



Perspectives of EFL Students in Listening

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Modality: Descriptive Study

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Proyecto de Investigación

Certifico que Evelin Mercedes Valencia Rodríguez ha cumplido satisfactoriamente su investigación descriptiva como pre-requisito de graduación de Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés.

Su investigación es parte del proyecto Perspectives of EFL Students in Listening cuyo objetivo general es conocer desde la perspectiva de los estudiantes sus dificultades al momento de escuchar en inglés. Esta información nos servirá para realizar mejoras en el proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés en nuestro contexto.

El proyecto se implementa en niveles de eficiencia en inglés diferentes. En este proyecto, cada participante desarrolla la recolección de datos en un contexto educativo diferente. Las secciones de literatura y metodología (instrumentos y análisis de datos) son las mismas.

Particular que comunico para los fines consiguientes.

María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Coordinadora de Titulación

Abstract

This study aimed to describe EFL students' difficulties in listening skills in a public University in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The sample involved 53 participants who were in the fifth semester in the Faculty of Chemistry and the subject that they were taking at the moment was Unit Operations, classes 1 and 2. Most learners with a B1 English level. The participants answered a Likert-type scale that was applied as an instrument to know the current academic situation and difficulties in foreign language learning that they have. Students answered the survey via email using WhatsApp groups. The data collected were analyzed in an excel worksheet and processed in a specific statistic program where results were found. Results demonstrated that even though students try to understand a different accent it is difficult for them and when they listen to an audio only once it is not enough to interpretate. Participants most of the time understand better when they listen to some topics that they are interested in, using resources such as: podcasts, YouTube, series, and videogames. Finally, activities applied in the classroom which are provided by the teacher are: fill in blanks with information after listening to an audio and talk to their classmates comparing answers to check the listening comprehension activity. Since outcomes are significant for EFL teachers, researchers, and students who can find this investigation beneficial for subsequent research to apply it for lesson plans.

Keywords: Listening skills, listening difficulties, EFL.

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo describir las dificultades de los estudiantes de EFL en habilidades auditivas en una universidad pública en Guayaquil, Ecuador. La muestra fue de 53 participantes que cursaban el quinto semestre de la Facultad de Química y la materia que cursaban en ese momento era Operaciones Unitarias, clases 1 y 2. La mayoría de los estudiantes tenían un nivel de inglés B1. Los participantes respondieron una escala tipo Likert que fue aplicada como instrumento para conocer la situación académica actual y las dificultades en el aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera que tienen. Los estudiantes respondieron la encuesta por correo electrónico utilizando grupos de WhatsApp. Los datos recolectados fueron analizados en una hoja de cálculo de excel y procesados en un programa estadístico específico donde se encontraron los resultados. Los resultados demostraron que a pesar de que los estudiantes tratan de entender un acento diferente, les resulta difícil y cuando escuchan un audio solo una vez es suficiente para interpretar. Los participantes la mayoría de las veces entienden mejor cuando escuchan algunos temas que les interesan, utilizando recursos como: podcasts, YouTube, series y videojuegos. Finalmente, las actividades aplicadas en el salón de clases que son brindadas por el docente son: llenar espacios en blanco con información luego de escuchar un audio y conversar con sus compañeros comparando respuestas para comprobar la actividad de comprensión auditiva. Dado que los resultados son significativos para los profesores, investigadores y estudiantes de EFL, quienes pueden encontrar esta investigación beneficiosa para investigaciones posteriores para aplicarla en los planes de lecciones.

Palabras clave: Habilidades auditivas, dificultades auditivas, inglés como lengua extranjera.

Perspectives of EFL Students in Listening

Listening and understanding are essential to communicate in a foreign language. According to Schreuder et al. (2011) and Liubinienė (2009), listening is one of the components of spoken language because there is no spoken language without listening. Schreuder et al. (2011) stated that listening skills are a key factor in communicating with more people because it provides the basis for a successful communication.

However, there are some difficulties and challenges EFL students face when they are listening to a native speaker in the new language such as the pace of other person talking, unknown words, and absence of previous knowledge, among others. Douglas (1988) considered that listeners cannot recognize the language in a long speech due to the fact that they are used to hearing English just in chunks (a few amount of words).

There have been many research works that were conducted as descriptive studies about listening. For instance, one of those research works is an analysis of student's difficulties in listening comprehension and difficulties by Diora and Rosa (2020) which main aim was to find out the difficulties faced by students in listening comprehension and the factors that cause the difficulties. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method.

