The Effect of Task-Based Activities on Iranian Beginner EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of applying task-based activities on students' listening comprehension improvement. It also aimed at providing evidence to show how shifting from a traditional language teaching approach into the TBLT approach can positively affect the process of learning listening skill. To do this, 80 participants were selected from three English language institutes in Shiraz. Participants of the study were chosen by assigning a placement test and they were divided into two groups. In the experimental group, the participants were taught listening skills based on the tenets of task-based teaching while the participants in the control group were taught listening skills traditionally. This process continued for 20 sessions. A pre-test and post-test were administered. One-way ANOVA, correlation and t-test analyses were used to determine whether differences between the sample means were statistically significant or not. It was found that the students of the experimental group, who experienced task-based principles of teaching listening, performed remarkably better than those

of the control group on the final listening post-test. And it was concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the effects of tasked-based activities and traditional activities on Iranian beginner EFL learner's listening comprehension.

1. Introduction

By the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in language teaching methodology, communicative competence became the end goal of any learning and teaching program. According to CLT, all four skills of language are equally important and listening skill is not a secondary skill, but an active and internal one. Among recent manifestations of communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a major focal point of language teaching which is based on using tasks as the core of language teaching and learning (Brown,2007).

According to Field (2008), task-based instruction is designed to explicitly teach learners how to use strategies throughout the listening process. In contrast to the previously mentioned approaches to listening instruction, a task-based approach is more student-centered. Students learn and practice a 'macro-strategy', a strategy that can be broadly applied when listening to different materials in a variety of contexts. Through strategy use, students are empowered to monitor their own comprehension as they identify problem areas of understanding and then use both the listening material and possibly their peers to check and clarify their understandings.

Teachers need to heed the recent developments in L2 listening research and replace traditional models that tend to focus more on product, with more process-oriented models that will in turn better meet the unique needs of students in language classrooms (Ashcraft & Tran, 2010; Brown, 2007; Field, 2008). The traditional model of L2 listening instruction, which was ultimately designed to measure comprehension by examining whether or not students were able to produce a correct answer, is no longer the most appropriate one. Instead, it should be replaced

with an integrated model that makes listening instruction interactive, student-centered, and aims at the development of skills and strategies that can be applied in authentic listening contexts both within and beyond the classroom. Taking these points into consideration, the present study, hence, tries to focus on the way task-based language teaching can promote learners' listening comprehension.

2. Review of Literature

Recent years have shown increased attention to the use of task-based instruction (TBI) in language teaching (Bygate, Skehan and Swain, 2000; Skehan, 1998; Willis, 1996). The need for a change from the traditional approach of presentation, practice and production (PPP) to TBI is a controversial issue. Skehan (1996) claims that there are two opposite ideas about the help of PPP method in FL classes. Rivers (cited in Skehan, 1996) suggests that the traditional PPP method includes many techniques that provide teachers with a clear schedule of activation to follow. However, Skehan (1996) emphasizes the unproven and unrealistic nature of PPP and proposes task-based approaches to instruction as a preferable alternative. The same ideas are shared by Prabhu (1987) and Nunan (1989). In the PPP method, students are seen as "language learners", whereas in the TBI pedagogy, they are treated as "language users" (Ellis, 2003b, p. 252). Task-based instruction can be defined as an approach in which communicative and meaningful tasks play the central role in language learning and in which the process of using language in communication carries more importance than mere production of correct language forms. Therefore, TBI is viewed as one model of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of regarding real and meaningful communication as the primary feature of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Willis, 1996).

Authentic language use, the real use of real language in classroom content, fosters a learning environment in which learners have their own say; they gain communicative practice within their own sense of the defined goals in TBI. In other words, learners are to learn the language as they use it. Because of this, communicative language use comes into focus as an essential aspect of a task-based framework (Willis, 1996). In

addition to developing communicative capability, attention to form is fundamental for language learning. Even though TBI emphasizes the primacy of meaning, a focus on form has a parallel importance in the language learning process (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001).

