

# Enhancing Learners' Communicative Skills through Audio-Visual Means

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**Abstract:** Communication helps us to receive and transmit information with the help of the language. In the result of globalization and cultural integration English became a worldwide used language. Knowledge of English gives rise to numerous possibilities so modern specialists have to speak the English language fluently. Thus, methods of teaching students a foreign language should be developed. English language acquisition is closely connected with different types of activities with audio and video that help motivate students to communicate and enhance their communicative competence of English through listening and speaking. Moreover, listening to and watching authentic professionally-oriented educational materials has a better impact on the sensory organs and allows students to choose the appropriate vocabulary to respond quickly to communicative situations. Therefore, we hypothesize, that the effectiveness of the use of audiovisual means in teaching professional English communication depends on such factors as the teacher's skills level, the quality of the audiovisual means used, the authenticity of the professional audio and video texts, the correct organization of the educational process and the consideration of the individual peculiarities of students. In this study we analyse theoretical data relevant to the current research, describe our personal approach to the choice of methods and techniques using audio and video to provide students with proficiency in professional English and seek to compare the level of English language proficiency before and after the experiment when conducting our lessons with different types of activities. Our findings prove that the appropriate usage of authentic audio and video professional materials by the teacher influences the sensory organs of students and allows them to memorize vocabulary and speech patterns better in order to react to communicative situations.

**Keywords:** *EFL – English as a Foreign Language; Professional English (Medicine); communicative competence; communicative skills; audiovisual means; monological speech; dialogic speech; authentic audio and video texts.*

**How to cite:** Labinska, B., Matiichuk, K., & Morarash, H. (2020). Enhancing Learners' Communicative Skills through Audio-Visual Means. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 12(2), 220-236. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/12.2/275>



## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Listening as a basis for communication*

Communication is the foundation of any society, as we are able to receive and transmit information with the help of it. The English language (EL) was acknowledged “first-choice foreign language” to master (Lo Bianco, 2014), so there is an urgent need to learn it. The purpose of mastering EL is, first of all, to promote the possibility of real communication between people in a variety of situations, the transmission of information, the exchange of opinions, the correct behavior during the implementation of a communicative act and its use in various areas of foreign language communication. Nowadays, the teaching of English language is focused on “teaching intercultural communication” (Marlina & Giri, 2014).

The sphere of verbal foreign language communication is understood as the interconnected set of homogeneous topics and situations of communication, types of speech activity, characterized by the same type of an individual's speech stimulus, relations between communicators and circumstances of communication which determine the needs of learners. Methodologists point out that the process of teaching a foreign language (FL) should be as close as possible to real communication, which involves identifying the necessary areas of communication according to the objectives of learning (Shchukin, 2006).

According to V. Chernysh, “The Common European Framework of Recommendations” identifies four areas of communication:

- “personal or personal interest area – centered on the sub-topics of “Home”, “Family”, “Friends”;
- public sphere – the subject of the learning process acts as a member of a common community or any organisation and performs various activities with different objectives;
- professional sphere - the subject of the learning process fulfills his/her job or professional duties;
- educational sphere - the subject of the learning process participates in the organized educational process, especially in a certain educational institution” (2013, p. 174).

Communication in the above mentioned areas is carried out within the framework of certain topics and relevant communication situations. The set of situations within each topic varies and students should be given the

right to choose their communication situation by expressing their own opinion.

It must be mentioned that communication is directly related to listening. As far as listening is considered to be “the most difficult for teaching and learning” (L. Vandergrift, 2004), the process of mastering the ability to listen and comprehend as well as to do communicative tasks while using professionally-oriented vocabulary is a complex and challenging process.

It can be often noticed that students have a lack of auditory skills. A student with sufficiently advanced phonetic, lexical and grammatical skills may not be able to comprehend the audio or video text. That means a student understands the language used but is not able to refer it to personal experience or outside world (Rost, 2011).

Listening is a complex speech activity, based on inner individual abilities. It can be developed and enables the speaker to understand information in acoustic code, to store it in memory, to select and evaluate it according to interests and goals. From the point of view of psychophysiology, listening is a perceptual thinking mnemonic activity: “perceptual” due to the process of perception of listening; “thinking” because it is connected to the logical operations of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, comparison, abstraction, concretization; “mnemonic” due to selection and assimilation of informative features of linguistic and speech units, image modification and recognition as a result of comparison with the initial image saved in memory. Taking into account all abovementioned, using authentic audio and video for teaching professional English communication can be considered extremely relevant.

