



## **Students' Perspectives Towards Listening Comprehension in EFL**

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Modality: Descriptive Study

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magister en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-01-N°. 014-2020. Cohort 2020 - 2022. Author's email:

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### **Students' Perspectives Towards Listening Comprehension in EFL**

Listening is one of the input skills that people should acquire first when they are learning another language. According to Nunan (2003), this skill is considered a great source of input in the educational system, while Shariyevna and Atxamovna (2020) affirmed that this skill is essential as it is constantly present in any activity carried out that implies communication. Besides, Alzamil (2021) believed that its acquisition is one of the students' most difficult tasks. It happens because sometimes they may experience anxiety and frustration, as there are no concise rules like those for teaching grammar, or due to the speech speed. The listening comprehension process implies the capacity to recognize phonemes, syntax, morphology, and pragmatics. When all this is combined into one, words and sentences are created (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Listening is the first condition for developing the language and enriching the linguistic bank of the child; however, its acquisition requires effort and dedication (Tabieh, et al., 2021). According to Meza (2020), some students struggle when listening to recordings because they usually have to predict upcoming information. Vandergrift (2007) assured that all the processes implied in listening are very hard to understand because they relate to different human beings' backgrounds and other contextual factors. On the other hand, Ableeva and Stranks (2013) indicated that the material used to develop this skill seldom reflects the real purpose of applying linguistics in the learning process, while Burtabaeva and Yuldasheva (2021) suggested that addressing authentic material is essential to developing this skill.

The fact that students can hear spoken English does not mean they can decode the message. Underwood (1989) affirmed that during the listening process students deal with several problems such as speed of what they are listening to, pronunciation they do not understand, comprehension of the audio at the first time, limitations in their

vocabulary, and lack of concentration in a foreign language. Furthermore, Rost (2011) explained that the act of listening is a permanent and dynamic process. It means that learners have to pay attention all the time and then they have to analyze all the information they heard. This is why it is pertinent to implement a new strategy to improve students' performance in this skill.

Regarding the development of this skill, technology plays an important role in the classroom, as it provides students with listening experiences; besides, it also gives teachers lots of choices in media, teaching materials whether in audio or video formats and sources (Maulina et al., 2022). In modern technology, podcasts are one of the best ways that students have to increase their learning because they allow them to develop understanding and critical thinking (Constantine, 2007). It is possible to argue then, that a language teacher needs to be aware of updated computer-based technologies, so students could benefit from the spoken language experience.

There has been extensive research on listening comprehension (Al-Nafisah, 2019; Pinto, 2019; Tersta & Novianti, 2017). Some authors have used a lot of grammar and reading to explain listening activities (Pinto, 2019; Vera de la Torre et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2021). Others have focused their work on selecting and using practical exercises to improve listening (Al-Nafisah, 2019; Syafii et al., 2020). In Ecuador, there is a study that implemented summarizing as a strategy with negative results (Salazar, 2020), and a couple of projects aimed to use podcasts to improve speaking skills (Pino 2021; Ushca, 2020). Those studies applied methodological procedures similar to the current work facilitated by technological resources to be self-assessed. However, there is a gap that the current research work attempts to cover, aimed to determine the importance of self-assessment of students' podcasts to improve listening skills, having as population students in 10th - grade of a private high school located in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

It was noticed that some students showed difficulties in their listening decoding performance, as it seems they do not recognize the words they know and quickly forget what was heard. In addition, they showed problems understanding sounds, tone, and rhythm in fluent English. As a consequence, they have problems establishing effective communication in English. Possible reasons could be teachers without enough training in techniques, methods, strategies, and technological tools. It is also possible to think that they have little time for planning activities and using appropriate strategies. This may happen because their training is not a priority for the institution; there is no budget for it, or teachers are assigned excessive-class hours and other paperwork which does not allow them to plan or design strategies in language learning.

### **Literature Review**

In this section, literature is analyzed regarding to listening skills and self-assessment. It presents theories for listening comprehension, authentic assessment, and its disadvantages, as well as foundations related to podcasts. The literature is organized to support the research.

#### **Listening Skills**

Purdy and Borisoff (1997) stated listening is "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal) needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings." (p. 8). Listening is a psychological process that happens in people's minds (Amari & Gorjian, 2019). Listening is a natural process in which someone can organize some lexical elements (Rost, as cited in Amari & Gorjian, 2019) and can understand what is heard (Pinto, 2019).

