RESEARCH ARTICLE

USING COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR ENHANCING LISTENING SKILLS OF EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

English is the combination of various skills that require conscious efforts to gain the mastery. The sense of confidence in the EFL the learners can be achieved through learner-centric teaching techniques and approaches. English, like any other language, is a system of sounds wherein production is solemnly depends on the reception. Thus, in order to enable the learners to use English confidently, it is important to focus on enhancing their listening skills from the very initial stage of language acquisition. This research paper aims to showcase the potential use of Common European Framework of Reference in enhancing listening skills of EFL learners.

Key Words: Listening Skills, EFL Learners, Common European Framework of Reference, Illustrative Scales, Level descriptors.

Introduction:

Listening is an ability to hear attentively and process upon the information being given. It is often observed that the learners from the vernacular medium fail to follow and process the information given to them in English. Also, they fail to utter their ideas in English with appropriate level of fluency and accuracy. Various reasons are identified behind this failure, like, inadequate vocabulary, grammatical errors, incorrect pronunciation and so on. However, it is important to note that the fundamental reason behind these issues is their poor listening skills which must have been taught naturally from the beginning of their language acquisition through various social contexts. As Littlewood states (1984), "The child imitates the sound and patterns which he hears around him."

This close relation between listening and speaking produces the desired verbal expressions. While learning English it is important for the learners to understand the sound system of English along with its usage in an appropriate social context. Willis (1981) states that "Students need to learn how to listen, and to get the chance to listen to different types of English, so they will be able to listen with understanding to spoken English outside the classroom." While learning a foreign language, it is important to listen in the target language as it untimely results in the reproduction of ideas. Enhancing listening skills needs a scientific treatment and graded practise to ensure that the learners understand the sounds completely for a fluent and accurate reproduction through speech. For such teaching, learning and evaluation, an

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action-oriented approach like Common European Framework of Reference (henceforth CEFR) is the need o an hour.

Literature Review:

In the US, educational frameworks in every state borrowed scales from CEFR. In Ireland, English Language Proficiency Benchmarks have been developed based on CEFR for the learners of English as a second language in primary and post-primary (secondary) schools. The aim is to offer a curriculum that can improve the learners' language so that they can access English- medium education without rigorous support. Moreover, in China, the government is planning to change high school exit assessment and the curriculum according to CEFR. In such a case, millions of people will be affected by this innovation (Little, 2006). Likewise, Korea is planning to implement changes in line with CEFR in order that Korean the learnerscan have acceptable language qualifications when entering the global job market (Finch, 2009).

**Common European Framework of Reference - an Action-Oriented approach:**

CEFR provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. Moreover, it also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis.

The CEFR is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe. It was formed by the Council of Europe as the main part of the project titled, 'Language Learning for European Citizenship' between 1989 and 1996. It focuses on providing a method of assessing and teaching. It is consist of six reference levels, which are widely accepted as the standard for grading an individual learner's language proficiency.

How CEFR can be helpful in enhancing Listening skills?

As mentioned earlier, Listening is a fundamental skill that must be taught naturally. It's important to understand the level of the learners before applying and experimenting in the classroom. It is obligatory for the facilitator to break the autocratic teaching styles and map the needs of the learners with teaching, in failing to do so, may result the failure of attainment of the desired objectives at the end of the programme. It is important to understand that teaching listening is a challenging task which needs scaffolding at the facilitator's level. In order to enhance the listening skills among EFL learners the following action plan should be followed which is designed keeping in mind the CEFR guidelines.
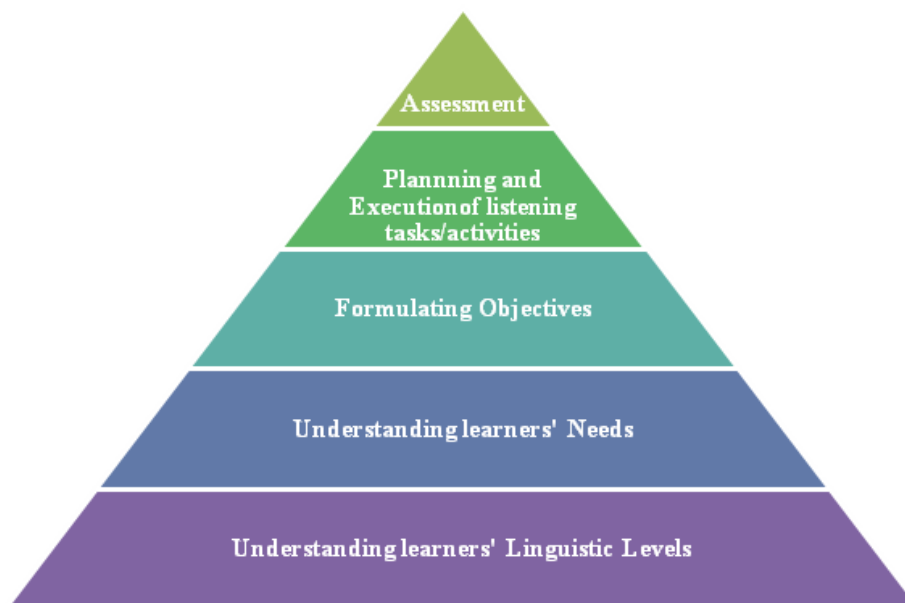
The CEFR has been very significant in the process of teaching, learning and evaluation as its impact goes beyond describing learners' levels. It is an action oriented approach that is based on the notion of communicative proficiency – the increasing ability to communicate and operate effectively in the target language. The descriptions of levels are skill-based and take the form of Can Do Statements. It is a practical approach which focuses on what learners can do apart from their linguistic knowledge. These 'can do' statements were developed by ALTE (The Association of Language Testers in Europe).

