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DEVELOPING LISTENING COMPETENCE FOR B1-LEVEL LEARNERS WITH THE AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD

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Abstract. Listening is necessary for communication but B1 learners may not yet be able to recognize words in connected speech, follow natural speech or identify details. How can the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) support listening competence through repetition, dialogue practice and pattern drills? The article uses critical review of academic literature and language learning guidance; it does not report an original experiment. It discusses what B1 learners need, how structured practice might help and why repetition by itself is not enough. ALM techniques may help learners get familiar with pronunciation, rhythm and common expressions but accurate repetition does not necessarily indicate comprehension; memorised dialogues do not prepare learners for unfamiliar conversations. ALM techniques are most useful when combined with tasks which check understanding of main ideas and details and encourage meaningful communication. Practical recommendations are given for using structured practice as one part of a balanced listening lesson.
Keywords: Audio-Lingual Method; B1 learners; listening competence; listening comprehension; repetition; English language teaching.

Introduction.

Listening is at the heart of learning English: students listen to teachers, follow conversations, watch videos and communicate outside the classroom too. But knowing vocabulary and grammar does not make spoken language easy to understand. In everyday speech words connect; sounds may be reduced; speakers talk at different speeds. Learners can recognise a sentence in writing but not hear it when they do. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages states that B1 listeners should understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters (work, school and leisure) (Council of Europe, 2020). This is more than just recognising words: learners have to follow the overall message and notice relevant details. One approach which might help develop this ability is Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). Listening to language models; imitation; repetition; dialogues and pattern drills are used (Rilling, 2018; Rambe, 2013). These techniques provide structured practice but also pose an important question: can learners who repeat sentences understand unfamiliar spoken messages? How can ALM techniques be used to develop listening competence among B1-level EFL learners and what are their main limitations? It examines repetition, dialogue practice and

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pattern drills and how teachers can use them. The paper is not an experiment but a critical review of literature and language learning guidance; it first describes ALM and B1 listening needs; then classroom applications (strengths/limitations); finally practical recommendations.

Theoretical background of the ALM.

2.1 Origins and main principles of ALM.

The Audio-Lingual Method became popular in the US in the 1940s and was important for several decades in language teaching. It was based on structural linguistics and behaviourist views of learning: language learning was associated with habits formed through repeated practice (learners listened to a model, imitated it and practised sentence patterns; teachers gave examples, organised drills and corrected errors) (Rambe, 2013; Rilling, 2018). Common ALM techniques are repetition drills, substitution drills and dialogue practice. In a repetition drill learners repeat after a model word or sentence; in a substitution drill they change one element of the sentence pattern while keeping the rest; dialogue practice exposes learners to expressions in short conversations. These techniques can focus practice on pronunciation rhythm and common structures. ALM is not usually seen as a complete method for every language-learning need today but some principles and techniques are still part of the language teaching discussion (British Council, n.d.-a). The British Council sees drilling as a technique that can support practice when teachers use it purposefully and choose appropriate items (British Council, n.d.-b). Value depends on lesson objective: repetition should help learners notice and use language, not become an end in itself.

2.2 The Potential of ALM for Listening Development.

ALM is relevant to listening because learners have to recognise spoken forms first before they can understand a message. Short sentences and dialogues repeated often might help learners become more familiar with pronunciation, rhythm and common expressions (for B1 learners this can be useful when they know a word in written form but don't recognise it in connected speech). For example a teacher may play a short dialogue about weekend plans. Listeners listen for general situation, then again for key details and repeat some expressions. Change time or place in second version and ask learners to identify new information. So structured practice leads to comprehension. However repetition alone cannot prove that learners have understood a message. Remembering a dialogue may help with familiar expressions but does not mean they will understand a new speaker or an unexpected response either. Listening is about more than repeating sounds and instruction should attend to how learners interpret spoken input (Field, 2019). ALM is therefore best thought of as a set of useful techniques which need to be combined with meaning focused work.

Listening competence at B1 level.

Listening competence is not only about hearing words; learners need to recognise spoken forms, understand meaning, identify main ideas and notice important details. Research reviews also show that second-language listening includes multiple subskills and cognitive processes rather than one undifferentiated ability (Aryadoust & Luo, 2023). B1 learners can generally understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar topics (Council of Europe, 2020). They may still find it hard to follow fast speech, unfamiliar accents, connected words or vocabulary they haven't encountered before. A learner might know that two people are arranging a meeting but miss time or place. Another learner knows the words in the recording

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but doesn't recognise them when they are spoken naturally. These challenges mean listening lessons should not just be about playing a recording and checking answers. Learners need practice recognising spoken language as well as tasks that show whether they have understood the message (teachers can support them by starting with familiar contexts, replaying short sections for a purpose, increasing difficulty gradually). It's also important to think about which part of listening is difficult (words recognition, following main idea or locating a particular detail) so the teacher knows what activity to choose rather than assuming all learners need the same practice.

Listening for specific information is identifying selected facts in spoken language not trying to understand every word. Learners have to learn which details are relevant to a particular listening purpose (e.g., when listening to an announcement they might need to identify departure time, platform number or destination). The main challenge is not only understanding the words but recognising what is needed while processing continuous speech. So listening for specific information should be considered as focused listening subskill where tasks are based around a clear objective (B1 level learners have more specific learning goal than general listening comprehension)

4. ALM Techniques for Listening Competence Development.

Repetition and Listening Practice: In repetition activities students listen to a word, phrase or sentence and repeat it (pronunciation, stress, intonation etc.). The teacher can play sentences about daily routines ("I usually take the bus to university", "She goes to work at eight o'clock") then learners repeat them and identify the person's routine or time mentioned. Comprehension question gives activity listening purpose beyond imitation. Teachers should not ask learners to repeat long stretches of language without checking meaning. If students reproduce a sentence but cannot explain what it says then the activity gives little evidence of understanding. A short question, picture choice or detail-identification task can help the teacher check understanding.