In the task-based framework, it is desirable that learners can achieve accurate as well as fluent use of language (Willis, 1996). In addition to real language use, which is a common feature both in CLT and TBI, other critical dimensions define TBI: "input and output processing, negotiation of meaning and transactionally focused conversations" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). TBI provides effective language learning contexts in the form of tasks (Willis, 1996). Among the significant contexts for language learning, exposure to meaningful language input is seen as primary (Krashen, cited in Ellis, 2003b; Willis, 1996). However, Swain (1985) indicates that productive output is as significant as meaningful input, and TBI requires a product-an output-at the end of a task (cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Communication in task-based instruction places an equal importance on the processing of comprehensible input and production of comprehensible output. In task-based learning, learners also have the opportunity to negotiate meaning to in order identify and solve a problem that occurs in their communication (Ellis, 2003b; Foster, 1998; Plough & Gass, cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Negotiation of meaning involves adjustment, rephrasing and experimentation with language. The components of meaning negotiation are central for communication in real life conversations. Conversations involving clarification requests, confirmation and comprehension checks, and self-repetitions make input comprehensible. Thus interactions to negotiate meaning are essential to insure that input is comprehensible and language acquisition is promoted (Seedhouse, 1998, and Yule, Powers, & Macdonald, 1992).

Despite the integral role that listening plays in achieving communicative competence in a L2, it is viewed by many as the least explored modality (Brown, 2007; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2007).

Studies related to L2 listening have examined how factors such as speech rate, lexis, phonological features, background knowledge, prox-

imity to L1, and affective variables have shaped how those in the field teach, learn, and research listening. Additionally, L2 listening methodology has changed over time, which is reflected in the constant evolution of its curriculum and instruction.

During the 1950s and 1960s, audiolingualism, with its directed focus on memorization of new language concepts that were presented through scripted audio texts, drove listening curriculum and instruction. At this time, listening instruction was developed to strictly focus on preparing students for lecture listening, or more scripted discourse, rather than spontaneous, real-life, interactive listening experiences (Brown, 2007). However, in the 1970s and 1980s, audiolingualism was replaced by a more communicative model, one that was designed to encourage application of previously learned language skills in more authentic, 'real life' contexts (Brown, 2007; Field, 2008).

Recently, the belief that students should only listen to authentic materials has shifted again to make room for more integrated models such as content-and task-based instruction (Brown, 2011; Field, 2008; Hinkel, 2006; Vandergrift, 2007). An integrated skills model promotes the use of listening, speaking, reading, and writing throughout the listening process, and expects learners to demonstrate L2 listening comprehension by using at least two of the above mentioned modalities simultaneously (Field, 2008). Despite their differences, audiolingualism, communicative, and integrated models have all influenced the field of L2 listening curriculum, instruction, and research in unique ways. L2 listening is no longer considered to be a passive, receptive skill where learners demonstrate their comprehension by answering questions. Instead, curriculum and instruction is now designed to treat L2 listening as an active, productive skill that requires students of all ages and backgrounds to be actively engaged throughout the entire listening process regardless of their educational setting (Ashcraft & Tran, 2010; Brown, 2011; Field, 2008; Hedge, 2000; Vandergrift, 2007).

Additional developments in the field of L2 listening include the integration of listening instruction with that of other modalities. Parallels are sometimes drawn between approaches to the curricular design and instructional application of the receptive modalities of listening and read-

ing. Much like reading, listeners need to demonstrate certain behaviors if they are going to fully engage in the L2 listening process. Moreover, it has been established that full engagement in the listening process requires L2 listeners to activate their schema by setting a purpose or identifying specific tasks that will help them to maximize comprehension before, during, and after listening. For example, students might make predictions or hypotheses before listening and then test them during and after listening, or summarize both orally and in writing during and after listening (Ashcraft & Tran, 2010; Brown, 2011; Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2002, 2007).

3. Statement of the Problem

Many researchers have specifically focused on listening comprehension in the context of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), the essential ones include Willis (1990), Long and Crookes (1992), Ellis(2003b), Littlewood (1981) and Nunan(2004). Willis (1990) believed that tasks are activities which involve students focusing on the outcomes of the activity rather than on the language itself. On the other hand, TBLT can motivate students to learn effectively more than other approaches (Long & Crooks, 1992). This is because TBLT is learner-centered (Ellis, 2003b).

In the Iranian context of language learning and language teaching, the audio-lingual method is the dominant one, that is, the emphasis is on structure and grammar of language. As Hosseini (cited in Ghorbani, 2008) stated:

In Iran, teachers continue to use the grammar translation method through textbooks which lack listening and speaking activities and deploy grammatical exercises disguising as 'writing' activities. They may do so because the standardized national exams are still largely structural in orientation (p.133).