Other descriptive studies on listening comprehension were conducted in listening skills, and some learning strategies and methods by Liubinienė (2009). This study will explore students' perspective in listening to figure out what perception

students have on developing this skill due to the importance of listening comprehension in academic contexts as well as in daily life.

Some similar difficulties were demonstrated at the university where the research work took place. Students find it difficult and unclear to understand what teachers, classmates, or recordings say because they are not familiar with the correct sounds of different words, even if it is a simple one. Another problem is the diverse accents and the different pace speakers have. Students are not aware enough to differentiate the sounds of words to get specific information or an overall idea of the speech.

Malyshevych (2017) claimed that parsing and utilization are essential in listening comprehension because of the reconstruction of unclear speech sounds that are found in real-life listening contexts.

The university where this research was held is in Guayaquil-Ecuador. There are fifty-three students (30 females and 23 males) who belong to the fifth semester in the Faculty of Chemistry and the subject that they were taking at the moment was Unit Operations, classes 1 and 2. They are young adults; ages range from 22 to 24 years old. Their level of proficiency in English is B1. In the first years of their career, students must pass five English modules that can be seen in two ways: by taking a complex exam or taking five English modules that prepare them to obtain a level B1+.

Literature Review

Listening Components

Hogan et al. (2014) referred to the importance of two primary components in listening: decoding skill and linguistic comprehension. Pedagogy has focused the attention mostly on assessment and intervention for decoding, providing less attention

to the comprehension. The authors (Hogan et al.) showed that listening comprehension is the dominating influence on reading comprehension. They also highlighted the failures of some participants in reading skills, due to deficient listening skills, determining them as poor comprehenders.

Rost (2014) cited some components of listening skills including discriminating between sounds, recognizing words, identifying stressed words, grouping words, and identifying functions in conversations. Moreover, Rivas (as cited in Hidrovo, 2021), claimed that intonation and stress are determined by connecting linguistic cues to paralinguistic cues, for example, the nonlinguistic cues determine the gestures and objects in the situation. All those listening components and prior knowledge enhance people to predict and create meaning. The components listed above enhance learners in internalizing a new lexicon, arranging some ideas, and understanding of short basic conversation.

Listening Skills

Djabborova (2020) pointed out that listening comprehension skills are the basis of language learning. If language learners have difficulty listening comprehension and language skills, these factors could interrupt the learning process. The listening process focuses more on sounds and tone. It is necessary to understand the unknown words, to concentrate but people do not try to understand the message literally. Of course, there are difficulties in the process of listening. The key to listening skills enhancement is figure out what are the barriers which are affecting to get an effective listening. The listening skill is the ability to receive and interpret messages in the communication process beyond simply hearing something (Surbhi, 2017). Listening is the most frequently used language modality.

According to Rivas (as cited in Hidrovo, 2021), some listening skills that must be overpowered are perception skills, which refers to the listeners segmenting the sounds and detecting a limited number of words, contractions, and vocabulary, emphasizing the longest words. Analysis skill which is based on how people get the main ideas or messages the speaker wants to convey, and synthesis skill that is the way people make the relation between what they understand and what they hear in their brains. The listener could make inferences with the relation they made between language and concepts they can understand. Therefore, the understanding in listening skills, helps to understand symbols learners have seen and heard; students must analyze the meaning of the perceived stimuli; these are words and sounds like applause and sights as blue uniform, among others (Tyagi, 2013). Communicating with various people could help to identify different accents and pronunciations. In interpreting a message, learners naturally make sense of that message in terms of their own experience (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Different Sources of Input for Listening

Spratt et al. (2011) affirmed that listening skills could be the most difficult for some students, even more if their learning style is not auditory. Moreover, when students are listening to a conversation, it is crucial to pay attention to the audio since it disappears as soon as it was spoken. Consequently, students must infer the emotions of the people involved in the audio from the tone of voice and the way they expressed.

Graham and Santos (2015) indicated that in order to become effective listeners, learners must do a lot of listening. According to Chu (2017), teachers should provide self-access learning materials, e.g., listening to films and dramas, TV programs, podcasts, vodcasting, radio news, and online interviews, among others in preference to

students. Indeed, recent mobile technologies (e.g., smartphones, tablets) and widespread availability of L2 materials on the internet can greatly benefit L2 learners. From this perspective, one particular method that can both embrace mobile technology, and combine flexible and extensive learning is the implementation of podcasting and vodcasting technology (Gonulal, 2020). Listeners use all those sources in real-time as they perceive the aural input (e.g., verbal symbols of audio, video, and spoken language of a speaker during communication/interaction) because most of them have the technology in their hands.

