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**Student's perceptions on their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL
classrooms: An Ecuadorian case**

TRABAJO DE TITULACION

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Magister.

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Loja, diciembre de 2016

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate my work to my lovely husband Toyo, who was very patient and supportive when I had to stay long hours studying and doing my research; to my family, who always encouraged me to continue; my friends Vero and Vanesa, who motivated me in my teaching practice process.

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ABSTRACT

Listening is a macro important skill when learning English as a foreign language. For its complexity, it needs to be learned in class. The present study attempts to consider the students' perceptions on their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classrooms in Ecuador. It tries to answer the questions about the listening problems students have in a group of second high school in two all-male institutions in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador during the academic year 2015 – 2016.

The information was obtained from a sample of one hundred twenty five students from five different courses. They were surveyed through questionnaires and fifteen interview sheets that were applied to three students per class chosen randomly within the sample. The age of the participants ranged from 16 to 17 years old. The methods employed in the investigation were qualitative and quantitative.

The results analyzed indicate that the majority of the students know English and do not have listening comprehension difficulties. However, a few problems related to the speaker and listening passages were found.

KEY WORDS: Listening, students' difficulties, authentic tasks, teaching methods.

RESUMEN

Escuchar es una macro destreza muy importante cuando se aprende inglés. Por su complejidad se la debe enseñar en clase. Por consiguiente algunos estudios han sido investigados sobre este tema. El presente estudio intenta considerar las percepciones que los estudiantes tienen en cuanto a las dificultades al escuchar comprensivamente en las clases de inglés: un ejemplo ecuatoriano. El estudio trata de responder las preguntas acerca de los problemas de escuchar que tienen los estudiantes de un grupo de segundo de bachillerato de dos colegios masculinos de la ciudad de Cuenca – Ecuador durante el año escolar 2015 – 2016.

La información fue obtenida de una muestra de ciento veinte y cinco alumnos de cinco diferentes cursos, ellos fueron entrevistados a través de cuestionarios, y 15 entrevistas fueron aplicadas a 3 estudiantes por grado escogidos al azar dentro de la muestra. La edad de los participantes varió entre 16 y 17 años de edad. Los métodos utilizados en la investigación fueron el cuantitativo y cualitativo.

Los resultados analizados indican que la mayoría de los estudiantes saben inglés y no tienen dificultades en escuchar comprensivamente. Sin embargo, problemas relacionados con el hablante y el texto fueron encontrados.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Escuchar, dificultades de los estudiantes, tareas auténticas, métodos de enseñanza.

INTRODUCTION

Listening is a complex skill to achieve when learning English. It is not learned in a linear sequence preceding the other skills (speaking, reading and writing) to accomplish language development (Rost and Candlin, 2014). The improvement of listening comprehension in class has an important role in verbal communication because it allows students to understand what others express. People assume it is almost the same as hearing. In spite of that, listening is more than hearing because people can hear what others say without actually listening. (Wolvin, Berko and Wolvin; 1999).

Bolton (2011) refers to listening as a difficult psychological process that involves, interprets and understands the meaning of the sensory experience. Furthermore, Burley-Allen (1995, p.3) states that listening is “the channel used most often for learning.” Therefore, listening is a skill that needs to be taught through an active process. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) point out that teachers do not have enough strategies to teach listening in a way to improve students’ comprehension.

Although, listening is not an easy skill to develop, this study aims to research the students’ listening comprehension difficulties in the EFL classroom by answering the following questions: 1.How do the listener factors affect their listening comprehension? 2. Do the speaker factors interfere on the learners’ listening skills? 3. How does the listening passage hinder the student’s listening comprehension?