Thus, more studies need to be done in order to focus on the extent to which task-based instruction can be effective. Today, task-based approach to teaching is trendy and it can be sufficient for all the language skills. In Iran, few, if any, studies have been conducted on the role task-based teaching plays in listening comprehension. As EFL educators, we need to explore how our Iranian students learn to listen to English tasks

and understand more the problems they have encountered in listening so that we can help them acquire better strategies. To get a clearer picture regarding Iranian listeners' perceptions of listening tasks in English and learn more about different levels of proficiency and listeners' use of specific strategies, this study can be useful.

On the other hand, in Iran, the focus of most English courses is on reading skills and one of the important channels of obtaining information, i.e. the aural channel is mostly overlooked (Dahmardeh,2006). In addition, the development of technology and computer provide us with more and more access to information and aural channel takes on more importance because multimedia is one of the greatest parts of modern technology. When considering these issues, listening skill takes on great importance and needs more attention. Being aware of such listening problems might enable us to provide better ways of training our learners regarding the listening tasks, which can, in turn, bring about maximum absorption of aural input (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

4. Objectives of the Study

Learning English by using new methods in education encourages students to learn the language, develop their aural ability and consequently help them speak fluently and overcome the language barriers. As such, this study was an attempt to investigate the effect of tasked-based activities including picture dictation, picture completion, summarizing and paraphrasing on Iranian beginner EFL learners' listening comprehension to determine whether teaching listening through this approach could be influential in EFL listening comprehension improvement of Iranian beginner learners or not.

5. Research Question

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research question was formed: RQ. Do tasked-based activities including picture dictation, picture completion, summarizing and paraphrasing improve Iranian beginner EFL learners' listening comprehension?

6. Methodology

6.1. Participants

The participants of this study comprised of 80 EFL learners, 32males and 48 females, selected from three English language institutes including Binesh, Sina, and Forooqandisheh in Shiraz . All the students were native speakers of Persian, ranging from 11 to 14 years of age. The selected participants were assigned into experimental and control groups with the same number of learners, 40 students in each group. Each group was then sub-divided into 4 classes. The students had to study English Time 4 (part one) through a semester course at a beginner level. The participants in the experimental group were presented with the principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT) while teaching listening skills. The control group participants were taught based on the traditional methods of teaching listening skills.

The data collection process was conducted with the permission granted from the institute. Besides, the teachers of these two groups were also instructed on the way they had to teach in each class, using the treatment under investigation in the experimental group, and applying no treatment in the control group.

6.2. Treatment

The participants in both groups had to take a test at the beginning of the term, before any instruction. The results were collected and stored for future comparison with data collected after the treatment. After this stage, the experimental group received the treatment in which they were presented with task-based language teaching in which the teacher had to use task-based activities for teaching listening skills. The participants in the control group, on the other hand, were taught based on the traditional methods of teaching listening skills. After the treatment which encompassed teaching for ten weeks using both teaching methods, the listening test was conducted again. All collected data were organized and categorized for data analysis phase.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), focusing on listening activities, was applied for the experimental group. As mentioned in the previous part the experimental group, itself, was sub-divided into four

classes having the same number of students, 10 language learners in each class. For all these four classes task-based activities were applied but types of activities were different. In fact, four different activities for the experimental group classes were used to make a comparison between the four different activity types.

As this study aimed to investigate the effect of task-based activities on listening comprehension improvement, it would be really useful to distinguish and identify the most effective task type. These four classes of the experimental group as well as their related treatments were defined and introduced as:

6.2.1. Experimental group one

The experimental group number one received 20 sessions of Picture Dictation treatment through which the teacher provided the students with picture dictation worksheets. The teacher wanted the students to draw the picture of the terms they heard while listening to him. In fact the students had to illustrate the words through drawing their pictures to convey their meaning.

6.2.2. Experimental group two

The experimental group number two received 20 sessions of Picture completion treatment. The researcher provided the students with picture completion worksheets. The students were asked to complete the uncompleted parts of the picture based on the listening task. The teacher read aloud the text to the students. After finishing the text by the teacher, the students had to begin completing pictures.

6.2.3. Experimental group three

The experimental group number three received 20 sessions of Summary treatment. The researcher provided a blank worksheet for each student. He asked the students to listen carefully to the text that he read aloud. After finishing the text, the students had to write a summary of what they heard.