Teaching Listening

Rost (2011) highlighted all six types of listening including selective listening which gathers specific information to perform a task. It refers to ‘attending to only what you want to hear’ and ‘tuning out everything else’. Interactive listening in which the listener takes a leading role in understanding, by providing feedback, asking questions, and supporting the speaker. Intensive listening whose intention is academic with an educational purpose of teaching languages, while extensive listening allows listeners to enjoy some type of audios with pleasure. On the other hand, responsive listening in which the listener’s response is the goal of the activity, and finally autonomous listening refers to independent listening, without the direct guidance of an instructor (Rost, 2014). The key to enhancing listening skills is to involve learners in overcoming the barriers when listening, interpreting stress and intonation, distinguishing phonemes, comforting foreign environments, fostering intensive and extensive listening.

The structure of the activities has been changed by making them more guided to help students follow the texts. The last part of the listening lesson is post-listening, which can be used to practice expressions and language functions in the dialogues that

people use in their lives, such as offering, refusing, and apologizing (Field, 2008). The author stated that activities are guided by teachers, so students have better comprehension.

Research Methodology

This research work was conducted with the goal of a descriptive study that reporting the situation that occurs in a specific place through Wh- question. Quantitative data is counted or expressed numerically by answering questions involving quantity, frequency, value, or size (Davidson, 2019). This type of research is more holistic and often involves a rich collection of data from various sources to gain a deeper understanding of individual participants, including their opinions, perspectives, and attitudes (Gall et al., as cited in Nassaji, 2015).

Research questions:

1. What is the most difficult part when listening to a recording?
2. What resources do students use when listening for comprehension?
3. What type of activities have students used to improve listening comprehension?

Participants

The participants of this research were students from fifth semester, ages ranging from 22 to 24 years old. These students belong to a University in Guayaquil-Ecuador. There are 53 students (30 females and 23 males). They all consider themselves mestizos and their social status is middle-class. These participants were selected because they have been learning English for some years, and the University offers some English

programs which are designed to reach a B2 level, also these group of students are constantly attending to extra English courses that the university offers.

Instruments

A survey was the instrument used and applied to all 53 students. Therefore, it was set up to know three main points; what is the most difficult part when listening to a recording, what resources do students use when listening for comprehension, and what type of activities have students used to improve listening comprehension. The questionnaire was divided in 4 sections which included Likert scale choice and open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed and displayed the data in a table. After that, students' responses were registered in an excel worksheet to present the results. Every table shows the means obtained to run the descriptive study. Some students were confused at the beginning of the study. They did not know how to fulfill the survey, the virtual classes were arranged with enough time, but many students did not connect to classes. Then, the researcher had to develop some extra sessions to explain all learners the survey fulfillment.

Ethical Considerations

Descriptive research is widely used in education which value is based on premise that problems can be improved through observation, analysis, and description (Eunsook & Willis, 2012). This is why as a requirement to develop the descriptive study in the institution, it was necessary to present a document (Appendix A) to the University authorities to inform about the study's objective and the aims of the survey (Appendix B). Some days after that, the investigator received the consent letter (Appendix C) to implement the study. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the

research and the pedagogical process, and it was not necessary a consent letter to their parents because all the participants are adults, whose names and personal information will not be mentioned to keep confidentiality.

Results

The data collected through the survey to answer the research questions are shown in this section. The research questions were: What is the most difficult part when listening to a recording? What resources do students use when listening for comprehension? and What type of activities have students used to improve listening comprehension? Participants answered the items as follows:

To understand the survey's answers in Table 1 (below), the specific codes have been written to check how students responded to each item related to difficulties when the participants listen to some audios, recordings, or interactions in English:

- 1.- Nothing
- 2.- Partially
- 3.- A little bit
- 4.- A lot
- 5.- Completely

Research question # 1. According to the descriptive analysis for question 1. What is the most difficult part when listening to a recording? The results showed that the main problems are that students understand the British accent, which a mean obtained of (2.7). This reflects that even though students try to understand a different accent it is difficult for them. According to the indicator, if students understand a recording the first time', the mean was (2.98); students partially understand when they listen to an audio only once. The students also understand better when they listen to

some topics that they know previously, with a mean of (4.26); which means students understand a lot of topics they already know. Also, the students understand if a person speaks English slowly, the mean was (4.70); they understand completely if anyone speaks slowly. Finally, for a better understanding of the results, all the items are presented in the table below:

Table 1.