### **Listening Comprehension**

Cameron (2001) expressed that listening comprehension helps people to understand what they hear effectively if they start doing it from an early age. This skill plays an important role in the communication process. Yavuz and Celik (2017) affirmed that listening plays an important part in communication and is considered an essential agent in gaining input in the language learning process. People need to understand and interpret what they hear. The listener needs to be able to answer what is said. For this reason, paying attention and understanding a message is important in this process.

Listening comprehension is considered one of the most difficult skills to acquire for anyone, and a variety of authors agree that the best way to develop this skill is through audio files. Today's podcasts are helpful resources that allow students to learn even faster, because they work on different skills such as reading, listening, and speaking (Chaikovska et al., 2019).

Abrantes (as cited in Villón, 2016) affirmed that the main difficulty in learning this skill is basically that it is a complementary skill to speaking; as a consequence, a good level of listening is crucial to becoming a good speaker. The author also explained that it must be taken into consideration the fact that the message transmitted requires a great amount of attention. It means that the student who listens will be able to repeat exactly or almost exactly what he or she heard. Consequently, listening is not an isolated skill, but a skill that is complemented by the other three.

### **Authentic Assessment**

It focuses on assessment tasks that learners have the chance to use in real-world situations (outside the classroom) and helps to boost the autonomous learning process. Boud (2010) described the assessment as “the knowledge, skills, and predispositions

that underpin lifelong learning activities” (p. 151); furthermore, it supports the idea of long-lasting learning.

### **Self - assessment**

Self-assessment is one of the tools that students can use in class for checking their advance and their academic progress. They can use it during the learning process to monitor what they are doing (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013). Its main goal is to provide immediate feedback, so the students can follow their advance in their learning experience.

Panadero (2011) stated that “the qualitative assessment of the learning process, and of its final product, realized on the basis of pre-established criteria” (p. 11). Besides, Dunning et al. (2004) explained that accurate self-assessment will help students to become more autonomous because they will know their weaknesses and strengths.

### **Disadvantages of Self-Assessment**

According to Brown and Harris (2013), one disadvantage could be that students may become dishonest and subjective with themselves. Some of them can disguise the truth while others can rely on construct-irrelevant and subjective criteria.

### **Podcast**

Harris and Park (2008, as cited by McClung and Johnson, 2010) defined podcasts are audio and video files that can be downloaded to a desktop computer, iPod, or other portable media player for playback later.

Podcasts are great tools that help people not only to learn but enjoy a wide variety of topics, whenever they choose. Moreover, people can access them by subscribing and waiting for automatic downloads (Potter, 2006). Solano and Sanchez (2010) stated that a podcast is a multimedia sound file that can be found on the web and

involves several topics such as music, religion, and politics, to better contextualize and engage students.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

#### **General objective**

Describe the students' perspectives towards listening comprehension in EFL through self-assessment of students' podcasts, having as population 10th - grade students from a private high school located in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

#### **Research questions**

After the analysis of the research problem and the theoretical foundations, this paper aimed to answer the following question:

- What are students' difficulties during the process of decoding a message?

#### **Innovation**

As listening is considered one of the most important skills when learning a language, to decode a message, improve the sound, tone, and rhythm recognition in spoken language, and therefore listening comprehension in students, is essential. Consequently, this current research work proposed the design of a set of strategies for improving the listening skills in 10th - grade students from a private high school located in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

For the implementation of this project, the backward design model is applied. Participants had to pay their undivided attention to acknowledge a message; apply discriminative listening; make predictions, identify information; and recognize the context. The innovation will be carried out in a total of 20 hours, two class hours per day for two weeks in a row. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was selected for innovation to promote and support the development of listening skills with meaningful activities.

The procedures applied as part of the innovation process were: a) the sessions will be developed and carried out as stated in the planning and considering the independent materials selected for the lessons; b) The online resources chosen for the innovation are Google Classroom, Google Podcast, and Podchaser; c) the researcher will supply learners all the materials needed to infer, predict and recognize information, word meaning, and improve listening through unscripted and scripted podcasts; d) students will have to understand the point the speaker tries to communicate; e) students will have to rephrase and summarize the speaker's message; f); students will have to jot down important facts from the speaker's message g) students will participate actively and kept on asking questions; h) the teacher will explain students the self-assessment process; i) students will self-assess their listening performance at the end of each unit.