6.2.4. Experimental group four

The experimental group number four also received 20 sessions of Para-

phrase treatment. The researcher provided each participant with a blank worksheet. They had to listen a text by the teacher. After finishing the text they wrote what they had heard by their own words.

6.3. Instruments

In order to obtain measurable data with which the results of the present study could be statistically analyzed, the following instruments were utilized:

Pre-test: The listening section of the English Time series Placement Test was used as the pre-test. English Time series Placement Test, is a language proficiency test designed by Oxford University Press (2nd edition, photocopiable) for people who can use very basic written and spoken English at a beginner level. This test which is one of the standardized tests among the series of Oxford ESOL was divided into three sections: Reading-Writing, Listening, and Speaking. All sections were administered in this study for homogenizing the participants at the beginning of the study, and each question carried one mark. The allocated time for this test was around two hours: 1 hour and 30 minutes for reading and writing, 20 minutes for listening, and 10 minutes for speaking.

The reliability of this test was estimated by the researcher of the study, using the Cronbach's Alpha formula and indicated Alpha level at .799 which shows that the test is reliable to be used for the purpose of this study.

Post-test: At the end of the treatment, a listening test designed and made by the researcher was administered as the post-test. This test included 20 items and its reliability was estimated using the Cronbach's Alpha formula and indicated Alpha level at .799 which shows that the test was reliable to be used for the purpose of this study. This test included 20 listening items which was administered in 20 minutes.

6.4. Data analysis

Data analysis procedures for this study were comprised of quantitative data analyses using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results answered the research question of this study through some descriptive statistics which represented Means and Standard Deviations

of different variables under investigation as well as one-way ANOVA, correlation and a t-test analysis which were used to determine whether differences between the sample means were statistically significant or not. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was also run to test the normality of scores dispersion. Levene's statistics were used to test the equality of variences in the two groups for testing of the means.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1. Descriptive statistics

The 80 participants of this study were selected from among128 EFL students based on their proficiency scores. Then they were divided into two groups, experimental group and control group. The participants in both groups had to take a test at the beginning of the term, before any instruction. The results were collected and stored for future comparison with data collected after the treatment. After this stage, the experimental group received the treatment in which they were presented with task-based language teaching. The participants in the control group, on the other hand, were taught based on the traditional methods of teaching listening skills. After the treatment which encompassed teaching for ten weeks using both teaching methods, a listening test was conducted as the post-test. All collected data were organized and categorized for data analysis phase.

In order to check their homogeneity, a one way ANOVA was run on their proficiency scores. The descriptive statistics of the experimental group and the control group is demonstrated in Table1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for placement test

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
experimental	40	68.73	3.731	63	75
control	40	66.80	3.256	61	73
Total	80	67.76	3.493	62	73

Mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores of the experimental and control groups are shown in Table 1. Minimum score

(Min=61) belonged to the control group and the maximum score (Max=75) was possessed by the experimental group. As it is clear from Table 1, the mean scores of two groups were approximately the same (68.73, 66.80).

But in order to be sure whether there is any significant difference among the mean scores of the two groups or not, the data were analyzed through a one-way ANOVA; the results of which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: One-way ANOVA for the pretest

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PET	Between Groups	30.533	1	15.267	.945	.397
	Within Groups	678.267	78	16.149		
	Total	708.800	79			

As the results of the ANOVA test in Table 2 shows there has not been a significant difference among the two groups regarding their proficiency level ($F(1, 78) = 0.945$, $Sig. = 0.397 > .05$).

7.2. Normality assumption

The data obtained from the performance of the participants in the listening tasks were put into SPSS and one-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (Table 3) was run to test the normality of scores dispersion. Assuming zero shows the normality of the variables dispersion, if significance level is under 0.05, then the zero will be denied and the result of the dispersion normality is not acceptable.

Table 3: One-sample kolmogorov-smirnov test

	Group	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	Experimental group	40	.506	.960
	Control group	40	.635	.814
Post-test	Experimental group	40	.703	.706
	Control group	40	.496	.967

Based on the results of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test shown in Table 3, all Sig. values are above .05 thus it can be concluded that

the normality of the scores in pre-test and post-test was assured and the following tests were computed for answering the research question.