Results of difficult in listening

Items:	Mean
I understand when I interact with the teacher	3.92
I understand when I interact with a partner	3.77
I understand when I interact with Native speakers	3.26
I can understand a long, complex audio.	3.36
I understand a recording completely at first listening.	2.98
I have to recording more than twice to understand it.	3.30
I understand some single phrases or words when I listen to something in English.	3.81
I understand better when I listen to some topics that I am interested in.	4.17
I understand better when I listen to some topics that I have some prior information.	4.26
I understand better when I listen to speakers who use American accent.	3.70
I understand better when I listen to speakers who use British accent.	2.70
I can use my own words to summarize what the speaker said in an audio recording.	3.38
I understand if a speaker speaks slowly	4.40
I think I understand speakers of English in a certain percentage because my vocabulary knowledge is not enough.	3.51
I think I understand speakers of English in a certain percentage because my knowledge of the topics is not enough.	3.36
I can understand what a speaker means if he/she is using almost similar words (e.g., SHIP / SHEEP; CAT / CUT).	3.81

To understand the survey's answers in Table 2 (below), the specific codes have been written to check how students responded to each item related to the resources used when the participants listen to some audios, recordings, or interactions in English:

- 1.- Never
- 2.- Hardly ever.
- 3.- Sometimes
- 4.- Often.
- 5.- Always.

Research question # 2. What resources do students use when listening for comprehension? Results showed that with a mean of (2.98) prove that students hardly ever listen to some recordings in computer from supplementary books. Results also demonstrated that students listen to some recordings from the course textbook with a mean of (3.11), this confirm that they sometimes use this resource for their comprehension. Another resource that students frequently use is listening to songs focusing on their lyrics' meaning, the main obtained was (3.98). The most significant outcomes in the table 2 demonstrated that listen to songs with a focus on their lyrics meaning is one of the most common resources used for students with a mean of (4.17). It means that listen to songs with their lyrics meaning is a resource that they always use.

Table 2.

Results of the use of listening resources by students.

Items:	Mean
I listen to some recordings from the course textbook.	3.11
I listen to some recordings in computer from supplementary books.	2.98
I listen to songs with a focus on their lyrics meaning.	4.17

I listen to authentic recordings of native speakers (from YouTube).	3.98
I listen to authentic recordings (podcasts) of native speakers (from Spotify).	3.45
I listen to authentic recordings of native speakers (from podcasts, series, movies).	3.81
I listen to a recording while I read the transcript of the audio from DVD/video.	3.74

To understand the survey's answers in Table 3 (below), the specific codes have been written to check how students responded to each item related to activities used when the participants listen to some audios, recordings, or interactions in English:

- 1.- Never
- 2.- Hardly ever.
- 3.- Sometimes
- 4.- Often.
- 5.- Always.

Research question # 3. What type of activities have students used to improve listening comprehension? with a mean of (2.6), results confirm that the participants record their voice with different activities during classes, this is an activity that they hardly ever do in classes. Also, a mean obtained with (3.5) showed that students talk to their classmates and compare answers to check the listening comprehension activity, this is an activity that they sometimes do in the classroom. Finally, students fill in blanks with information after listening to an audio with a mean of (3,60). This means that the teachers often do this activity with their students.

Table 3.

Results of activities that students use to improve their listening

Item:	Mean
I fill in blanks with information after listening to an audio.	3.60
I talk to my classmate and compare answers to check the listening comprehension activity.	3.51
I record my voice with different activities during classes.	2.60
My teacher provides us with the transcripts of the listening activities we listen to something in classes.	2.92
My teacher requests us to orally summarize information whenever we have any listening activity.	3.11

Table 4.

Perspectives Survey: Open-Ended Questions

Question	Answers	Total
What ways do you think you learn to develop your listening skill the best?	Listening to music with podcast, spotify and YouTube	22
	Watching tv series, tv shows, and movies you like most	15
	Talking with english speakers	10
	Playing videogames	6
	Total	53
What sort of resources (e.g. technological, native speakers, recordings, radio programs, etc.) do you use to learn to develop your listening skill?	YouTube, podcast and spotify	22
	Technological resources	11
	Netflix: cartoon series	6
	Video games	4
	Native speakers	4
	Apps: Duolingo	2
	Radio programs	2
	Audiobooks	2

	Total	53
	Repeat a recording a certain number of times	17
What sort of strategies (e.g. listening for gist, do not translate things into L1, repeat a recording a certain number of times, etc.) do you use to learn to develop your listening skill or any other you use?	Do not translate things into L1	11
	Listening for gist	10
	Subtitles in videogames	7
	Devices in english	4
	Talk to native speakers	3
	Use of flashcard	1
	Total	53

Students expressed their opinions and perspectives in their answers, and despite having some difficulties, they continue with their practice for improving their English listening competencies.