In order to understand more about this topic, a few studies have been carried out to determine listening difficulties. For instance, a research performed by Hamouda (2013) who investigated how English college students face listening difficulties due to the lack of teaching methods. Moreover, students need to be aware of the facts that influence those difficulties to develop strategies aimed to achieve success. The purpose of this research was to find some strategies and techniques for teachers and students that could be used in class to improve their

proficiency in listening comprehension. The researcher came to the conclusion that listening is a neglected and weak skill among students, causing different kinds of listening problems.

On the other hand, Muniandy (2012) conducted an investigation about applying a constructive learning theory in teaching concerning to the three parts of listening: pre-listening, while listening and post listening. The aim in the pre-listening was to introduce background knowledge about a particular topic. In the while listening part, the teacher gave the students a reason for listening by creating interest on the subject. The post-listening was to ensure the students had understood the particular topic. The results revealed that teaching listening skills through the constructive learning theory helped the students to overcome listening barriers because it activated the students' prior knowledge to achieve success.

Moreover, Ismaili (2013) carried out an investigation about the usage of movies in class as an effective strategy to develop listening skills. The purpose of the study was to prove that by watching movies the students would get more engaged with the activities. The data revealed that through the usage of movies, students improved their communication and brought more opportunities to use English in class.

Concerning the present study, the results can be used as a reference for teachers to have a deep knowledge about the listening difficulties students have and their reasons. . Certainly, they could take actions either using or changing the strategies and methods investigated to help the students overcome such difficulties. In addition, it will help the educational institutions, coordinators, and English teachers to learn how to improve the listening skills in EFL classes, for example, creating authentic material, planning meaningful activities, improving teaching techniques and so forth.

METHOD

Setting and Participants

This study about “Student’s perceptions on their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classrooms: An Ecuadorian case” was applied in two private High Schools in the city of Cuenca, during the academic year 2015-2016. The participants were one hundred twenty five male students chosen at random, twenty-five for each class in five different parallels from second grade of senior high school. Their ages range went from 16 to 17 years old. At the beginning of the research, the students were asked to answer a questionnaire about their difficulties in listening comprehension in English class; those questions were related to the listener, speaker and listening passage. At the end of the class, an interview sheet was given to three students within each group selected randomly. The teacher in charge was the same in the four surveyed groups in the first High School, and in the other one, the inspector selected a teacher at that moment. There were a few teachers involved in the process who were requested to answer a questionnaire as well.

Procedures

The literature gathered for this research has fundamental theories from different sources related to the topic “Listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classes: An Ecuadorian case”. In addition, the most important information has been incorporated not only in the Literature Review, but also in the six studies related to the topic.

The methods used in this research were qualitative and quantitative. Moreover, the instruments were three types of data collection: Questionnaires for the one hundred twenty five students, an interview sheet to three students in each group and questionnaires to five English teachers, who at least one of which gave class to the surveyed groups. This investigation was primarily concerned to find out the central reasons the students have

difficulty to develop their listening comprehension skills in class. For this reason, the quantitative method was mainly employed to collect data about the difficulties students have. The information was gathered through questionnaires with eighteen statements handed out to teachers and students respectively. On the other hand, the qualitative method was used in less amount to give support to the difficulties some students perhaps have concerning to their listening skills.

The eighteen statements in the students' questionnaires were divided in three parts, nine items related to the listener, four to the speaker, and five to the listening passage respectively. As the students might not understand the questions in English, the information of the survey was rather in Spanish to avoid mistakes. At the beginning of the class, the students were explained how to fill in the information and to choose only one frequency in each response. Therefore, in case they needed to ask further questions, they were allowed to do it discretely as long as they remained calm and quiet.

A wide and long spreadsheet table was used to input the responses and its frequency for each questionnaire carefully to score the results. The procedure was long and needed a lot of concentration and revision to validate the outcomes, avoiding any mistake. After the tabulation process was completed, the results were displayed in three tables. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the results were conducted as follows.