Common Reference Levels : Global scale

Starting from its user-friendly descriptors till guidelines for facilitators, it can help learners and facilitators at each stage of language learning process. In the country like India where English plays vital role in almost all the spheres of the life, CEFR can help the learners to learn it in the real life situations. Valuable assistances can be found for educational administrators, course designers, facilitators, facilitator trainers, examining bodies, etc., to reflect on their current practice, so that they can meet the real needs of the learners for whom they have been striving hard for long. This common basis for objectives, content and methods, makes for transparency of course criteria, syllabi and qualifications, and thus promotes international cooperation in the field of modern languages.

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

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	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Illustrative scales for overall Listening Comprehension:

The objective criteria for describing language proficiency help the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts, and thus facilitate European mobility, which is the prime reason behind learning English for the learners in India.

C2	Has no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, delivered at fast native speed
C1	Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar. Can recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts. Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly.
B2	Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influence the ability to understand.
	Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can follow extended speech and complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar, and the direction of the talk is sign-posted by explicit markers.
B1	Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent.
	Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives.
A2	Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.
	Can understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment) provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.
A1	Can follow speech that is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.

Utilization of CEFR for teaching Listening Skills in English:

In the overall listening skills, the fundamental faculty in the learners is their ability of follow instructions. As far as English is concern, due to the various linguistic constraints it is found that they fail to understand the clear instructions by their facilitators. In order for the classroom to be a good learning environment, it is obligatory to enhance this basic skill among the learners.

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A few language learning activities/exercises are designed with an optimistic outlook keeping in mind the above descriptors to enhance the overall listening skills of the learners. Here it is important to mention that CEFR provides descriptors for the various purposes such as, Listening for:

	UNDERSTANDING INTERACTION BETWEEN NATIVE SPEAKERS
	AS A MEMBER OF A LIVE AUDIENCE
	TO ANNOUNCEMENTS & INSTRUCTIONS
	TO RADIO AUDIO & RECORDINGS
	WATCHING TV AND FILM

In this research paper, the focus was kept on learners' ability to *understand announcements and instructions.* The descriptors provided for the same in CEFR are as under:

C2	No descriptor available
C1	Can extract specific information from poor quality, audibly distorted public announcements e.g. in a station, sports stadium etc. Can understand complex technical information, such as operating instructions, specifications for familiar products and services.
B2	Can understand announcements and messages on concrete and abstract topics spoken in standard dialect at normal speed.
B1	Can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for everyday equipment. Can follow detailed directions.
A2	Can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcement. Can understand simple directions relating to how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport.
A1	Can understand instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions.

Experiments:

Sample: 1	
Level	A1
Skill	**Understanding instructions**
Type	Individual Work
Objective	• Can understand instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions.
Material/s	Learners — Pen and Paper Facilitator — Annexure: 1
Procedure	1. The facilitator will give instruction of a map to all the learners. 2. Once the instructions are given, the facilitator will display the actual picture on the screen (May be through PPT/OHP) 3. The learners will be asked to cross check their drawing with the actual picture. 4. The exact/ nearest drawing will win the activity.
Variation	Before showing the actual picture, the facilitator might ask the learnersto cross check their work with others. These will enable the learnersto communicate with each other in English.