### **Methodology**

This study is aimed to describe the students' perspectives towards listening comprehension in EFL through self-assessment of students' podcasts. Google Classroom, Google Podcast, and Podchaser are the resources selected to achieve this purpose. The research design of this study is qualitative. In addition, the inductive and deductive methods were considered to collect primary data through the application of the research tools, which was essential for building conclusions.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study are 40 students in 10th - grade, classrooms A and B, between 14 to 15 years old, of which 17 boys and 23 girls from a private high school located in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Most of the students are considered mixed-raced with a mid-class social standing. None of them show a different sexual orientation from heterosexuals, or in other words, girls and boys as gender identity. In this group of students, around 15% receive additional English classes from private language



academies to complement and reinforce the knowledge acquired at school. Besides, an additional 10% of students are supported at home by private tutors for assignments and exam preparation.

A Cambridge diagnostic test was applied to pre-evaluate participants of the study. The purpose was to determine their level of listening skill. The results showed that students had important deficiencies in their listening skills and vocabulary. The diagnostic test revealed a low score for each of the 5 parts of the test (Table 1). The total Mean was 12.30, near 50% of the possible marks that students could obtain, and the STDEV was 2.86.

**Table 1.**

*Proficiency test for reading results*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	STDEV
Part 1	5	1.00	5.00	3.18	1.17
Part 2	5	2.00	5.00	2.83	0.68
Part 3	5	2.00	5.00	2.93	0.73
Part 4	5	1.00	6.00	1.85	1.12
Part 5	5	1.00	4.00	1.53	0.68
Total		9.00	23.00	12.30	2.86

Source: Author's own elaboration.

### **Instruments and Data Analysis**

First, a diagnostic English test for listening was applied to pre-evaluate students and determine their level in this skill. The Cambridge test includes 25 questions and is divided into 5 parts with 5 questions each. Part 1 required students to listen and draw lines to match information; part 2 asked them to listen and write the information identified; part 3 requested them to listen and write a letter according to the information

listened; part 4 asked students to tick the box according to the information listened, and part 5 requested students to listen and color a picture (Appendix 1).

In addition, informal conversational interviews were conducted with the sample participant in order to identify their difficulties at the moment to deal with listening comprehension. The interview questionnaire included 6 open-ended questions and was applied to 20 students that represent 50% of the total population (Appendix 2).

### **Procedures/Data Collection**

In order to collect the data for this research, a diagnostic test was applied to all the participants in one session and helped to measure the listening skills of students. In addition, the interviews lasted at least 10 minutes with each participant of the sample. The interview took place virtually because of the restrictions due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Students who agreed and signed the interview consent received a call by Zoom or WhatsApp. In order to select the participants from the total population, a random sampling method was applied. Learning journals and students' logs are also considered to collect students' perceptions regarding their listening skills.

Finally, the current study considers the application of a posttest, to be administered after the application of the innovation activities. The test to be applied is a Cambridge test to measure students' listening skill at A1 level and is oriented to identify if students have improved their final score after using the innovation activities.

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed into a document. Students' answers and thoughts about their issues were collected during the interview. With the results, the researcher determined the way the innovation can minimize the student's struggles according to their answers.

**Research question 1.** The data collected through the interviews were processed by hand and also in Microsoft Excel where a frequency table was obtained (Appendix 3). A diagnostic test for listening was administered.

The strategy selected for students' self-assessment is the learning journals. This strategy was considered an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It includes 5-10 of minutes reflection time for students to discuss and record their learning in their journals at the end of a lesson – sentence starters and prompts may be provided if necessary. The students' interview applied was also aimed to obtain their perceptions about the effectiveness of podcasts to develop the listening skills. This information was organized and processed by hand. Learning logs of students' perceptions regarding the innovation were also applied.

### **Ethical considerations**

To be successful in the development of this research, it was necessary to concentrate on ethical viewpoints that might ensure students' proper development of their knowledge as well as their own personal development. According to Rahman (2017), both quantitative and qualitative research requires close attention, and researchers must be aware that different research approaches raise different ethical difficulties. Informed consent, beneficence, and respect for confidentiality-privacy are among the ethical issues raised by the author.