First, the higher percentage in each statement concerning the listener, speaker and listening passage was to be highlighted individually according to its frequency and parameter; and then the outcome was associated as the main reason students have difficulty or not in order to achieve their listening comprehension skills. Next, this data was contrasted with the teachers' information and students' interview to give support to the results. Afterwards, the findings needed scientific information from authors and studies related to the topic to

reinforce the research. Finally, the highest score among all the factors related to the listener, speaker and listening passage respectively have to be analyzed, explaining their incidence with the students' difficulties in listening comprehension.

DISCUSSION

Literature Review

Listening is an important macro skill when learning English as a second language. Vandergrif and Goh (2012) state that, as an important skill, it does not receive enough attention from teachers. This fact is because the educators do not have a clear understanding of the listening process. Furthermore, the authors mentioned above claim that the strategies needed in class to achieve success in listening cannot be used because of the lack of knowledge among teachers. Nation and Newton (2009) argue that the proficiency students will achieve in English as a foreign language will depend on listening. Therefore, the more they hear the better they will understand English.

This study attempts to show the process students have to go through to develop their listening skills and improve their learning. This work will consider the following aspects:

- Listening comprehension
- Elements of listening comprehension, the listener, the speaker, and the listening passage
- Listening difficulties for EFL learners (Listening Problems / causes)
- Strategies and activities to develop listening comprehension skill

Finally, a short review about some researches related to the topic will be presented.

Listening Comprehension

Listening plays an important role in communication, it takes an amount of 40 to 50% of the total interaction (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011). Carter and Bishop (2006, p. 120) state that “Listening is a process involving perception, interpretation, evaluation and response to verbal messages.” Therefore, for many years, this skill did not have enough importance

concerning to language teaching (Nunan, 2002). For instance, this author compares listening as a Cinderella skill, because, it has been overlooked by the elder sister speaking, and ignored its magnitude in the learning process. In contrast, other authors support that when it comes to learning English as a foreign language, listening is the precursor to speaking (Nation and Newton, 2009). Indeed, Brown (2010, p. 160) makes a request about “How could one speak a language without also listening?”

Learners need listening comprehension skills to learn a language. Rizvi (2005, p. 70) explains that, “listening comprehension is the act of understanding an oral message,” but in fact, why listening? Hence, “listening is the way of learning the language” (Nation and Newton, 2009, p.38). It provides information to the learner about how to build up enough knowledge to learn how to use the language. There are some ways to help students to develop their listening comprehension abilities. For example, learners need real-life listening situations to find out the basic ideas they need to be able to understand in any specific circumstances (Ur, 1999). In addition, students need to practice listening with some audio-visual material, which is another way to develop their listening comprehension (Shaobo, 2013). Alternatively, Rizvi (2005) affirms that students also need intelligent listening skills to participate actively in situations where there are group discussions, interviews, etc. However, as it is a complex process, students must learn how to perceive and interpret sounds correctly to understand the meaning of the message. “These skills include scanning, predictions, speed decoding, comprehending, and oral discourse analysis” (Rizvi, 2005, p. 70).

Brown (1990), as well as Nation and Newton (2009) agree that in the past listening was taken for granted. In fact, learners only needed instruction in how to read and write, but not in listening and speaking because it was assumed that those skills could be developed through exposure but not really taught. Furthermore, listening comprehension gained

emphasis when Krashen (1982) shared some ideas about the comprehensible input, which means, when a learner is exposed to the language that is understandable. Above all, this skill is fundamental in the classroom because provides input for the students. Nunan (2002, p. 239) points out that “without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin. Listening is thus fundamental to speaking.”

Indeed, learners need to have a reason for listening. Teachers should encourage students to achieve their listening tasks using an approach that works for that specific purpose. For example, after a listening activity, they could get engaged in an assignment, such as filling the gap with the information they have listened. Therefore, learners would concentrate more in the tasks by having a specific purpose (Shaobo, 2013). Furthermore, students in class would become comprehensive learners who listen to lectures, conferences, television, documentaries, etc., in order to understand the information offered.