Discussion

The current descriptive study is an attempt to know listening comprehension in EFL learners. As a general view, results have displayed that students developed their English listening skills with significant improvements. Results showed that students have been working hard during class to improve their listening in English.

Question 1: *What is the most difficult part when listening to a recording?* Results demonstrated that students understand better when they listen to some topics that they have some prior information, but it is difficult to understand when they listen to

speakers who use British accent. Spratt et al. (2011) affirmed that listening skills could be the most difficult for some students, even more if their learning style is not auditory. Students most of the time understand better when they listen to some topics that they are interested in. That's one of the reasons which cannot understand a recording completely at first listening.

Question 2: What resources do students use when listening for comprehension? Results displayed that learners listen to songs with a focus on their lyrics meaning and began to use different apps to listen to some audios and interpret meanings, dialogues, and speeches. Graham and Santos (2015) indicated that in order to become effective listeners, learners must do a lot of listening. Some students indicated that they listen to authentic recordings (podcasts) of native speakers (from Spotify). From this perspective, one method that can both embrace mobile technology, and combine flexible and extensive learning is the implementation of podcasting and vodcasting technology (Gonulal, 2020). Therefore, it is important to obtain real input, so learners practice listening to songs, radio channels, or watching any video in the target language.

Question 3: What type of activities have students used to improve listening comprehension? According to Chu (2017), teachers should provide self-access learning materials, e.g., listening to films and dramas, TV programs, podcasts, vodcasting, radio news, and online interviews, among others in preference to students. Results demonstrate that learners practice with activities that the teacher provides in class such as: fill in blanks with information after listening to an audio, talk to their classmate and compare answers to check the listening comprehension activity and orally summarize information with any listening activity. On the other hand, responsive listening in which the listener's response is the goal of the activity, and finally

autonomous listening refers to independent listening, without the direct guidance of an instructor (Rost, 2014). Many learners in some cases, feel disappointment doing autonomous activities because they have spent a lot of time studying English, but their learning skills are not so good. Frustration, anxiety, and boredom appear on the learning stage.

Conclusions

The listening troubles found in the study let the researcher know that even though students try to understand different accents it is difficult for them, some experts are aware of that listening a different accent could be the most difficult part when they listen to. In addition, learners often do not know how to interpret audio and speeches, and their listening skills are feeble despite studying for more than ten years. Consequently, being exposed to interaction with distinct English speakers is one of the indispensable elements that students need to develop to reach their listening goals.

Additionally, results demonstrated that students listen to authentic recordings, podcasts, and Spotify as resources to improve by themselves their listening comprehension; they prefer to listen to topics related with something that they already know because it is easier to understand. Nevertheless, students must be exposed to different interactions inside and outside the classroom to develop listening skills for learning.

On the other hand, teachers provide students with different activities to improve their listening skills such as: fill in blanks with information after listening to an audio, talk to their classmate and compare answers to check the listening comprehension activity and orally summarize information with any listening activity. Finally, it is required to have practical and real listening training in classes.

Limitations

The main limitation to accomplishing this study has been the virtuality. Students had their time limit in the university and did not have time to connect for the virtual session to explain the study research better; this made it difficult for the researcher to describe how to fulfill the survey. Lack of internet access for students who lived in rural areas was another difficulty that the researcher had to face up. Although, some students appreciated working in-class time applying some technological tools and strategies.

Recommendations

For future research, it could be suitable to take the survey in the classroom to explain to the students how to fulfill it. It would be easier for the participants and the researcher. For instance: if students do not understand one item, immediately they will have an explanation. Moreover, the researcher could collect the data faster without waiting days until the participants could do the survey. Therefore, if future surveys will be taken in the classroom, the researcher should provide internet access for students that could not have it at that moment or in case the wi-fi signal connection of the university is weak. Finally, supporting these ideas will save the researcher and participants time and will help to carry out better research without difficulties.

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Appendix A

Letter for the Institution

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Listening Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Consent Letter from the University

Available upon request.