One ethical consideration that will be taken during the interview administration, is the parents' consent to apply this instrument to students. Students' parents will receive a phone call or an email asking for permission. Participants will only be excluded if their parents disagree or do not answer on time. Besides, students will be asked to agree and sign an Interview Informed Consent previous to the interview (Appendix 4).

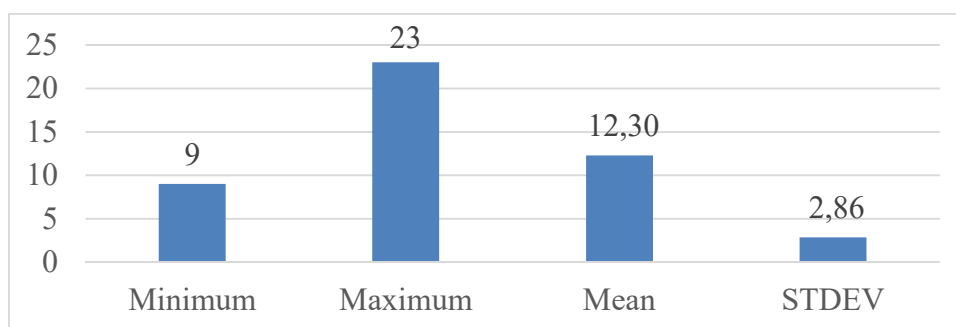
## Results

Follows the main findings of the study, which resulted from the application of the research tools. The data collected was processed and analyzed.

Results for research question 1: *What are students' difficulties during the process of decoding a message?* The pretest's results showed students' difficulties in their listening decoding performance. According to the data collected, students had problems to recognize words that were introduced and learned in previous sessions. It commonly happens when students have not stored words or sounds in their long-term memory, which means they under learned vocabulary, sounds, tone or rhythm in English. The results also showed that students could not relate information listened with meaning and tended to soon forget the words they heard, which means students have not developed listening skills appropriately. The pretest's results revealed a total Mean of 12.30, that is, 50% of the possible marks that students could obtain, and a STDEV of 2.86. (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Pre-test results*



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The interview's results collected students' perceptions regarding the listening skills and students' preferences and difficulties. It was noticed that students prefer other activities than practicing listening. In addition, they believe the problems they have in listening are because they cannot identify the phonemes in a word, or because they do

not feel motivated to practice listening and improve these skills. Follows a summary of the results obtained:

Question #1. Most students affirmed they do not practice listening regularly and prefer to spend time playing at home. Some of the expressions collected were “I like playing with my dog when I am not doing homework”, or “I am allowed to play football when I am not at school”.

Question #2. Students said they do have problems to comprehend when listening in English. They believe their difficulties to recognize the sound of words are some of the most important causes. Even though they have been struggling with listening comprehension from previous years, they expressed their enthusiasm for practicing listening from their cellphones or tablets, with podcasts about interesting topics for them.

Question #3. Most students stated that something important to know about listening comprehension and listening activities is that it is not enough to hear, but to recognize speech sounds. Students find listening activities difficult, which means they have important difficulties to interpret the message appropriately.

Question #4. In this question, most students answered that they do not make an extra effort to understand a listening activity that is difficult for them.

Question #5. Almost all students interviewed said they would prefer to listen to stories; information about their favorite character; or their favorite songs.

Question #6. Students said they do not commonly look for podcasts on the internet, but that they have heard interesting adventures or mystery stories in their tablets or cellphones.

The students' reflections regarding their experiences in the acquisition of their listening were collected through learning journals, which encouraged students to deal

with the challenges of listening. The learning journals requested students listening to a text several times focusing on meaning, and also focusing on decoding the message through activities such as gap filling or matching. At the end, students had to reflect on their achievements, as well as their strengths and weaknesses to identify what they need to improve. Results showed students' weaknesses in word sounds, tone, and also meaning in fluent English.

Students' perception about podcasts effectiveness to develop students' listening comprehension was minimum. Most students answered that even they have listened to podcasts, they do not feel motivated to do it regularly and as a consequence, they do not perceive any improvement in their listening skills. However, some of them said that they would like to listen to stories, popular characters, or real-life issues.