### ***1.2. The importance of audiovisual means for mastering the ability to communicate***

One of the components of the English-language communicative competence is the competence in speaking, which ensures effective oral communication taking into account language, speech, socio-cultural norms, situations, goals, etc. (Buryak, 2019). A. Leontiev contemplating about the concept of speaking activity with regard to its psychological content points that speaking is “an oral form of speech activity that is characterized as a productive activity. And in the process of communication, speaking is defined as an initiative type of speech activity, since it is aimed at meeting human needs” (2003, p. 140).

Important conditions for the production and stimulation of communication in modern methodology are, first of all, the presence of a motive for communicating, situationalism and individual orientation.

Motivation is a crucial factor in foreign language learning, which boosts language acquisition, lessens anxiety, raises self-efficacy and self-confidence, and also contributes greatly to achievements in learning (Liu & Huang, 2011). To create a motivation for communicating in a foreign language, the situation should be used. The situation is an important element of language learning within the classroom (Zadorozhna & Bilianska, 2018).

For the practical mastery of a foreign language, the teacher should choose such teaching approaches that give each student the opportunity to be active and creative. The educational system is the subject of the process of the informatization of society, so the teacher combines traditional teaching methods with application of audio-visual means such as educational film, television and computer “that became invariable in the learning process” (Smith, 1994). Such audiovisual means are called technical educational means (TEM). In English-language sources, the term “technical educational means” is referred to as audiovisual, information and communication, information and telecommunication means, which are divided into hard (hardware - these include tape recorders, projectors, TVs, computers) and soft (software - these are: magnetic tapes, magnetic and optical discs, slides, movies).

The pedagogical literature offers different approaches to the classification of didactic and, in particular, technical educational means. The difference between approaches lies in the content of the principles that underpin the classification.

Didactic means could be divided into three groups (natural, technical and symbolic) (Fleming & Jacobi, 2002). Some other categories could also be included into this classification (*Simple means*: verbal tools: textbooks and other printed texts; simple visual means: original objects, models, paintings, diagrams, maps. *Complex means*: mechanical visual tools; audio means; audiovisual means, aids to automate the learning process (Nikolaeva, 1999).

Audio and video that belong to complex audiovisual means should be chosen correctly according to the students' field of specialization, maximizing the use of the authentic language as well as patterns relevant to developing students' communicative skills (Kostikova et al., 2020). In order to advance in communicative competence mastering the ability to listen and comprehend should be recommended.

Although the role of audiovisual means in teaching speaking has been widely discussed and researched among academicians, in our active

research we have attempted to demonstrate how different types of activities using authentic professionally-oriented audio and video help motivate students to communicate and enhance their development of English communicative competence according to their field of specialization. Our active research explores what teachers do, the classroom context in the field of medicine and the dynamics of classroom communication. We aimed to present the analysis of practical usage of authentic professionally-oriented audio and video with different types of activities to develop the listening skills of students starting from B1 and advancing to B2 level as the basis for developing communicative skills of the future doctors.

### ***1.3. The purpose of the research***

So, **the purpose of the article** is to research the correlation between communicative skills' development and improvement of listening skills through usage of authentic professionally-oriented audio and video with different types of activities, to present the dynamics of changing of professional English language proficiency of medical students and to reveal how teacher's skill level and correctly chosen and prepared tasks and types of activities influence the motivation of students to enhance their communicative skills.

## **2. Research methods**

### ***2.1. Participants***

The participants were 19 students of the Bukovinian State Medical University. We have limited our active research to nineteen participants as this number represents the average classical group of our university and we aimed to show the real progress of students within one group during a short limited period of time. The students ranged from 16 to 19 years of age. Prevailing majority of the participants were females. Although, all of them were speakers of Ukrainian, Russian and/or Romanian language, Ukrainian is their dominant language.