Elements of listening comprehension: the listener, the speaker and the listening passage

According to Gento and Hernández (2012), communication is a complex process. O'Malley, Kupper and Chamot (1989) state that listening comprehension is an active process where the listener and speaker share meaningful information to mutually understand. Mueller (1980) argues that the listening passage helps students to enhance comprehension in class. Furthermore, Watson (2014) explains that for human communication to exist, there must be a transmitter or speaker, a receiver or listener, and a message. Speakers and listeners should take responsibility over the 51% of the success of communication and that the message should be received clearly. Therefore, the author suggests the importance of knowing exactly where the breakdowns in listening are probably to happen. Carter and Bishop (2006, p. 120) argue that “listening is a four-phase process that occurs instantly and are built together: perception, interpretation, evaluation and reaction.” On the contrary, Watson (2014) mentions the fourth

aspect as responding instead of reaction. These authors have come up with a model called The Pier listening model, which means: perception, interpretation, evaluation and reaction.

During the perception phase, the ears pick up the sound that goes to the brain; in the interpretation phase, the listener gives meaning to the message; the evaluation phase is when the listener decides to agree or disagree with the information and the final phase reaction/responding, is when the feedback is achieved.

This model helps to diagnose when a breakdown in a communication occurs to find out where exactly the listening error took place. In fact, this model helps to improve the listening skills by increasing the perception phase, and to become a better listener by maximizing the stages of interpretation and evaluation.

Moreover, Gento and Hernandez (2012) point out that the processes of communication are internal and external. The internal processes are cognitive and neurophysiological. That means the speaker expresses and conveys a message by using a linguistic code, when simultaneously the message is produced according to syntactic, semantic and phonological languages rules, then the transmitter encodes the message. On the other hand, the listener has to decipher and understand the message. He/she has to decode and know the linguistic code for the speaker under the same language rules. The external processes deal with environment, socio-cultural, linguistic environment and communicative mode; internal and external feedback, imitative stimulation.

In addition, Rost (2011, p. 95) states “In early communication theory, listening is viewed as a part of a transactional process – a kind of conduit – in which all participants are simultaneously sending and receiving messages.” In other words, the view of listening and speaking is as a co-construction process, where there is a transaction between the listener and the speaker because the listener speaks through non-verbal responses constantly, and as well

as verbal responses periodically. Meanwhile, the speaker listens to this non-verbal and verbal message. They have to adapt each other to communicative behavior, attitudes, and affective state (Beall, 2009). In fact, establishing interactive connection between the listener and the speaker, reaching mutual comprehension and developing a relationship between each other is rather more important than the comprehension of the message itself.

With regard to collaborative listening in class, Rost (2011) mentions that the primary purpose of listening is not to comprehend messages but to establish an interactive connection with one's interlocutor, find common grounds, and mutually moving toward goals.

Moreover, the goal of listening and learning a second language is also to promote active listeners (Patridge and Starfield, 2013). These active listeners understand the need of more information depending on the input. According to Goh (2005) to listen actively, the learners need to have an available source of knowledge, use listening skills for interaction, and regulate their own comprehension. Furthermore, during an active listening, the interaction with others is not necessary, it could happen in all types of listening context.

Listening difficulties for EFL learners (listening problems/causes)

Regarding to listening problems, there are many factors that affect EFL learner's from learning oral communication. Shumin (2002) considers age, sociocultural and affective factors as some aspects to be reviewed to have a better idea about the causes that fall into failure when learning a L2.

First, age is a main reason why EFL students find it difficult to learn a second language (Shumin, 2002). The author states that the listening process is better to learn in early childhood, because it is achieved naturally, in contrast to adults. Furthermore, depending on the age, students could reach a native-like proficiency, the older they learn a language, the more will affect their ability to pronounce language fluently and with a native like accent.