7.3. Inferential statistics used to answer the research question
The first part of data analysis referred to the research question of the study which aimed at investigating the effect of applying task-based activities on listening comprehension improvement of Iranian EFL learners. To answer this question, a paired sample t-test was conducted to see if there is any significant difference in the listening scores of the pretest and posttest for the experimental group.

Table 4: Paired sample t-test for the experimental group

Group			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental group	Pair 1	Pre-test	.587	40	0.128	-8.515	39	.000
		Post-test	.876	40	0.094			

As Table 4 shows, the listening mean score for the experimental group in the posttest is bigger than the pretest and significance level is smaller than 0.05, (t (39) = 8.515, p=0.000), so we can conclude that the listening measurement in the experimental group has shown a significant increase. So the answer to this question is positive and we can say that applying task-based activities leads to more improvement in the listening comprehension skills of the participants.

As a result, the null hypothesis of the study which predicted that tasked-based activities have no improving effect on Iranian beginner EFL learners' listening comprehension is rejected because the results proved that applying task-based activities can positively affect learners' listening comprehension.

Based on the research question, the researcher wanted to find out if there is any significant difference among the two groups regarding their listening scores in the post-test. To answer this question the researcher conducted a one way ANOVA analysis.

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics in the two groups. The variances equality in the two groups is needed for testing of the means. So this test is done by Levene's statistics.

Table 5: Test of homogeneity of variances

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Post-test	Experimental group	40	.876	.094	2.431	1	78	.100
	Control group	40	.623	.110				
	Total	80	.745	.138				

As it is indicated in Table 5, the mean score of experimental group (0.876) is much higher than the mean score of the control group (0.623).

In order to see whether this difference among the groups is statistically meaningful or not, the researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA test, the results of which are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: ANOVA test for comparing the experimental and the control groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Post-test	Between Groups	.481	1	.241	28.360	.000
	Within Groups	.356	78	.008		
	Total	.837	79			

As the results of ANOVA test in Table 6 show the difference among the groups is statistically meaningful. The values observed for $F = 28.360$, $Sig. = .000 < 0.05$ indicated that the two groups involved, did not perform equally in the listening task performance, because of the different types of instruction they have had for their listening comprehension skill. As the results of tables indicate, the listening mean score of posttest in the experimental group is significantly bigger than the control group. Therefore, the hypothesis of the study which predicted no statistically significant difference between the effects of Tasked-based

activities and traditional activities on Iranian beginner EFL learner's listening comprehension was rejected as well.

The experimental group, itself, was sub-divided into four classes having the same number of students, 10 language learners in each class. For all these four classes, task-based activities were applied but types of activities were different. In fact, four different activities for the experimental group classes were used to make a comparison between the four different activity types which included: picture dictation, picture completion, summarizing and paraphrasing.

In order to test whether the whole treatment (task-based activities) affected the participants' performance (listening comprehension), statistical analysis of Pearson correlation was also employed through which the relationship between task type and listening ability of EFL learners was investigated. The results are provided below for the experimental group participants who are classified according to their task types:

Table 7: The results of the correlation between listening skill and task types

		Picture dictation	Picture completion	Summarizing	Paraphrasing
Listening skill	Pearson Correlation	.593*	.852**	.758**	.710**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.000	.001	.003
	N	10	10	10	10

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

By studying Table 7, one can see that the correlations between listening ability and all task types are statistically significant, that is, Picture dictation (r= .593, p= .020), Picture completion (r= .852, p= .000), Summarizing (r= .758, p= .001), and Paraphrasing (r= .710, p= .003). As a result, it can be claimed that there is a significant correlation between task type and listening ability of EFL learners.

7.4. Discussion of the research question

To summarize the major findings of this study in terms of research hypotheses set at the outset, the null-hypothesis predicting no improvement in listening skill through using task-based activities for the experimental group in comparison with the control group was rejected in this study. This could be due to the different task-based activities that were used during the treatment period. Therefore, the effects of using task-based activities on listening comprehension skill were confirmed in this study. Additionally, the experimental group indicated more ability in listening. It was predicted that using task-based activities would lead to listening comprehension improvement. In fact, the results revealed that the systematic variation between groups' performance on post-test was due to the manipulation of experimental treatment. Accordingly, it could be speculated that using task-based activities affected the listening ability of the experimental group.

