

# Practice of English Listening and Speaking Teaching in Primary Schools from the Perspective of the Activity-Based Approach—A Case Study of One Teaching and Research Course of a Primary School in Leshan

Jing Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Leshan Normal University, Leshan 614000, Sichuan, China

**Copyright:** © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

**Abstract:** Listening and speaking ability is one of the essential language skills for primary school students. This study is guided by “The Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)” and uses “Unit 3: Lesson 4 What do astronauts do in space?” from “Fun Learning Children’s English 3A” published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as a case study for listening and speaking teaching. It provides reference for primary school English listening and speaking teaching from discourse interpretation, goal setting, and teaching activities.

**Keywords:** English learning activity view; Primary school English listening and speaking teaching

**Online publication:** April 26, 2025

## 1. Introduction

In primary school English learning, listening and speaking skills are fundamental abilities that students must master. For primary school students, listening and speaking are the main means of learning English and the main forms of understanding and expressing English<sup>[1]</sup>. Students capture and receive various sounds, vocabulary, and expressions in English through listening. Continuous input can help students gradually understand the language rules of English and prepare adequately for future output. It is said to enable students to engage in meaningful practical applications, which is the stage of language output. Specifically, continuous listening input helps students establish their perception and understanding of English. During the process of listening to stories and following conversations, students unconsciously store the pronunciation secrets of words and the rhythm and melody of sentences. And speaking is the practice of listening, which transforms stored language materials into real communication tools through activities such as role-playing and situational dialogue.

At present, listening and speaking teaching in primary school faces some challenges and difficulties. Firstly, excessive reliance on textbooks for teaching resources and lack of situational creation. For example, teachers often repeatedly play audio accompanying textbooks, lacking the creation of real-life situations, which makes it difficult for students to establish a connection between language and real life. Secondly, the classroom content presents a state of “Can’t see the forest for

the trees”. Teachers often spend a lot of time correcting word pronunciation and teaching sentence structures, but neglect to guide the students to think about the thematic meaning of the text and the value of the discourse, leading to the fact that language learning becomes mechanical memory, and students’ thinking abilities, emotional attitudes, and values can not be developed. Furthermore, the teaching process is stuck in a teaching rut. Most of the teaching process consist of three steps: listening to recordings, answering questions, and reading dialogues. Students cannot fully understand the text. Finally, the activities in instructional design are fragmented and lack of logical connections. The listening and speaking exercises in textbooks often focus on shallow training such as reading words and completing sentences, and the problem of “marginalization” in listening and speaking teaching is particularly prominent <sup>[2]</sup>.

To solve these problems in English listening teaching in primary school, integrating the six elements of the curriculum is key point. The content of English courses consists of elements such as themes, discourse, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies. Based on these elements, teachers design and implement learning activities that follow the rules of cognitive laws, gradually deepen from easy thing to difficult thing , and continuously promote the development of students’ core literacy through activities such as learning comprehension activities, application practice activities, and transfer innovation activities <sup>[3]</sup>. The concept of the Activity-Based Approach emphasizes the construction of a multi-level and multi type English learning activity system guided by themes and carried by discourse <sup>[4]</sup>. Under this system framework, teachers guide students to gradually deepen their language abilities, scientifically construct cultural awareness, effectively improve their thinking qualities, and continuously enhance their learning abilities, which provides a precise and adaptive solution to the challenges faced by current English listening and speaking teaching in primary school.

## **2. The view of the activity-based approach**

The view of the activity-based approach refers to the teaching design and implementation being guided by the theme, relying on discourse, and guiding students to integrate language and cultural knowledge through activities such as learning comprehension activities, application practice activities, and transfer innovation activities. Then, using the learned knowledge, skills, and strategies, students can express their personal views and attitudes around the theme, solve real problems, and achieve the goal of cultivating students’ core literacy in teaching <sup>[5]</sup>. Specifically, learning comprehension activities include learning activities based on discourse, such as perception and attention, acquisition and organization, summarization, and integration. application practice activities include in-depth discourse learning activities such as description and interpretation, analysis and judgment, internalization, and application. Transfer innovation activities include learning activities beyond discourse, such as reasoning and argumentation, criticism and evaluation, imagination and creation. The concept of the activity-based approach closely integrates language, culture, and thinking, becoming an important implementation path for implementing core literacy in the English subject <sup>[6]</sup>.