4.2 Dialogue Practice.

Dialogue practice introduces common expressions in a conversation. A teacher might play a recording of two friends arranging a meeting (first listening without transcript students identify the situation); on the second listening they answer questions about time, place and plan; then share transcript, explain difficult expressions and ask pairs to practise lines. If students can't remember the dialogue then they can change details and repeat it again (change place or time of meeting, respond to new suggestion etc.). This still has the structure of ALM practice but also asks learners to attend to meaning as well as adapting language for slightly different situation.

4.3. Pattern drills.

Pattern drills practise a sentence structure but change one element (though usually speaking they can also be used to draw attention to differences in spoken language). Students hear "She is going to the library" then "He is going to the library" and then "She is going to supermarket". They say what changed: person or destination. At B1 level drills should use understandable language about familiar situations. The teacher can ask learners to listen for changes in tense, pronouns, places or times and then find similar patterns in a short conversation (not only reproduce a correct sentence but notice meaningful differences in what

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is heard). As with other drills follow-up comprehension task connects pattern to communication (British Council, n.d.-b).

4.4. Practice and comprehension tasks.

A balanced listening lesson can have three stages: before listening the teacher introduces the topic and checks a few key words (without explaining the whole recording), during the first listening students find the general idea; during the second listening they locate specific information; after listening they repeat useful expressions, practise a short dialogue or do a communicative task.

For example, after a conversation about travel plans learners identify the destination (where they are going), departure time and reason for the trip. They practice expressions related to this and use them to talk about their own plans. The teacher can play back difficult parts if learners miss something but should also ask what they mean and how it fits together. This kind of sequence combines structured language practice with comprehension not repetition as an alternative to understanding.

Discussion: Strengths and limitations of ALM.

5.1 Strengths.

One strength of ALM is that it exposes learners to spoken models in a focused way. Repetition of short sentences and dialogues can focus attention on pronunciation, stress, intonation and familiar expressions. Structured tasks may also be manageable starting points for learners who feel overwhelmed by longer recordings — teachers can replay a short section, give feedback immediately and focus on a particular difficulty. The techniques work with familiar B1 topics (education, shopping, travel and everyday routines). If teachers mix repetition with questions about meaning students practise patterns of language but also check what they have understood. ALM therefore helps in the early or controlled stages of a listening lesson.

Limitations.

The main problem is that repetition does not necessarily mean comprehension. Learners may remember a dialogue but not when the same expressions appear in a different context; fixed dialogues and predictable drills also give little practice for responding to unfamiliar speakers, unexpected information or changes in topic. Listening instruction needs to take into account how learners process spoken input (not just whether they produce a correct answer or repeat a sentence). If ALM is used rigidly then learners may spend too much time reproducing language and not enough time interpreting messages, picking up important details or responding spontaneously. The method should not be expected to develop every aspect of listening competence by itself.

Implications for Teaching B1 Learners.

The discussion shows that ALM is best used as a collection of techniques within a lesson rather than a standalone technique. Teachers can do short controlled practice first and then ask learners to listen to another example, identify information and use it in a short exchange (e.g. after practising a dialogue about making an appointment students listen to a different conversation and identify time place purpose before creating their own exchange). Teachers also need to respond to learners' actual needs. Some will need help recognising connected speech and others may get the main idea but not details; different types of task and increasing

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difficulty gradually can make the lesson more responsive than giving every learner the same repetitive exercise.

Practical Recommendations. The following recommendations are based on the discussion of ALM and B1 listening needs. First use short level appropriate recordings on familiar topics (university life, shopping, travel or making plans). Short recordings are easier to replay a difficult section and have one listening goal. Confidence builds so longer recordings and more situations are introduced later. Second, give repetition a purpose. After students repeat some sentences ask them to identify the detail, match a statement with a speaker or explain the message in their own words. This tells you if they are just imitating accurately or understanding what is being said. Third, do dialogue practice in stages. Listen first without the transcript so students check main idea and details then give text to clarify difficult expressions; pair practice should involve small changes to original dialogue so that students don't rely on memorisation entirely. Fourth is feedback that explains the difficulty. If learners miss a word or detail, replay the section and point out pronunciation or connected speech; ask learners which part was hard then adapt next activity accordingly. Finally link controlled practice to communication. After a listening task students compare plans of speakers, make a decision based on information or discuss a similar situation with partner. Repetition, dialogue practice and pattern drills can all be used to support the larger goal of understanding spoken English.

Conclusion.

In this article we have seen how the Audio-Lingual Method can support listening competence among B1-level EFL learners: repetition, dialogue practice and pattern drills can give structured practice with pronunciation, familiar expressions and sentence patterns; they may be particularly useful when learners need support in recognising language in connected speech. However, repeating sentences or memorising dialogues doesn't necessarily mean that learners understand spoken messages. B1 learners also need to spot main ideas, find specific details and interpret language in different contexts too. ALM techniques are therefore most useful when combined with comprehension questions, repeated listening for different purposes and short communicative tasks. The article is based on a review and critical analysis of the literature but not an experiment. Classroom-based research could explore how learners respond to these activities in practice. ALM can be part of listening instruction but shouldn't be used as a panacea by itself — structured practice has to go hand in hand with meaningful communication.

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