Therefore, students will have problems in pronunciation, intonation, stress, etc; leading to a communication breakdown. Li (2014, p. 297) points out that “to understand a non-native speaker is not an easy task.” Indeed, adult learners fail in acquiring language fluently and natural because they do not have the innate ability as children do.

Second, the sociocultural factors in regards to the pragmatic perspective, language is used in a social structure when people interact with each other, showing a good attitude towards the language (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). In particular, Carrasquillo (1994, p. 51) reports, “shared values and beliefs create the tradition and social structures that bind a community together and are expressed in their language.” In addition, learning a language has to do with the target culture and the own cultural norms. Thus, students must know when responding politely to a compliment instead of feeling worried about that; or when recognizing sense of humor instead of feeling offended. In fact, the author has explained how sociocultural issues are aspects that affect oral communication.

Third, “the affective side of the learner is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure” (Oxford, 1990, p.140). With respect to the affective factor related to the second language, the learner is connected with the emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude and motivation (Shumin, 2002). However, there is a relationship between age in adults and anxiety with young people. “Anxiety was reported most frequently by the youngest” (Nikolov, 2009, p.210). This author describes that students felt anxious during the EFL classes because the teacher was too strict and made ironic comments about the learner’s performances. Some studies have proven that “anxiety caused by classroom processes can persist and not decrease with proficiency” (Djigunovic, 2009, p.210). However, this research contrasts with the MacIntyre and Gardner’s (1994) conclusion: the anxiety is lowered with higher proficiency. Indeed, students who have anxiety make the language difficult to learn. On the other hand, Brown (1994) explains that

students would develop anxiety when they have to speak in public with native speakers or when they get tongue – tied by any other reason. Furthermore, adults seem to be concerned about other people's opinion. For example, in China, students feel anxious that making a mistake would be embarrassing for them, causing a delay in the process of learning.

Another difficulty is related with the affective filter hypothesis, which is a model associated with Krashen (1985), is that it impedes learning the L2 (Tavakoli, 2013). This model uses a metaphor to describe a blockage caused by negative emotional attitude towards learning a second language. Specifically, this is when learners feel anxious, unmotivated or without self-confidence provoking a mental block in the brain in the acquisition of the language device. Indeed, "Krashen has claimed that the best acquisition will occur in environments where anxiety is low" (Tavakoli, 2013, p. 17). In addition, the filter determines how the language will be acquired.

Regarding the pedagogical implications, the common problems teachers have to face are concerned to vocabulary, speech rate and concentration. Teachers should find a way to teach students how to face their listening problems and to improve themselves. Moreover, this can be done when the educators expose students to listening experiences, plan their lessons carefully, give a reason for listening, choose the proper material, and motivate students to feel successful rather than grading only their listening skills (Underwood, 1989).

Furthermore, teachers still focus in the product rather than the process, and instead of teaching listening skills to develop better learners, they check the results (Richards and Renandya, 2002). These authors also show how teachers tend to judge the listening abilities by grading the correct answers in questions and tasks. Nonetheless, students have provided a different guess, participation and construction based on the listening tasks that prove that they have recognized the listening tasks 100%. For instance, according to the Pier model

(perception, interpretation, evaluation and reaction), the listener along the process of communication is allowed to find out where and how the breakdown starts. For this reason, the main motive for listening is to identify what is on the students' head, find the problems students have and put them right while teachers have been collecting enough evidence. In fact, teachers can make remedial lessons tasks to tackle the source of the problem. That is to change the planning lesson and implement activities that higher the level of the students whether they could develop listening micro-skills.

The last important factor that Anderson and Lynch (1988) have exposed is concerned to motivation. For example, EFL learners that are involved in the acquisition of a L2, should develop skills to practice how to find the main idea in a conversation and give a good response. Gilbert (2012) illustrates a case where a low-level student in a native speaking county tries to have a conversation at the bus station using what he has rehearsed in class. The interaction ended up that the other person did not understand anything and felt annoyed by the student. As well as the native speaker, teachers also are impatient with students. These attitudes discourage learners, who may continue attending classes, but without making any effort. Moreover, teachers should keep in mind that a discouraged student is hard to teach. Likewise, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) declare that a teacher efficacy can be judged by achieving success among those learners who might be unmotivated.

