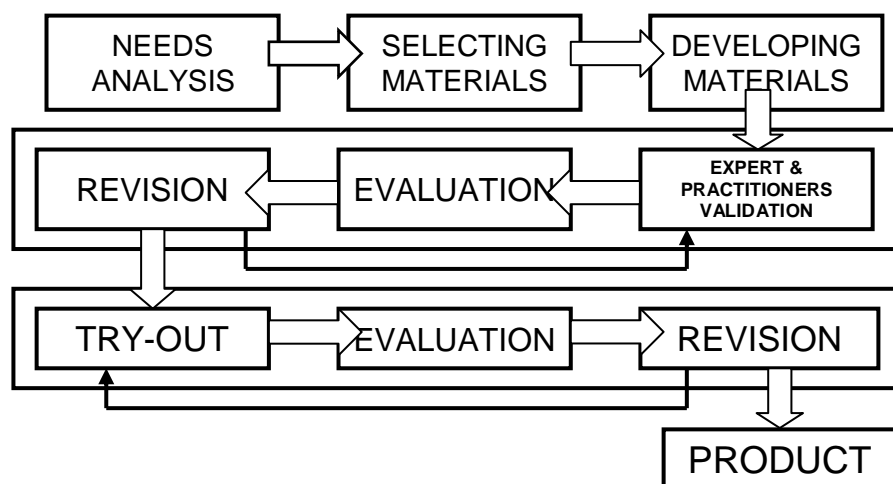


Figure 1 Stages in Materials Development

**Needs Analysis**

Needs analysis is a procedure used to collect information about learners' needs (Richard, 2001). In language teaching it is used for a number of different purposes. First to find out what language skills a learner needs in order to perform a particular role. Second, to help determine if an existing materials adequately address the needs of the students

Third, to identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to do. Fourth, to collect information about a particular problem learners are experiencing.

To obtain the data in needs analysis stage, some instruments such as questionnaires, interview guide and field notes can be used. They are employed to find out information about what the learners' and teacher's need.

**Selecting Materials**

Before developing listening materials, some available teaching materials related to the English listening should be collected. When the materials are already gathered, the recorded materials are played and listened to carefully. This is administered to select the appropriate ones. However, selecting materials which suit students' need and applicable for all students is not easy because the appropriateness of the materials should be based on the learners' need, teachers' need, the techniques of teaching listening and the facilities available in the school. In addition, the curriculum should be taken into consideration in terms of the instructional objectives, especially the standard competences and basic competences of listening skill.

The process of materials selection might be the first step to see the strengths and weaknesses of the sources of the materials. In that case, the criteria of the materials need to be set up. Ur (1996) states that the criteria can help teachers to select instructional materials.

In relation to that, Underwood (1993a) states that most teachers are not able to choose what material to use. But if they are in a position to make that choice, they have to be sure to listen to as large of any recording as they can before making up mind.

Here is a simple and practical list of criteria to be taken into consideration proposed by Underwood (1993a): (1) the recording is really clear, not just for one person to listen to but for use in a large class; (2) it is at the right level for the students; (3) it is easy to use with clear divisions between exercise and sections and so on, that the teacher can find the part needed easily; (4) the links between the recorded material and related printed material are straightforward; (5) it generates good language work; (6) the content is suitable; (7) it is culturally appropriate; (8) it is interesting; (9) the students will find it motivating.

Moreover Underwood (1993a) suggests teachers to use the checklist when choosing recorded material for their classes (See Table 1). This checklist will facilitate teachers in evaluating their listening materials.

Table 1 Checklist for the Selection of Audio Recording

| Features to consider | Yes/No | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| ▪ Clarity of recording | | |
| ▪ level of content | | |
| ▪ Practicality to use | | |
| ▪ Links with book | | |
| ▪ Quality of language work | | |
| ▪ Content Appropriateness | | |
| ▪ Cultural acceptability | | |
| ▪ Attractiveness | | |
| ▪ Variety of voices | | |

## DEVELOPING MATERIALS

Developing materials is the next step in which the selected materials are organized to be presented in the learning experience. The choice and the organization of materials is a big decision. Developing materials refers to the development of listening materials which is based on students' need and the consideration on the curriculum.

