

Perspectives Of Elf Students Towards the Listening Skill

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to describe EFL students' difficulties in listening skills in a public high school in Ambato, Ecuador. The sample involved 52 participants who are in the second year of baccalaureate with a majority of A1 English level learners. The instrument for collecting data was a survey that answered a Likert-type scale applied to know their current academic situation and their difficulties in listening. Results showed the listening difficulties and displayed that students could improve their language competencies from their perspectives. Moreover, students answered questions where findings showed that learners worked consciously about listening activities development. Finally, students' perspectives presented in the survey determined their second language acquisition and development difficulties. Outcomes have demonstrated that research is significant for EFL teachers, investigators, and students. Thus, this investigation is beneficial for subsequent innovations to apply it in lesson plans and improve their listening competencies' English language practice.

Keywords: *Listening skills; EFL; difficulties; listening development.*

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Perspectivas de los Estudiantes de Efl Hacia la Habilidad de Escuchar

RESUMEN

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo describir las dificultades de los estudiantes de EFL en habilidades auditivas en una escuela secundaria pública en Ambato, Ecuador. La muestra involucró a 52 participantes que se encuentran en el segundo año de bachillerato con una mayoría de estudiantes de nivel A1 de inglés. El instrumento de recolección de datos fue a través de una encuesta que utilizó una escala tipo Likert, aplicada para conocer su situación académica actual y sus dificultades para escuchar. Los resultados mostraron las dificultades auditivas y revelaron que los estudiantes podían mejorar sus competencias lingüísticas desde sus perspectivas. Además, los estudiantes respondieron preguntas donde los hallazgos mostraron que trabajaron conscientemente sobre el desarrollo de actividades auditivas. Finalmente, las perspectivas presentadas por los estudiantes en la encuesta, determinaron sus dificultades de desarrollo y adquisición de un segundo idioma. Los resultados han demostrado que la investigación es importante para los profesores, investigadores y estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Por lo tanto, esta investigación es beneficiosa para las innovaciones posteriores, para aplicarla en los planes de lecciones y mejorar la práctica del idioma inglés en sus competencias auditivas.

***Palabras clave:** habilidades de audio; inglés como lengua extranjera; dificultades; desarrollo auditivo.*

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INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most popular and spoken languages globally, which has been used effectively in many developing countries as the lingua franca for communication in different fields of life. Thierry (2018) expressed that English is currently the most spoken language worldwide. It is spoken in one hundred one countries, ahead of Arabic, which is spoken in sixty countries, French in fifty-one, and finally Spanish in thirty-one countries, as stated by Crystal (2003). Thus, developing skills in this language is a current demand for those who are not native English speakers (Ministerio de Educación, 2016a).

Consequently, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers has focused their attention on the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) integrated development (Qutob & Madini, 2020). However, some skills have received more attention than others in the English teaching-learning process. This inequality avoids a similar improvement of the other skills. Despite the remarkable evolution and importance of significant meetings and events to improve the second language, one of the neglected skills for years has been listening comprehension (Çakır, 2018). Thus, there is a requirement for educators and researchers to discover new ways in which this skill can be taught in foreign language sessions.

Nevertheless, its low development and lack of functional acquisition have made this skill challenging for students and teachers to get an adequate level of proficiency. Different types of processing should be integrated. The teaching of listening comprehension provides students with opportunities to pay closer attention to the perspectives they hear rather than focusing on the language structure, such as grammar and its characteristics (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012 as cited in Diora & Rosa, 2020). It is possible to identify students' main problems when facilitators speak and learners try to understand the language. It is undoubtedly a good way to improve the listening skills.

Listening as a foreign language is a significant part of English. Other skills like writing, reading, and speaking are also required in second language acquisition. Nevertheless, listening is the most commonly used skill in everyday life. Besides this, Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) mentioned that listening skill plays a significant role in daily communication in the EFL educational process.