Sample: 2	
Level	A2
Skill	**Understanding announcements**

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Type	Individual Work
Objective	• Can understand the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcement.
Material/s	Learners	Pen and Paper
	Facilitator	A recording of train announcement.
Procedure	1. The facilitator will play an announcement[1]. The learners will have to fill up the details, such as, ✓ Name of the Train ✓ Train Number ✓ Arrival Time ✓ Departure Time ✓ Platform Number ✓ Delay minutes ✓ Reason behind delay

Sample: 3	
Level	**A2**
Skill	**Understanding directions**
Type	Pair work
Objective	• Can understand the simple directions relating to how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport.
Material/s	Learners	Worksheet given by facilitator
	Facilitator	Annexure: 2
Procedure	1. The facilitator will distribute the worksheet among all the pair. 2. The learners then take it in turns to ask each other for directions to the places listed on their worksheet. 3. Encourage the learners giving directions to use the expressions from the 'Useful Language' box where possible. 4. When a learner has found the place they want to go to, they write the name of the place on their copy of the map.
Variation	The facilitator may not allow the learners to look at each other's worksheet until they have both found all eight places listed. Finally, the learners compare their maps and see if they have marked the places correctly.

Sample: 4	
Level	**B1**
Skill	**Understanding technical information**
Type	Individual Work
Objective	• Can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for everyday equipment.
Material/s	Learners	Pen and Paper
	Facilitator	Annexure: 3
Procedure	1. Before the lesson the facilitator will need to find suitable instructions[2]. 2. Then the facilitator will cut these into sections. 3. Then the facilitator will read these technical instructions.

[1] Announcement at the Railway Station
[2] Instructions related to installing software.

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	4. The learners will have to put these instructions in the correct order.
	5. Once the facilitator completes reading the instructions. The learners will share their answers.
	6. At the end the facilitator will share the correct order of the instructions.

Sample: 5		
Level	B1	
Skill	**Understanding follow detailed directions**	
Type	Pair Work	
Objective	• Can follow detailed directions.	
Material/s	Learners	---
	Facilitator	A cloth to blind fold
Procedure	1. The learners will work in the pair.	
	2. One learner will play the role of navigator in the pair. And another learner will become the hunter.	
	3. The person who will become the navigator will direct the hunter towards the hidden object. The hunter will be blind folded.	
	4. Once that member is blind folded, the facilitator will put an object in any one of the corners in the class.	
	5. The navigator shall give him/her instructions and will direct to the place where the object is being kept.	
	6. The person cannot use any other expression except the directions.	
	7. Once the hunter reaches to the object, he/she will have to guess the object by asking only three questions to the navigator.	
Variation	The learners might be given only 10 minutes to complete this activity.	
	Further they may also be restricted to give directions only for 6 times.	

Sample: 6		
Level	B2	
Skill	**Understanding announcements and messages**	
Type	Individual Work	
Objective	• Can understand announcements and messages on concrete and abstract topics spoken in standard dialect at normal speed.	
Material/s	Learners	---
	Facilitator	An audio/video with the twist/mysterious end.
Procedure	1. The facilitator will play a recording in the class.	
	2. The recording should contain a story with a twist.	
	3. The facilitator will stop the recording before the end.	
	4. The learners will have to guess the end of the story.	
	5. The learners may also be allowed to give multiple ends.	
	6. The facilitator then will play the actual audio once again till the end and will let learners know the actual twist in the story.	
Variation	A learner might be asked to write the answers given by others on the board so that by the end of the session the winner can be declared.	

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Sample: 7	
Level	**C1**
Skill	**Understanding announcements and messages**
Type	Individual Work
Objective	• Can extract specific information from poor quality, audibly distorted public announcements e.g. in a station, sports stadium etc.
Material/s	Learners — Pen and Paper Facilitator — An audio containing announcement at the Railway Station/ an interview in a distorted public place.
Procedure	1. The facilitator will make the learners listen to an interview. 2. The interview should be taken at such place where there is an external barrier like noise which may prevent the clear delivery of the message. 3. The facilitator will give ten questions based on this interview to the learners. 4. The learners will start writing the answers once they complete listening. 5. The facilitator will play the audio only once. 6. At the end when all the learners will finish writing their answers, the facilitator will play the audio once again. 7. The learners will exchange their classmates' answer sheets and will give score to each other based on their second attempt of listening. 8. The learner with the maximum answers wins the game.