Materials development covers at least three strategies: adopting, developing, and adapting materials. Adopting materials involves the process of making decision on the kinds of needed materials, evaluating and using the materials.

Developing materials can be conducted if all efforts to adopt materials fail to find appropriate materials (Brown, 2001). It is an extremely hard work since the materials might be developed from the very beginning.

Another way to get appropriate materials is adapting the selected materials. A compilation of materials can be evaluated and analyzed, and then the decision on materials which will be adapted is made.

The materials adoption, development, and adaptation follow certain criteria. The criteria are related to language, length, content, style, and speed of delivery, the style of delivery and the quality of the recording (Underwood: 1993b). The following is a brief description of the criteria.

## Language

Listening texts should be of the right level, as texts of the right level of difficulty combined with appropriate activities will develop not only the listening skill but also contribute to students' overall language learning. It is more important to select listening texts which provide comprehensible input and which are at appropriately the right level of difficulty than to 'match' listening material with the language being taught at any particular time.

## Length

There can be no strict rule about the length of listening texts for a particular level. The important thing is that if the teacher has a text which she wants to use but finds it rather long, she should plan to stop the tape from time to time, and use it in more manageable sections and introduce pauses to give time to the students to think.

## Content

In early stages, it is important to use plain, straightforward content so that this can lessen the students' burdens. The burdens are the problems that the students have to cope with while they are listening. They do not know what sounds will occur, how fast the language is to be spoken, what the intonation signifies, what pauses are used for, or even whether the speaker is angry or pleased. To have plain, straightforward content, for example, texts should be avoided if they jump backwards and forwards in time, deal with very abstract concepts, are full of jargon words, or are not logically sequenced, etc.

## The Style of Delivery

At least in the early stages of their learning, students should not be faced with too many varieties of styles or ways of speaking at once. They should at first be presented with listening texts which are spoken without excessive or sudden changes in speed or pitch or volume. It is suggested that the selected text for early stages is the one spoken by a person whose natural speed of speech is quite slow and deliberate, but who has a pleasant tone and varied pitch.

## The Speed of Delivery

Underwood (1993b) suggests that words of the texts should be spoken in normal speed, not slowed down in an attempt to help the students. It is better to have speakers who naturally speak slowly than to have a speaker whose natural speech is fast but tries to slow down for the sake of foreign listeners. More important than the speed of uttering the words is the length or pauses between groups of words. With these pauses students will have time to sort out the part of the message just received and to prepare to receive the next part. So, teachers should select listening texts already having appropriate pauses or give pauses while playing the tape for the students.

## The Quality of Recording

The tape should be clear enough for the students to hear. The background sounds which give an indication of the context are often helpful to the listeners, and give a much

more realistic listening situation. But teachers should avoid recording where the background is distracting, or so loud.

### Experts and Practitioners Validation

After the materials are developed, they are given to an expert and practitioners to be validated. The expert chosen should meet the criteria of having expertise and experience in materials development and have expertise in the theory of teaching listening. The practitioners should have sufficient experience in teaching English and know well about the characteristics of good listening materials.

The criteria of good and applicable listening materials which will be validated should be determined so that the expert and practitioners can judge clearly whether the developed listening materials meet the criteria. The expert and practitioners judgment is used for the basis of revision of the materials.

### Try-out

The purpose of the try-out of the prepared materials is to know its applicability, appropriateness, usefulness, effectiveness, efficiency, and attractiveness of the products to the user. Try-out can be conducted in a small group consisting of 3 or 5 students or in one classroom consisting of 40 or more students.

By trying-out the draft materials, the necessary data concerning the applicability of the developed materials can be elicited, and the advantages and the disadvantages of the materials are revealed. By so doing, the data obtained are useful to identify the problems and hindrances in applying the materials. Based on the obtained data, the revision is done.

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Listening is one of language skills which should be learned by learners. It means that this skill should be taught by teachers. Therefore, English teachers who teach EFL need to have a skill to develop listening materials by themselves because very often are the listening materials not adequately available. If they are available, they are not appropriate with the students' need and the curriculum. In that case, it is important for English teachers to know the procedure of materials development. They also have to know how to select and develop listening materials. Besides, they need to have knowledge about the criteria of good listening materials.

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