Learning listening will allow learners to improve significantly the ability to communicate with different people around each other (Wulandari, 2011). The author stated that it is beneficial to interact with diverse people to develop listening skills.

Students need to regularly and consistently hear different accents and sounds that they cannot remember without hearing those voices often. Hien (2015, as cited in Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016a) stated that listening as foreign language learning is crucial since it presents the language input. Therefore, as an input skill, listening plays a vital role in students' language development. Furthermore, listening has the potential to develop students' pronunciation, word stress, and syntax acquisitions. However, listening could be challenging for students to acquire, so it is necessary to understand how different authors apply strategies in their classes to develop this vital skill.

Some studies have been conducted about listening comprehension difficulties. For instance, in his research, Siegel (2014) helped to understand perceptions of listening strategies instruction held in a Japanese private university. This study involved listening background, listening strategy instruction, and the roles of different aspects of the classroom context. After applying the method that included questionnaires and interviews, the study suggested that learners see the listening instruction positively. Furthermore, the study also reported that students improved their abilities in listening as a result of the classes, but their confidence still needed to be trained to improve.

In their research, Dora and Rosa (2020) found out the difficulties students face in listening comprehension at the English Language and Literature Department in the Faculty of Languages and Arts State University of Padang. This study implemented a descriptive qualitative research method, where thirty-two students were the participants. Some questionnaires and interviews were applied to collect the data. First, the questionnaire was shared with all members of the class. After that, six students were chosen to be interviewed. Results showed that the difficulties were related into three categories: the listening material, the listener, and the physical setting.

Besides, the research, Dora and Rosa (2020) found that the factors that cause students' difficulties in listening comprehension depended on others. Some of these were the shame of asking the lecturer about the material and emotional disturbances. Additionally, results displayed that the

lecturer explains the material too quickly. Finally, there is also a lack of reward after the activities, and the reinforcement is unfocused.

Pico (2020) implemented a descriptive methodology that applied a quasi-experimental method to determine students' behavior, reporting significant items of listening skills in the Ecuadorian context. A group of fifty-six tenth graders was assessed with a pretest and a posttest to determine the strategy's effectiveness. The research determined that the Discovery strategy positively influenced the students' listening ability. Furthermore, various aspects were evident after its implementation, such as recognizing word sounds, phrases, or short stories and making inferences when new terms were applied.

In the public institution where the descriptive study was applied, there were some issues in the teaching-learning process for the correct development of the listening skills to teach students. There were some assumptions that teachers immersed in the English area mentioned; these were some possible troubles detected in different courses as the lack of teachers training, lack of knowledge to develop interesting and valuable activities, or the lack of motivation and low proficiency in understanding. However, with this descriptive study implementation, the researcher hopes to determine the problematic learning situation that has been currently assumed.

OBJECTIVES

General Objective

Explore and analyze the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in relation to the listening skill in language learning, aiming to gain insights into their challenges, preferences, and potential strategies for enhancing their listening proficiency.

Specific Objectives

Identify the specific challenges that EFL students encounter when developing their listening skills, including factors such as accent variations, rapid speech, vocabulary complexity, and background noise.

Explore the various strategies and methods EFL students find most effective in enhancing their listening proficiency, considering preferences for multimedia resources, interactive activities, real-life context simulations, and technology-based tools.

Examine the motivational factors that influence EFL students' engagement with and commitment to improving their listening skills, encompassing intrinsic motivation, perceived relevance, future language use scenarios, and the impact of successful comprehension on overall language proficiency.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The descriptive study is one of the best options for answering the questions related to the difficulties concerning the listening skills. According to Nassaji (2015), the descriptive research goal describes a phenomenon and its characteristics in a specific context. This type of research is more concerned with what, where, when, and how something has happened within a particular part of society. Consequently, it was chosen to develop an action research to find the issues related to students' listening in EFL difficulties.

Research questions:

To what extent do students understand the recordings?

Do they use listening strategies?

What listening activities they prefer?