Applying learning activities to primary school English listening and speaking teaching, teachers should design diverse learning activities to achieve the teaching goals of using speaking to aid, listening to promote speaking, and integrating listening and speaking, thereby improving students’ listening and speaking skills and cultivating their core literacy <sup>[7]</sup>. In primary school English listening and speaking teaching, practicing the concept of the activity-based approach, teachers should rely on the theme context and discourse type, deeply interpret the text, formulate reasonable teaching objectives, design teaching activities at three levels of learning comprehension, application practice, and transfer innovation, optimize problem design, and promote the improvement of core literacy in the English subject <sup>[8]</sup>.

In summary, listening and speaking teaching under the guidance of the English learning activity concept can be divided into three steps. One is to deeply interpret the discourse text. Teachers interpret texts from three dimensions: what, why, and how, fully exploring the basic content, knowledge structure, problem features, logical relationships, language features, author intentions, as well as the emotional attitudes and value orientations conveyed in the text. The second is to formulate teaching objectives that reflect core literacy. Based on the perspective of the activity-based approach and the

actual situation of students, teachers have formulated a series of teaching objectives that reflect core literacy. The third is the practice of teaching activities. Guided by teaching objectives and the concept of the activity-based approach, teachers carefully design situational, hierarchical, and effective activities to help students improve their language abilities, develop their thinking qualities, develop cultural awareness, and enhance their learning abilities.

### 3. Examples of English listening and speaking teaching in primary schools guided by the perspective of the activity-based approach

This teaching example is a teaching and research lesson from a primary school in Leshan. The content used in this teaching and research is Lesson 4 of Unit 3A, “What do astronauts do in space?” published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press<sup>[9]</sup>. The space theme has value in science and technology education and cross-cultural communication. The book combines multiple language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and reading, which is very helpful in cultivating students’ core literacy abilities.

#### 3.1. In-depth interpretation of discourse text

- (1) What: This lesson is selected from Unit 3 Lesson 4 of “Fun Learning Children’s English” published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. In terms of discourse type, the teaching content of this lesson is an listening and speaking teaching lesson, with the theme of people, technology, and space life. The theme context of the text is people and society. The text is Sally’s daily space work log, which describes Sally’s process of getting up, washing up, having breakfast, putting on her spacesuit, and getting out of the spacecraft to see Earth in chronological order, while expressing excitement and astonishment. This is a scientific and educational exploration under the theme of human and society, about the daily life of astronauts.
- (2) Why: Students can understand the work and life of astronauts through Sally’s perspective, stimulating their interest in sounding exploration. They can learn time expression and emotional description, compare the differences between sounding life and Earth life, cultivate scientific spirit, and cross-cultural awareness.
- (3) How: This article describes the life of astronauts in the form of a first person in blog, narrated in chronological order, using simple present tense, including daily activity vocabulary such as, get up, have a wash, breakfast, and vocabulary about space such as spacesuit, astronaut, Earth view. The sentence structure is simple and suitable for elementary school students to understand, and also includes some emotional expression vocabulary, such as excellent and amazing.

#### 3.2. Setting teaching objectives

The target audience for this lesson is fourth grade students, with slightly more boys than girls. Parents attach importance to the education, and the overall English proficiency of the students is good. Students have a certain foundation in listening and speaking to master basic daily verb phrases and time expressions, and can understand diary-style text content recorded in chronological order. But space-themed vocabulary is a bit difficult for them, and there may be difficulties in understanding compound time adverbs<sup>[10]</sup>. Based on text interpretation and analysis of learning situations, the teacher has determined the following teaching objectives<sup>[11]</sup>:

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- (1) Extract and summarize space-related vocabulary through listening, speaking, reading, and watching, organize the timeline, accurately extract and retell Sally’s space workflow; (Learning comprehension activities)
- (2) Identify emotional expression vocabulary in text, such as excited, amazing, etc. (Learning comprehension activities)
- (3) Pay attention to and summarize the pragmatic functions of “First, I... Then, I... Now I...” in listening and speaking, describe the process using the target sentence pattern, and correctly express time words such as o’clock

and half past. (Application Practice activities) (Key Point)

- (4) By comparing the differences between life on Earth and in space, draw the beautiful scenery of Earth and maintain a passion for exploring the universe. (Migration innovation activities)

### 3.3. Practice of teaching activities

#### 3.3.1. Learning comprehension activities

Table 1 shows the design of learning and understanding activities conducted.

**Table 1.** Design of learning and understanding activities

Activities	What do astronauts do in space?
Perception and attention	(1) Play a real-life video clip of the space station and ask “What do they do?”. Introduce the topic. (2) Listen to Sally’s blog and answer the question “Who is Sally?, Where does she live? What do astronauts do in space?” (3) Listen to the recording and sort Sally’s space life. (4) Listen to the recording and fill in the time of Sally’s activities in the space.
Acquisition and organization	(5) Listen to Sally’s blog and draw a space workflow diagram, paying attention to emotional words.
Summarization and integration	(6) Read the original content of the recording, organize, and complete the timeline.

In Activity 1, the teacher plays a video and uses audio-visual stimulation to activate students’ knowledge about space, leading to the topic of this lesson and laying the background knowledge for understanding Sally’s blog in the following text. In Activity 2, the teacher plays Sally’s blog, guides students to answer “astronaut, in space”, and focus on the core vocabulary of this lesson, which trains students’ ability to capture key information, such as identity recognition, location judgment, etc. In Activity 3, students listen to the recording and sort Sally’s space life. Through the sorting task, students can understand the structural characteristics of the text. This article is narrated in chronological order. At the same time, it provides scaffolding for drawing flowcharts later on. In Activity 4 (as shown in the **Figure 1**), the teacher uses a table format for students to fill in Sally’s activity time, strengthening the time expression method. In Activity 5, the teacher provides some prompt information, and the students complete the drawing of the flowchart and pay attention to emotional rendering, cultivating their logical induction ability, and providing an analytical framework for the subsequent comparison of Earth and space life. In Activity 6, students correct pronunciation by following and imitating, and the completion of the timeline transitions auditory input to visual output, connecting actions, emotions, and environment through a timeline.

Activity 4	
Time	Activities
	get up and have a wash
	have breakfast
	put on spacesuit
	go outside

**Figure 1.** Table format for students to fill in Sally’s activity time during Activity 4

#### 3.3.2. Application practice activities

**Table 2** shows the design application of the practice activities.

**Table 2.** Design of application practice activities

Activities	What do astronauts do in space?
Description and interpretation	(7) Retell Sally's activities in their own language and analyze her emotional changes.
Analysis and judgment	(8) Analyze breakfast choices in the text and ask, "why not soup or milk?". After watching the space food production video, design a more reasonable menu.
Internalization and application	(9) Retell the text content according to the timeline.

In Activity 7, when guiding students to retell the activity, teachers should use "First, I... Then, I... Now, I..." to make the discourse more coherent. By transforming the chronological order and actions in the text information into personalized expressions, this activity can train students' ability to convey information, analyze emotional changes, and teach them to recognize explicit emotional words such as "excited" and "amazing", and implicit emotional clues such as "Yum!" and the use of exclamation marks. In Activity 8, the teacher asks the question "Why Not Soup or Milk?" which encourages students to explore the physical principles of liquid control in weightlessness environments and evaluate the rationality of the original breakfast. When designing menus, factors such as nutritional balance, food safety, and taste should be considered to cultivate students' interdisciplinary problem-solving abilities. In Activity 9, a timeline is used to provide a narrative framework, using the target language "get up\ have breakfast\ put on...", which promotes language internalization.