In Ukraine students enter the university on the basis of their results of External Independent Testing (EIT) in three subjects. English is not included into the list of these subjects. But according to the curriculum of Ukrainian secondary schools students have to acquire English at B-1 level in the public secondary school and at B-2 level in the gymnasium.

Thus, the students were supposed to use General English at B-1 level when they enrolled into Medical University. The task of English teachers was to teach students professional English to advance to B-2 level.

However, the level of language proficiency at the beginning of their studies seemed to vary due to the fact that applicants come from different schools of different regions. Some students appeared to be even at the lower level than A-2 judging by an internal placement test.

## ***2.2. Materials***

We based our active research on materials from Professional English in Use (Medicine) textbook, Internet sources, British Council site and YouTube resources and our own tasks. The covered topics were: "At the Doctor's", "At the Polyclinic", "My Future Specialty" and "Anatomy" according to the content of the current curriculum. All prepared materials were authentic and showed real conversations. The additional materials selected for the exercises consisted of texts, dialogues, videos, quizzes, different speech patterns, grammar and various types of exercises that aimed at forming and developing communicative skills and abilities.

## ***2.3. Procedure***

According to the concept of Ukrainian scientists a mini experiment is carried out without a control group. The research is based mainly on the pedagogical intuition of the teacher or lecturer. In other words, the teacher/lecturer on the basis of their own experience without long and deep study of the problem does some research which supports or refutes the thesis statement related to the improvement of some aspects of language teaching or learning. The stated thesis is tested in the educational process without delay and its effectiveness can be evaluated immediately (Bihych, Borysko & Boretska, 2013).

The choice of such a research method was predetermined by its ease of implementation, limited time and number of participants involved. The results of a mini experiment can be perspective for conducting a true experiment by engaging a larger number of students and authentic materials for specialists in other fields taking into consideration our shortcomings.

Thus, we conducted a mini experiment, which lasted two months. Eight active, intensive and creative lessons with a large number of various types of activities based on the authentic medical texts and audiovisual means have been prepared and given. The comparison of a medical system in Ukraine, Great Britain and the USA has been included into the tasks.

At the beginning of our experiment the proficiency of new students in the English language was tested.

We have developed our lessons using audiovisual means according to the rules of time limits for different tasks and according to different stages of teaching speaking:

- 1) at the level of elementary expression;
- 2) at the level of complex expression;
- 3) at the level of full text reproduction.

In addition, we have included the following operations in our lessons:

- reproduction (imitation of materials heard from audiovisual devices);
- partial reproduction (operation of words and phrases substitution);
- transformation (changes in grammatical design);
- expanding and combining linguistic and communicative means for expression of thoughts;
- independent work of students (in or out of class): individual, in pairs and in groups.

We have suggested the following tasks for teaching dialogic speech:

- students answered the questions (short, full and detailed);
- put situational and key questions;
- made up dialogues on the basis of the heard or read monologue;
- made up dialogues on a given topic;
- role-played the monologue;
- supplemented or modified dialogues;
- provided reasoned answers to the questions;
- conducted combined dialogues (with replies and comments from other students);
- made up guided dialogues (with and without supports – beforehand prepared phrases and sentences) without preparation;
- played games;
- held discussions.

To teach monological speech, the following tasks have been suggested:

- to do exercises to reproduce expressions in the form of sentences with some modification;
- to make up situations or tell stories;
- to describe drawings and paintings;
- to reproduce situations in which the given words are used;
- to retell texts;
- to present the key information in several sentences;
- to write a plan of the story which the students listened to;



- to transform dialogues into monologues;
- to create headlines and explain them;
- to evaluate students' own judgments or their attitudes related to the facts;
- to evaluate what they have heard or read.

We have selected samples at the level of isolated sentences, as well as samples at the level of phrases, by which students could learn the possible types of interrelations between sentences in monological and dialogic speech. We also did not forget about the supports (flashcards) in language teaching, which were used at different stages of the lesson and for performing creative tasks.

We have selected vocabulary, grammatical forms, and syntax variations to fit the content and purpose of the communication and to offer a neutral-communicative style. When choosing complex expressions, we were guided by the principle of relevance, exemplarity, typicality and productivity.

In order to teach students to perform monologues and dialogues, we were rapidly expanding the students' professional vocabulary at each lesson at a rapid pace, were teaching them to build expressions using active vocabulary and we were trying to prevent difficulties in constructing sentences in advance.