Participants

The students who participated in this research were fifty-two learners who are currently in second-year of baccalaureate. They were students from a public high school in Ambato. The participants were: twenty-one females, and thirty-one males whose ages ranged from 15 to 17, (15 = 15, 16 = 34, and 17 = 3). All of them are Ecuadorian and speak Spanish at home as their first language. Additionally, all the students considered themselves as "mestizo." Their economic status ranged from the middle incomes to the high class status. All the participants have internet connection in their houses with their own Wi-Fi.

Instruments

The instrument applied in the study was a survey questionnaire. The survey was based on specific questions to get students' opinion on listening English. It had a Likert scale format. Students had to mark from totally agree to totally disagree. Additionally, the survey was prepared in a Google Forms format and sent to the participants via email, and WhatsApp, but, it was fulfilled in virtual

sessions. The survey included a demographic and some listening items to answer the three research questions.

Data Analysis

First, the data was uploaded in an excel sheet to present the results. Every table shows the means obtained. 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

An action research is a good option for teacher researchers, for students, for the school administrative department, and other stakeholders in the teaching and learning environment to consider the implementation of a study (Mills, 2011). 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 school 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.

Another fundamental component in any transaction data processing system is the security of the codes and elements included in the study. Security is a robust requirement in all computing systems (Gonzalez et al., 2012). The information of the participants was protected all the time. Their personal information was replaced by specific codes that represented the needed information. As students were minors, the researcher also sent a parents' consent letter (Appendix D) to ask them for the permission to let their children participate in the study. Parents gave their permission and accepted their children to be part of the study. Then the study began. Since the beginning, students had the opportunity to see a reminder of their voluntary participation in the survey fulfillment.

RESULTS

The data collected through the survey to answer the research questions are shown in this section.

The research questions were: To what extent do students understand the recordings? Do they use listening strategies? And, what are their perspectives towards listening? The researcher found that 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 when the participants listen to some audios, recordings or interactions in English:

- 1.- To a great extent.
- 2.- A lot.
- 3.- Some.
- 4.- A little bit, and
- 5.- None.

Research question # 1. According to the more significant results, the majority of students can understand when they interact with the teacher, and the mean obtained was 2.23, which means that learners interact with the teacher and understand a lot what they listen to. Students also understand when interact with a partner, obtaining a mean of 2.56. Results also demonstrate that students know when the listening is a sentence or a question. The mean obtained is 2.58. Finally, results show that students understand some parts of the listening when interact with native speakers, with a mean obtained of 3.79. For a better understanding of the results, all the items are presented in the table below:

Table 1.

Results of the different aspects of the listening identification

Items:	Frequency	Mean
Did you identify the topic of the recording?	52	2.85
Did you get the main idea?	52	3.04
I can understand a long, complex audio	52	3.06

I understand single phrases at a time.	52	2.60
I understand a long audio to the first time.	52	3.33
I have to repeat the audio many times to understand it.	52	3.35
When I listened to the audios, I translate all the words.	52	2.87
Feel confused for not understanding what I have listened.	52	2.75
I don't understand what the other person says.	52	2.98
I know when it is a question or a sentence.	52	2.58
I can identify the empathized word(s) in the audio.	52	2.94
I understand when I interact with the teacher	52	2.23
I understand when I interact with a partner	52	2.56
I understand when I interact with Native speakers	52	3.79

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 when the participants listen to some audios, recordings or interactions in English:

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

Research question # 2. The most significant outcomes in the Table 2 demonstrate that listen to some songs is sometimes helpful for students to improve their listening skills, with a mean of 3.90. Outcomes display that students sometimes listen to some songs to understand the English language better. The mean obtained has been 3.46. With a mean of 3.23, results confirm that students listen to themselves to correct their mistakes. Findings show that learners frequently interchange the activities through the WhatsApp groups during the class with a mean of 2.48. Results also demonstrate that students frequently create new stories implementing content they

have previously listened to with a mean of 2.40. Finally, with a mean of 2.33, it is demonstrated that student frequently listen to podcasts during the class. For a better understanding of the results, all the items are presented in the table below:

Table 2.