One more difficulty is shown in the research carried out by Hamouda (2013) on EFL Saudi students. The author investigated about listening comprehension problems in students at Qassim University. The course provided a listening component to students, which is to listen to audio cassettes or watch videos in English. Findings have proven that students had a lot of listening problems and learning comprehension, such as vocabulary, speed rate, accent, length of the spoken text, lack of concentration and pronunciation. The proposal was to include good listening material to the class, but also improve the teacher's classroom technique for the

students to reduce their own difficulties in listening comprehension and increase their proficiency.

Strategies and activities to develop listening comprehension skill

Richards and Renandya (2002); Hedge (2000), Beltrán (2006) and Mendelsohn (1988) demonstrate that there are two processes to help learners to master the listening skill. They have claimed that these processes should be combined in order to help students achieve comprehensible input as they integrate the information coming from both processes. First, the bottom-up processing model strategy “is used to combine increasingly larger units of meaning. It proceeds from phoneme-level units to discourse-level units from sounds to words and from words to longer lexical items” (Vandergrif, 2004, p.78). This process focuses on linguistic knowledge from the students such as sounds, words, intonation, grammatical structure, and other components (Brown, 2009). This procedure follows a hierarchical manner. Otherwise, in the top-down processing model, Nation and Newton (2009) state that this method moves from the whole to the parts. Certainly, this process “involves the learners’ activation of background knowledge to make connections with the incoming input” (Hedge, 2000, p.232). In other words, this procedure is used to predict the information in the message. Field (2008) also indicates that the top-down process focuses on the main idea, ignoring the little details, and, besides, enriching a deciphered message. Moreover, the two strategies mentioned above are considered necessary when developing courses, material and lessons, as an example, in a class students discriminate between animal pairs, but also can use their knowledge to understand what they listen. “If teachers suspect that there are gaps in their learners’ knowledge, the listening itself can be preceded by schema-building activities to prepare learners for the listening task to come” (Nunan, 2002, p. 239).

There was a time when the listening process was ignored for many years, meanwhile grammar was given effort for students to learn. In the research concerned with teaching listening activities, Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) coincide with Richards and Renandya (2002). They both agree that listening should be divided in activities to prepare students for their own learning in the process. These activities are subcategorized in pre-listening (pre-teaching new vocabulary), while-listening (extensive and intensive), and post listening (analysis of the language in the text).

However, the authors mentioned above disagree with the first activity, pre-teaching. The research conducted by Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) has a strong evidence to prove that this process is effective and works for students to learn critical words and grammar structure while introduces the topic. On the other hand, Richards and Renandya (2002) state that pre-teaching vocabulary does not work in real life, and words cannot be taught in advance. By the way, the aims of pre-teaching activities are to activate learner's prior knowledge, and provide enough context for the tasks (Karakas, 2002). In this stage, students usually answer yes / no questions based on the previous task. With regard to the listening task, Karakas (2002) judges the activity because the tape is recorded twice, and manifests that is unnatural because in real life students cannot hear twice the same information. On the contrary, the research states that "listeners who participate actively in the listening experience are more likely to construct clear and accurate meaning as they interpret the speaker's verbal message and non-verbal cues" (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011, p.982). During this stage, students work on their prediction, complete charts and answer questions. Furthermore, the aim of this activity is to build on the students' knowledge. An example of this task could be to work in pairs and complete the missing word in the worksheets. Concerning the post-listening activity Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011); and, Richards and Renandya (2002) agree that this task is an important stage because it offers the students the opportunity to work on their critical thinking

and also be able to infer the meaning of the words from the context. At this point, students can connect the ideas with their own experience to share among them, and answer the questions left.