In the development of communicative skills, we worked in several stages, starting with the development of speech automatisms, then selecting language means, adequate communication goals and combining different speech models in a certain logical sequence. We have tried two ways of teaching both monological and dialogic speech:

- “the way from the whole” - the unit of learning is the completed text, and
- the “the way from the unit” - where learning is based on a sentence that reflects a basic expression.

The “way from the whole” which means the way from the whole dialogue-sample, we began with the listening to the dialogue. Listening is considered to be the most difficult skill among learners (Vandergrift, 2004) but at the same time it is proved to be beneficial for the development of other skills (Rost, 2011). We tried to avoid difficulties while listening, taking into consideration data from the research of N. Vyspynska, so we paid special attention to such factors that affect students achievements in listening as: rate of delivery, new vocabulary, length of listening, visual support and background noise (2019, p.302). We also implemented strategies to improve listening skills (Caro, 2013). After listening, we parsed the text in

graphical form to identify its features: unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical structures. The students then worked in pairs and groups, doing exercises to the text. Having worked through the vocabulary and grammatical structures, students worked on their own statements. To stimulate students' attention, during the presentation of the topic, we assigned them to interrupt the speaker with questions or statements. We used video with the situation for discussion to develop both prepared and unprepared speech.

During the “way from the unit” which means the way from dialogic unity to the whole dialogue, we began by learning new words and expressions, then making sentences and ended by working over dialogues in pairs or groups.

In our lessons we used forms and methods that maximize practical language acquisition:

- text reproduction with the help of supports (flashcards);
- communication on the situation using learned vocabulary;
- character description;
- collective and choral training of new vocabulary;
- preparing students' own statements;
- listening to and watching videos;
- making up and role-playing the dialogues;
- watching movie fragments;
- working with the materials from the Internet to prepare a project.

We actively used role-playing games in our lessons. They were conducted according to the scheme: after listening to the dialogues – the problem was stated – students worked in pairs, they made up mini dialogues (as preparation for the game) - a role-playing game that included dialogues and monologues. The lesson provided medical terminology to be learned, which was trained in thematic texts.

We suggested to make solutions to problem situations in various ways: individually, by discussing separate stages together with the teacher or by solving problem situations in pairs and groups of three to four people.

According to the methodology of video lessons frequency, students worked with video materials once a week. The purpose of the video usage was to work on grammatical material and on increasing the scope of the professional vocabulary to be studied. New words were introduced in sentences and texts.

To memorize the material, we suggested students doing individual interactive tasks to the topic using a computer at home and conducted active testing in the classroom using Kahoot application.

According to the chosen tasks, methods and techniques we expected that students will improve in some way their communicative skills. Moreover, we expected that using authentic professionally-oriented audio and video will help most of the students to memorize at least some of medical terminology and other vocabulary to be used in communication. However, the survey results demonstrate that the set of communicative tasks based on listening to and watching correctly chosen and prepared by the teacher educational material help students even with the lowest level of English proficiency to be able to react to any communicative situation in the field of their specialization.

### 3. Results

In the first lesson, we found out that students had different levels of speech formation based on the results of testing, which can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Level of English proficiency before experiment

Levels of English proficiency	Course 1/Group M-11	
	Number of students	%
Excellent	3	16
Good	3	16
Average	6	31
Low	7	37
Total	19	100

a reproductive level of speech formation (they could reproduce speech only on the model), 9 students had a reproductive and productive level (students could use the learned language material in new situations), and only 3 students had a level of productive oral communication (they could express their opinions based on their language and speech experience).

Our task was to teach both dialogic and monological speech. An important point was the selection of supports in teaching speaking. We have used such supports as text, pictures, song, sentences and phrases.

Creating a monologue proved to be a difficult task for students. One reason for the difficulties is the lack of vocabulary and insufficient

knowledge of grammar. Another reason for the difficulty in formulating such a statement is the limited amount of program material, limited time opportunities to communicate in a foreign language, the individual characteristics of a student and a teacher, limited exposure to the language and insufficient use of audiovisual means in the classroom.