Sample: 8	
Level	**C1**
Skill	**Understanding announcements and messages**
Type	Individual Work
Objective	• Can understand complex technical information, such as operating instructions, specifications for familiar products and services.
Material/s	Learners — Pen and Paper Facilitator — Annexure: 4
Procedure	1. Before the lesson the facilitator will need to find suitable instructions[3]. 2. Then the facilitator will read these technical instructions. 3. Facilitator will not speak any one or two important instructions which the learners will have to guess. 4. The learners may inform about this mission part at the beginning itself. 5. The learners will have to identify the mission instruction. 6. Once the facilitator completes reading the instructions. The learners will share their answers. 7. At the end the facilitator will share the correct order of the instructions.

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[3] Instruction: Inserting a cartridge in the printer.

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Conclusion

A curriculum for English language teaching should be planned in the line of the interest of it's learners who can address their needs and future requirements. Unfortunately, the existing curriculum is designed to teach English theoretically from primary to post graduation. As a result, the learners can read and write fairly well but fail to speak and communicate in the practical real life situations such as, group discussions, public speaking or personal interviews. Such a scenario requires channelizing our efforts to address their needs and queries based on a systematic framework recognized globally. A curriculum model based on certain standard guidelines such as Common European Framework of References is the need of the hour. These guidelines can offer the graded and learner-specific approach in curriculum design and evaluation. It provides transparency to our stakeholders' learning needs and helps them in the development of their autonomous study skills.

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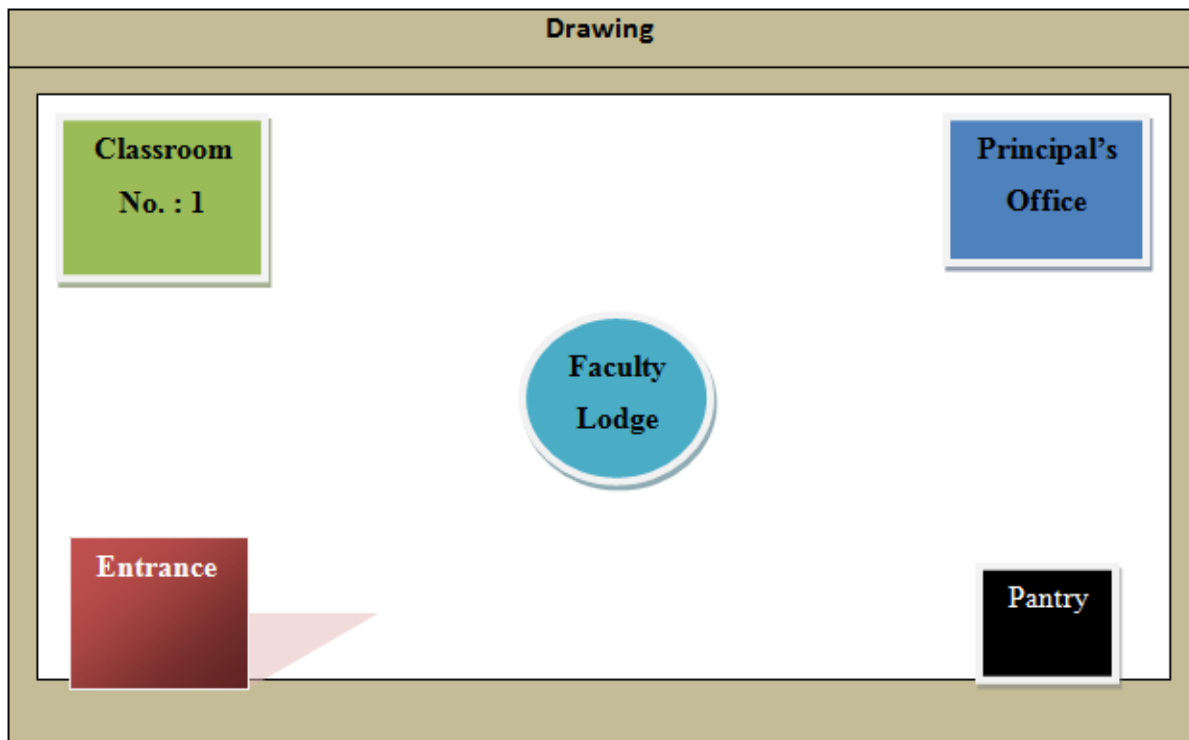Willis, J., Teaching English through English. Hong Kong: Sing Cheong Printing Co. Ltd., 1981. Print.