Results of the use of listening strategies by students.

Items:	Frequency	Mean
I listen to some songs to understand the English language better.	52	3.46
Listen to some songs is helpful to improve the listening skills.	52	3.90
I listen to some stories in English during the class.	52	2.96
I develop the listening book activities during the class.	52	3.10
I watch videos during the class to improve the listening skills.	52	3.21
I Listen to myself to correct some mistakes.	52	3.23
Listen to my partners' recordings.	52	2.62
Listen to podcasts during the class.	52	2.33
I listen to my partner speaking in English and I can understand him/her.	52	3.02
I fulfill blank spaces after listening an audio.	52	3.04
I complete the activities correctly after listening to audios only once.	52	3.65
Interact with a partner to check the listening comprehension.	52	2.79
Practice interactive activities inside the classroom.	52	3.04
Practice interactive activities through virtual sessions.	52	2.90
Interchange audio activities through WhatsApp groups during the class.	52	2.48
I transcript the activities that I have previously listened to.	52	3.04
I make summaries of what I have listened before.	52	2.62
I create new stories implementing what I have previously listened to.	52	2.40

Research question # 3. In this stage, the results demonstrate the most significant aspects of the students' preferences related to their listening activities. Describing their English background, it is summarized what students said in the following text:

Some students have been studying English during ten years and they still do not manage their second language. Their main learning issue is trying to understand what they listen to because they, in a lot of cases, do not understand what other person say. They also mentioned that the big quantities of classes that are not so meaningful to learn. Lack of concentration and mispronunciation are sometimes the main constraints to learn the second language. Some students mentioned that adapting to a new methodology for learning a second language, at the beginning can be a little frustrating and even disgusting when the learner does not understand what the other person tries to say to him/her.

The lack of vocabulary knowledge to practice good listening is essential for developing an efficient understanding of audio or videos. Even though, according to students' words, the listening scaffolding can be created by listening some short phrases to finally generate a comprehensible audio for learners. One student said that "a meaningful practice will develop meaningful results."

Some difficulties that students have found in the audio were related to the vocabulary accent: There were some accents in the audio that hindered my understanding. A few of students also mentioned that they did not understand the majority of phrases. The speakers spoke so fast, and it was very difficult for them to understand the audio. Some students said that it was impossible for them to translate the words without seeing them. However, when speakers pronounce slowly, it is easier to understand it. One student said "I understood a great part of the audio when the audio is slower."

The second open question in the survey was: What kind of activities would students like to do for improving their listening comprehension in English? Some students mentioned that practicing with different people through interactive platforms to increase the learning skills. Some student said that: "I like to listen to some songs in English to improve my listening skills." It is necessary

to write some dictations to internalize the listening to become it a routine. Finally, it is required to be exposed to listen to the second language.

Students expressed their opinions and perspectives in their answers. Despite having some difficulties in their listening, they continued practicing to improve their English competencies and being more participative in classes.

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 the innovation developed in class time to improve their listening in English.

Question 1: To what extent do students understand the recordings? Students can understand the audios according to the quantity of practice and exposure that they have to the second language. Results demonstrated that students have better understanding when they interact with the teacher in classrooms. However, when the interaction takes place outside with native speakers, the comprehension decreases. Schwartz (2004) expressed that students might receive as much as 90% of their information through listening to facilitators. This could be the reason why students understand their teachers and partners better in classes. Additionally, Dhanapala (2019) mentioned the insufficient effectiveness of a good listening skill could be originated because listening could be acquired by exposure to the language rather than taught in a class.

Findings demonstrated that most students could understand single phrases at a time, and a few of them could understand complex audio or long audios at the first time. In most cases, learners construct words and phrases with individual sounds, and it is used pitch changes, intonation, and stress to convey different meanings (Harmer, 2007). However, it is required to repeat the audio many times because students feel confused for not understanding what they have previously listened to. The Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación, 2016b) said that a learner must want to listen. If not, the listener can miss important information (Munayer, 2020).