### **Discussion**

This study was driven by one research question, which aimed to describe the students' perspectives towards listening comprehension in EFL. A comparison of the findings, the theory, and previous studies are explained below.

Regarding research question #1 in which students' difficulties in listening comprehension were identified, it is important to mention that these results coincided with Chaikovska et al. (2019), who affirmed that some students find listening particularly difficult, usually because of their vocabulary limitations or due to the speaker speed and accent. Additionally, Yavuz and Celik (2017) discussed the importance of listening in communication and the difficulties it represents to students of English as a second language; while Amari and Gorjian (2019) highlighted the fact that listening is a difficult skill to acquire because it must be processed in students' mind.

On the other hand, learning journals showed students' weaknesses in word sounds, tone, and also meaning in fluent English. Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2013)

affirmed that self-assessment is an effective way to provide feedback to students as they can measure their improvements in listening through it. In addition, Dunning et al. (2004) explained that self-assessment is crucial help students identify their weaknesses and strengthens and in this way to become more autonomous.

Finally, students' interviews showed that students' preferences are podcasts about stories, popular characters, or real-life issues, which made clear that podcast motivate students and encourage them to identify meaning and decode a message when listening. The results coincide with Harris and Park (2008, as cited by McClung and Johnson, 2010), who described podcasts as a flexible resource that can be used in desktop computers and can help students develop and enhance their listening skills. In addition, Solano and Sanchez (2010) highlighted the relevance of podcasts to engage students and grasp their attention and interest in English lessons, because this resource can give students a great understanding of the content, increasing their competence in listening.

### **Conclusions**

The study is aimed to describe the students' perspectives towards listening comprehension in EFL through self-assessment of students' podcasts. Based on the research process and research question that was drawn, the main conclusions are the following:

Research question #1. What are students' difficulties during the process of decoding a message? The literature review as well as the research tools applied to collect data allowed to determine that self-assessment of students' podcasts have an important impact in the development of their listening skills. Several authors developed a set of similar studies that support and validate theoretically the current research work.

Learning journals resulted an effective way to show students' weaknesses in word meaning, sound, and tone, to engage them and promote reflection regarding their learning and listening skills acquisition. However, teachers' feedback is crucial to achieve an effective development of this skill.

The literature consulted and students' perceptions regarding podcasts allowed to conclude that these technological resources are effective and efficient to develop students' listening comprehension. However, it is important to consider students' preferences to motivate them and successfully engage them in the learning process.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations found in the current study to be considered in further studies. First, it is important to highlight that the sample size may not be large enough to have a broad view about the scientific fact and should not be generalized to a larger population. It is also important to mention that even though there were found important studies covering the importance of self-assessment of students' podcasts, a large amount of them cover the self-assessment of students related to other skills.

### **Recommendations**

In order to improve the results obtained in the current study, it is important that future studies select a larger sample for the application of the innovation. In this way, the results obtained will be generalized to a larger population. In addition, it is important to consider the application of the innovation. In this way, it would be possible to measure students' improvement in their listening skills with the administration of the post-test. Ideally, it would be relevant to encourage the development of more research work about self-assessment of students podcasts and the development of the listening skills. In this way, future studies will be able to access more complete and concrete results regarding the topic.



It is recommendable to consider the application of the strategies based on self-assessment of students' podcasts, as it is seen as an effective way to improve their listening skills. Technology is an essential element for this intervention, since the internet gives students a large amount of resources to improve their skills in English language. As a consequence, the institution should give teachers the support needed, either in resources or in training, so teachers can have the competences needed to use modern strategies in the classroom.

Finally, the intervention proposed in the current study is characterized by a continuous innovation, so it should be reviewed periodically and updated regularly with the latest technological advances, to go hand in hand with the demands of a changing world and the dynamism of technology.

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**Appendix 1**

**Pre-test**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 2**

**Students' Interview**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 3**

**Students' Interview Results**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 4**

**Interview Informed Consent**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 5**

**Sample Unit**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 6**

**Rubrics for the Final Task**

Available upon request.



**Appendix 7**

**UBD Lesson Plan Scoring Rubric**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 8**

**Listening Skills Self-Assessment**

Available upon request.