### 3.3.3. Transfer innovation activities

**Table 3** shows the design of the transfer innovation activities.

**Table 3.** Design of transfer innovation activities

Activities	What do astronauts do in space?
Reasoning and argumentation	(10) Inference on time of Sally's wearing spacesuits and thinking about why it takes a long time to wear spacesuits;
Criticism and evaluation	(11) Watch the lives of astronauts on Shenzhou-13 and clips from Tiangong Classroom, comparing the differences between life on Earth and in space;
Imagination and creation	(12) Create one's own space journal: A Day in Space.

In Activity 10, students infer time by calculating the time difference between breakfast and leaving the cabin. It is estimated that it will take two and a half hours to wear a spacesuit. The teacher guides students to explore the complex structure of spacesuits. Due to the age and vocabulary of students, the teacher could use Chinese language to teach this part appropriately. In Activity 11, students compare the lifestyles of Earth and space by eating breakfast and wearing a coat, which cultivates students' cross-cultural perspectives, and inspires students' space dreams by watching the Tiangong classroom. In Activity 12, the teacher provides "First, I... Then, I... Now, I...". Then, the students will apply the knowledge learned in this lesson to new situations, which trains students to flexibly use target sentence patterns such as "I get up at...", "It takes...", and vocabulary such as, "spacesuit" and "astronaut", to achieve a leap from imitation to creation. The assignment for the activity includes:

- (1) Read the text content aloud
- (2) Draw "Viewing Earth from Space" and briefly describe it in English.

This assignment converts the amazing view of Earth in the text into pictures, such as blue oceans, green continents, white clouds, etc., to enhance students' oral expression ability.

## 4. Conclusion

Under the guidance of the activity-based approach, primary school English listening and speaking teaching can effectively achieve curriculum standards. Teachers should set teaching objectives that are operable and verifiable for students based on the learning situation, guided by the theme, and carried out through discourse. Through learning comprehension, application practice, and transfer innovation activities, students' core literacy can be cultivated, and the comprehensive educational value of the English subject can be realized.

## Funding

Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project of Leshan (Project No.: SKL2023D33)

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Wang J, 2021, Research on Optimizing Primary School English Listening and Speaking Teaching Based on Textbook Text Discourse. *English Learning*, 2021(03): 20–25.
- [2] Sun L, Xu W, 2021, Primary School English Listening and Speaking Teaching Based on 'Unit Knowledge Structure'. *Teaching and Management*, 2021(35): 60.
- [3] Full Spirit Practice of Middle School English Listening and Speaking Teaching from the Perspective of Learning Activity View, 2024, *Classroom Teaching*, 2024(06).
- [4] Ma S, 2025, Teaching Practice of Listening and Speaking to Enhance the Thinking Quality of Junior High School Students Based on the Perspective of the Activity-Based Approach. *English Teachers*, 2025(02): 28.
- [5] Ministry of Education, 2022, English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition). Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, Beijing.
- [6] Wang Q, Qian X, Wu H, 2021, A View of the Activity-Based Approach Pointing to the Core Literacy of the English Subject: Connotation, Structure, Advantages, Theoretical Foundations, and Initial Practical Effects. *Foreign Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools (Middle School Chapter)*, 2021(07).
- [7] Ling X, 2023, Integrated Teaching Practice of Middle School English Listening and Speaking Based on the Perspective of the Activity-Based Approach. *Foreign Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools (Middle School Chapter)*, 2023(3).
- [8] Chen S, 2019, Practice of High School English Reading Teaching Based on the Perspective of the Activity-Based Approach. *Basic Education Curriculum*, 2019: 88.
- [9] Cheng X, 2025, Foreign Research Fun Learning (Children's English New Version 3B). Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, China.
- [10] Luo X, Zhang L, Hong Y, 2019, Examples of High Quality English Courses in Primary School. East China Normal University Press, China.
- [11] Cheng X, 2022, Interpretation of Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) Based on Elementary School English Lesson Examples. Education Science Press, China.

### Publisher's note

*Whioce Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.*