The results of data analyses demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference in the performance of experimental and control groups. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the experimental group was taught based on the tenets of TBLT while the control group was taught traditionally using conventional methods of teaching listening skill. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a direct relationship between using TBLT method of teaching listening and learners' listening comprehension improvement in EFL classes. As such, the first research hypothesis of the study which predicted no relationship between using TBLT method of teaching and learners' improvement in listening comprehension in EFL classes is rejected.

The results obtained highlight the potential benefits of task-based activities in language classes which can positively affect listening comprehension improvement among EFL learners. They showed that there was a significant difference among the means of the participants of the two groups regarding their listening skill during the test process. The experimental group had a better performance in comparison with the control group.

The findings from the post-test of the experiment in the study showed that using task-based language teaching and learning could improve the

students' listening comprehension abilities. The results from the present study are consistent with those of Jeon and Hahn(2006) that task-based learning improved language skills. This explains that Willis's (1996) principles of task-based learning provide students with opportunities to use language creatively. And task-based learning enhances the language proficiency of the learners. The findings of this study also confirm results (Brown, 2011; Field, 2008; Hinkel, 2006; Vandergrift,2007) that integrated models such as content-and task-based instruction positively affect student learning. The accountability associated with task-based listening usually promotes students to pay closer attention and continue listening to what they heard even when they did not understand.

The implementation of L2 listening techniques such as discourse analysis and the incorporation of new technologies (Ashcraft & Tran, 2010), and the explicit instruction of strategies directed at building background, setting a purpose, finding the main idea, and making inferences (Brown, 2011; Ellis, 2003a; Hedge, 2000, Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodtari, 2006) are all examples of ways instruction was implemented to actively engage L2 listeners. Students were fully engaged in the listening process and activated their schema by setting a purpose or by identifying specific tasks that would help them to maximize comprehension before, during, and after listening.

Learners made predictions or hypotheses before listening and then tested them during and after listening, and summarized causal relationships identified both orally and in writing during and after listening (Ashcraft & Tran, 2010; Brown, 2011; Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2007).

The findings of this study suggest that a task-based approach to L2 listening instruction engaged all students, including those who struggled. Students were asked to complete listening tasks and were given limited opportunity to respond while listening (Field, 2008). Concrete academic listening tasks such as setting a purpose for listening focused students' attention and helped them meet the desired outcomes of the task at hand (Ellis, 2003a) Task-based instruction is student-centered by design, which may explain the high levels of student engagement as well as the overall gains.

By investigating the obtained results, there was a significant rela-

tionship between the listening ability and all four task types for the experimental group. The results suggest that there is high correspondence between picture dictation, picture completion, summarizing and paraphrasing task types and listening ability levels. In a similar study performed by Bahrami (n. d), the influence of task-based activities on listening ability of EFL learners was examined. The participants of that study were ninety senior EFL learners and the sources of data for this quasi-experimental study included two task-based tests of listening comprehension and a test of language proficiency entitled an Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE) test. The results of this study demonstrated that at the intermediate level, all the tasks showed some degrees of correspondence with the level in question except the task of selecting.

8. Conclusion

Listening comprehension is a complex psychological activity that involves various mechanisms. Feyten(1991) claims that more than 45% of communicating time is listening, which clearly shows how important this skill is in overall language ability. Different methods have been tested to promote listening ability of EFL learners in Iran, but unfortunately most EFL learners suffer from listening problems. This study was an attempt to demonstrate the effectiveness of four specific task types in teaching listening comprehension skill and to see if there is any direct correspondence between four specific task types and listening ability of students.

Generally speaking, the results mark significant positive relationship between applying task-based language instruction and students' listening comprehension improvement in language classes which is in line with findings of earlier research studies. These results indicate that students who were taught based on TBLT tenets are more able to improve their listening comprehension skills via using the various tasks in the classroom.

According to the obtained results, the listening-comprehension skill in EFL students tended to improve through exposure to task-based input. Specifically, there is significant positive correlation between listen-

tening ability and all four tasks.

Incorporating tasks and task-based activities in EFL classrooms enhance the listening comprehension skill of learners and task-based teaching of listening may be a suitable and effective alternative for traditional methods of teaching listening. Of course, some task types are more suitable for specific proficiency levels. Therefore, it is better to teach listening by means of tasks that have high correspondence to the learners' proficiency level.

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