In order to ensure that monological speech has a relative completeness of the expression, we taught students how to use language means of interphrase communication:

- expressions to start, continue or end a story (to begin with, at first, to continue, I would like to tell you this);
- adding a monological phrases to the dialogue (moreover, by the way);
- the combination of different sentences into a coherent statement (the matter is that, by the way, the thing is that, let's leave it at that, that reminds me, speaking of);
- introducing into monologue elements of personal attitude to what is being told (to my mind, I think, I suppose, it seems to me).

At first it was a difficult task, but in the fourth lesson students could already make statements using these language means much more easily.

It is also important to choose the right style of speech. We have chosen a neutral and communicative style, as it is used at work in the production for casual communication and live exchange of views. Students were interested in using non-verbal means of communication: mimicry, gesticulation, situation.

Students first had to learn vocabulary, then grammatical structures, then language material in dialogical exercises to the extent necessary for the organization of monological statements. Only after that they began to work on detailed statements. Larger monological statements could be learned by students only when significant language material had already been accumulated for this purpose. Then all the attention could be paid to the logical sequence of phrases during the expression of their opinion in English.

We must admit that without language basics, without possession of the necessary number of different language units and the ability to vary them, students can not express their thoughts in a foreign language. Therefore, in teaching speaking we have passed several stages, namely, development of language automatisms, selection of language means adequate to the purpose of communication and combination of different speech models in a certain logical sequence.

Thus, in each of the lessons we prepared, audiovisual aids were used at certain intervals. This could be at the beginning of the lesson or in intervals of 25, 30, 40 and 45 minutes.

Work was considered effective to be done in the following sequence:

- students listened to or viewed information;
- worked on new unfamiliar vocabulary;
- memorized it by heart (working in pairs);
- imitated what they heard from audio or video;
- substituted other elements in the main text;
- worked on grammatical structures;
- transformed sentences into other tense forms;
- they built their own statements based on the discussed text or dialogue (individual work or group work).

Such work has helped students with low English proficiency to learn new vocabulary and build their own sentences based on a structural model. Even the weakest students were eager to listen to and work on the text when they mastered the language units and understood what was being said in the audio or video.

The following exercise was effective in concentrating attention while listening to the text: students looked through the sentences with missing words, then listened to the text and filled in the gaps. Such exercises taught them to pay attention to some details in the text and to be able to find out the gist of the text. However, this task was difficult for half the group. So we listened to the audio recording for several times. But the practice gave the result - in the last lesson it was sufficed for students to listen to the dialogue only twice. Almost 85% of the students actively worked on this task.

The work on the project was particularly interesting for students. During the lesson all students were divided into groups of 3-4 students, each group had the task to prepare a presentation to the topic "My Future Specialty" on the basis of the learned vocabulary and a prepared plan.

After gradually learning new vocabulary, grammar and certain structures, and completing all the exercises, we ended up the lesson with role-playing. Students worked in groups or in pairs, and we divided them in equal parts with high and low level of language knowledge. Since the classes were full of different activities, students were always active and unable to waste time. Stronger students controlled the weaker ones, so everyone worked hard. Role-playing was perceived positively by students.

At the end of our experiment students were tested for perception and assimilation of the educational material by audiovisual means. For this

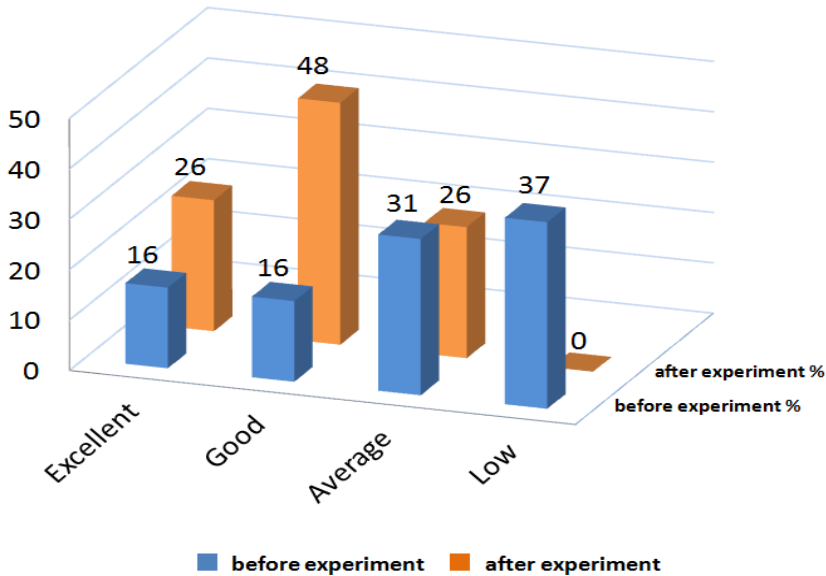
purpose, we used the self-prepared test using the material covered during our active research. The results of the test are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Results of the test for perception and assimilation of educational material by audiovisual means after experiment