Students most of the time can recognize the recording or audio topics, and they can get the main idea in a lower frequency. Regarding to interpreting a message, learners naturally make sense of

that message in terms of their own experience (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2020). Learners most of the times translate the words because the lack of comprehension during the interaction between peers. Fortunately, they identify when the audio expresses a sentence or a question. Learners integrate what they have understood and internally comment upon it (Wren & Wren, 2009).

Question 2: Do students use listening strategies? Hamouda (2012) mentioned that listening provides the learner with the required input, and learners cannot acquire anything without comprehending the specific information. Results demonstrated that the majority of learners listen to partners' recordings and listen to some stories in-class time. This is why it is important to obtain real input, so learners practice listening to songs, radio channels, or watching any video in the target language. Some improve when they listen to when they watch movies. Even though it is not easy to make students feel engaged with the activities (Andrade, 2006). This is why activities need to be meaningful for learners. This will enhance students to listen to the audios again to correct their mistakes.

Students mentioned that at the beginning of the survey, they heard the information but without meaningful results. Hearing does not require any effort at all; and listening is a conscious choice that demands the listener's attention and concentration (Hellesvig-Gaskell, 2018). Students mentioned that can create stories applying what they have previously listened to. Field (2008) mentioned that it is complex to teach listening expressions separate from a context, listening passages can draw students' attention to those features during the post-listening part. Moreover, Richards (2006) expressed that when students work in real contexts, they can develop their listening skills using the practice more than just theories or simple ideas. Learners began to use different apps to listen to some audios and interpret meanings, dialogues and speeches and Richards (2006) mentioned that CLT implies applying new roles for students and for facilitators.

Question 3: What listening activities they prefer? Results displayed that learners prefer working with partners through interactive platforms. Students mentioned they like writing some dictations to internalize the sounds that they listen to and collocate images to those sounds. The CLT has a communicative purpose where learners are required to use the information they hear in the learning activities (Ma, 2009). Some students still struggle with the listening activities

development. For this reason, many learners in some cases, feel disappointment because they have spent a lot of time studying English, but their learning skills are not so good, and frustration, anxiety, and boredom appear on the learning stage. An effective learning is developed when facilitators show appropriate materials to enhance students in a new stage of learning, as mentioned in Kamp (2011).

Good teaching and understanding of the listening skills help to understand symbols learners have seen and heard; students must analyze the meaning of the perceived stimuli, words, sounds like applause, among others (Tyagi, 2013). Communicating with people vary from individual to individual and depends on history and world knowledge. Brain functions like decoding, editing, and retrieving incoming information could vary concerning the learner (Lian & Pineda, 2014).

CONCLUSIONS

Results found during and after the innovation demonstrated that most learners understand the majority of the audios and speeches. Nevertheless, some listening difficulties encountered in the study let the researcher know that some learning complications can be improved based on the fundamental interaction and exposition to the foreign language. There are some students who still struggle with the listening skill development. These students need to be exposed to different kinds of interactions inside and outside the classroom. Being exposed to the interaction with distinct English speakers is one of the essential elements that students need to develop to reach their listening goals.

It is required to have practical and real listening training in classes. Interactive activities are very recommendable to develop the listening skills for listening skill learning and development. Learners, in many cases, do not know how to interpret audios and speeches that are not too relevant for them. This situation makes the students' interest and attention for learning to decrease. It is important to mention that some students said that “quality of context in classes is more meaningful than quantity.” Listening is one of the most challenging skill to develop. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that all learners can acquire this skill with effective activities based on communicative competencies, practice and enough interaction.

To conclude, it has been mentioned by students that understand the survey was harder at the beginning, and they recognized that it is necessary to improve in their competencies. Students have experienced some challenges that will be achieved through a conscious practice.

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