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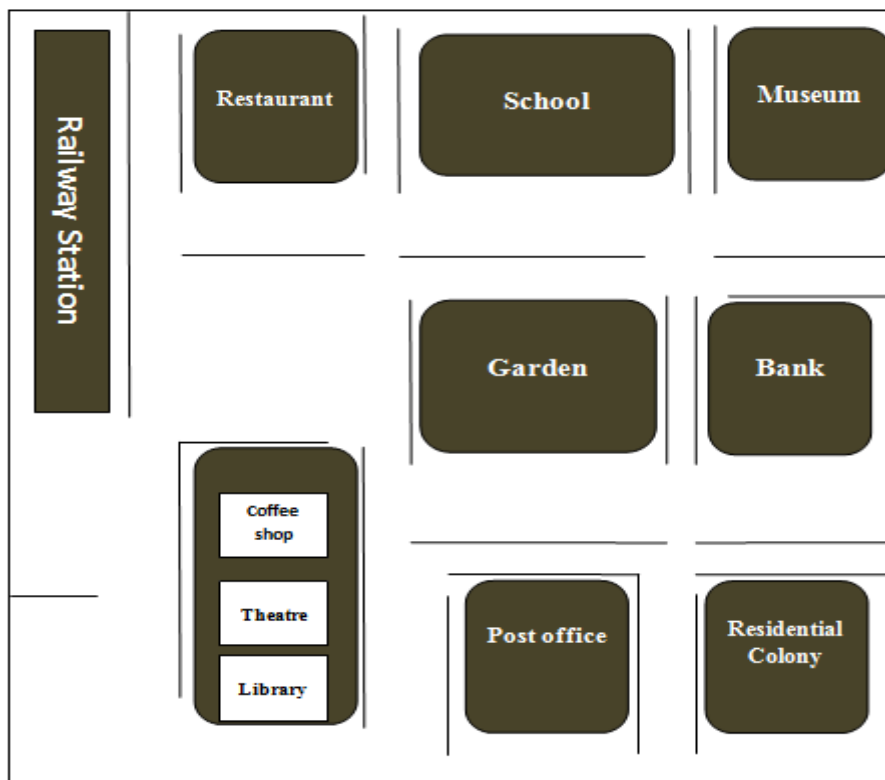Littlewood, W. Foreign and Second Language Learning - Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

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Annexure: 1

Annexure: 2
Direct Me!

Ask your partner for directions to:
1. the Garden
2. the Restaurant
3. the School
4. the Museum
5. the Residential Colony: 1
6. the Coffee Shop
7. the Post office
8. the Theatre
9. the Library
10. the Railway Station

Mark the location on your map

Useful Language
1. Go straight…
2. Turn left / right at the junction
3. Go past…
4. Go over the junction… Walk / Go along the road until…
5. The… is on your left / right.
6. It's opposite…
7. It's next to…
8. It's in between…

Annexure: 3

Instructions[4] to Install a Software in the Computer
Click "Standard Installation".
Read the license agreement carefully. If you agree with the terms and conditions of the license agreement, click [Yes] to continue the installation.
Enter your user name and company name, then click [Next]
Check the locations where you want the installer to add the program shortcuts and click [Next].
Check the box for each Microsoft® Office® application that you want to install the Add in for, and then click [Next].
Click "Standard Installation".
Read the license agreement carefully. If you agree with the terms and conditions of the license agreement, click [Yes] to continue the installation.
Enter your user name and company name, then click [Next]
Check the locations where you want the installer to add the program shortcuts and click [Next].

Annexure: 4

Instructions[5][6] to Install a Cartridge in the Printer
Write down the printer brand and model number.
Turn on your printer and open the lid/flap that encloses the cartridges.
Take note of the cartridge number and type.
Purchase new cartridges or have your old ones refilled.
Gently remove the cartridges you want to replace.
Shake the new cartridge before unpacking.
Remove the protector that covers the ink dispenser.
Insert the cartridge into the printer.
Print a test page.
Reconfigure printer heads for best quality.

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[4] The statements given are in the actual order. While reading them the teacher must change the sequence.

[5] The statements given are in the actual order. While reading them the teacher must change the sequence.

[6] While giving these instructions the teacher must remove any one/two(may depend on the learners' linguistic level)instructions. Students will have to arrange the instructions in the correct order and have to guess the missing part/instruction.

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