Levels of English proficiency	Course 1/Group M-11	
	Number of students	%
Excellent	5	26
Good	9	48
Average	5	26
Low	-	-
Total	19	100

As Table 2 demonstrates, after our classes, out of 19 students of a group 14 students had learned the material of this subject at high and good skilled levels. Students could use lexical and grammatical material in their simple sentences, could perceive by listening and understand short texts with familiar vocabulary, could immediately recognize and understand the material they listened to and watched in the lessons, could easily role play communicational situations in pairs. 5 students remained at an average level. They could repeat by heart the phrases from the dialogues they listened to and they learned new words and expressions. However, they did not manage to make up their own sentences without mistakes. Not a single student showed a low level of knowledge.

Having analyzed the whole experiment, we can present the results in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Comparative characterization of the level of the formed communicative skills

Comparative chart data show that the level of students' communicative skills has increased by an average of 12% after the experiment. At the final stage of the study, the number of students with high level of communicative skills increased by 10%, and at a good level - by 30%, while at average and low levels, in contrast, decreased by 10% and 31%, respectively.

Thus, the results of the study confirm the effectiveness of the use of audiovisual means in the formation of communicative skills and the appropriateness of their use at the English classes.

In Table 3 we have summed up and made a list of activities performed during the lessons using audiovisual means that help to make lessons active and creative.

**Table 3.** Types of tasks and activities

Types of tasks used at English lessons	Types of activities
texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to answer the questions after listening to the text</li> </ul>

quiz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to answer the quiz questions</li> <li>• to analyze and discuss results in groups</li> </ul>
grammar constructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to fill in the gaps with the correct grammar form</li> <li>• to change the sentences using information which is true about yourself</li> </ul>
dialogues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to fill in the gaps with the correct vocabulary</li> <li>• to make up dialogues as on the model</li> <li>• to role play the dialogues related to your future job</li> </ul>
video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to make up dialogues based on what you have heard</li> <li>• to role play the communicative situation</li> <li>• to characterize each character</li> <li>• to confirm or refute each character's opinion</li> <li>• to create a project based on the information received</li> <li>• to work in pairs and find the examples of the main speech patterns (learned before)</li> <li>• to find out some extra information</li> </ul>
speech patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to repeat together and individually, imitating the intonation of speech patterns</li> <li>• to work in pairs: ask and answer the questions according to a model</li> <li>• to complete the sentences (opinion)</li> </ul>

Our findings suggest that the biggest difficulties in communication are connected with monological speech. According to English proficiency tests results students are better at expressing their opinion on the situation after they have learned the necessary vocabulary and speech patterns. However, they showed lower results in listening for details. This may be due to insufficient use of audiovisual means and limited exposure to the professionally-oriented language and poor listening skills. The fact, that some students performed badly in making up their own sentences and stories, means that they have the lack of vocabulary and insufficient knowledge of grammar because of the limited program material and insufficient amount of hours in the curriculum for English language learning. But this problem can also be explained by close relation between listening and communication.



#### 4. Conclusions

According to the results of the conducted experiment and the analyzed scientific works, we can conclude that the development of students' communicative skills is a rather complex and time-consuming process. High efficiency in learning professional English can be achieved only under certain conditions. The most important condition is the mastery of teachers, their desire to work and create, their ability to encourage and motivate students, activate their mental and speech activity by preparing lessons with various types of activities to develop communicative skills. We can also say that foreign language acquisition depends on skillfully used approaches, methods, means and techniques of teaching a foreign language and on the level of students' listening skills.

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