A research in Mexico has shown a new strategy that could improve the listening skills with students (García, 2013). As long as students have a lack of contact with real English, they cannot acquire good listening comprehension skills. Therefore, in some schools or high school levels, English language has just been included in the curriculum. In spite of this problem, some students have found their answer to achieve success in English on the Internet websites, such as the Lyric Training. “This website contains only songs, which students seem to consider as a way of learning” (García, 2013, p. 45). The usage of multimedia gives the impression to help students to retain information, reduce their anxiety and improve their listening skills while making them to be more aware of the sounds. On the other hand, the internet appears as a source that plays a social role rather than an academic one. However, the results have proven that the usage of songs help learners to retain more information and is a helpful tool in class because they remember grammar structures, words and phrases that have learned in the song.

Similarly to the research in Mexico, Allen and Maxim (2012) explain the usage of technology as a strategy to develop listening skills. A university has given the freedom to teachers to design their own material on the web 2.0 such as podcast and blogs. This idea focuses on the usage of technologies (blogs, wikis, messenger, bookmarks, podcast, etc.), and has created a fully interactive space where students can create, collaborate and share their work among students. The research aims to develop listening skills through web-based listening tasks as an objective. Besides, it tries to put students to use language in real life situations. They will be provided with enough input in technical English topics. Therefore,

they will feel confident to achieve online tasks that follow technical podcasts with other activities related to the subject, for example, fill in the gap, note taking, etc.

When it comes to acquire a second language, the collaborative groups applied in listening practices have a good reception because they represent a challenge for teachers letting the students to have some control over the tasks and discover the content by themselves (Richards and Renandya, 2002). By using collaborative groups however, the tasks are centered on the learners rather than the teachers. Moreover, the students work within a group, and they have to participate actively in the process providing positive contributions to the group. In fact, the importance of collaborative group work is aimed to improve listening strategies where each member could bring a different conclusion about the topic. Naughton (2006) emphasizes the group work strategy because it allows the students to improve their listening skills by interacting with their peers and use the language to negotiate meaning.

According to Tavakoli (2013), effective strategies do exist. They are particular attitudes from teachers towards the classroom setting. These strategies basically allow students to remain in silent periods where they can listen without having to participate answering questions. Learners will start participating whenever they feel ready, meanwhile any effort to engage with the task should be recognized by the teacher. Furthermore, in this silent period, error corrections should be avoided to achieve fluency.

The last strategy to improve listening comprehension focus in metacognition (Hinkel, 2011). The students achieve the goals trusting their cognitive process and being aware of it. Flavell (1979, p. 459) states that “metacognitive knowledge consists primarily of knowledge and beliefs about the task-, person- and strategy- related factors that interact during any cognitive activity.” This is a mental process where the student is aware of their knowledge

bringing motivation and self- confidence to regulate their listening learning procedure (Veenman, Van Hout-Walters and Afflerbach; 2006).

The information mentioned above has been taken from different authors who have expressed their point of view about the topic related to listening comprehension, problems, strategies and activities to apply when learning English as a foreign language. Furthermore, some researches presented below will provide more information about the topic.

The first research, worked by Hamouda (2013) was primarily to explore a broad view and identify the listening comprehension problems that Saudi college students in EFL at Qassim University have in order to find out the reason learners keep on performing poorly when listening oral texts in class. Also, it tries to investigate the strategies used by the students in response to the listening difficulty. Furthermore, it proposes that some actions must be taken by the teachers in order to help students to overcome these problems.

The methods used for this study were a questionnaire and a semistructured interview for the students to get information about the listening difficulties they faced in class. The participants were 60 first-year students at Qassim University, whose age ranged from 20 to 22 years old. The study took place during the first semester of the 2012/2013 school year. The course offered to the students the inclusion of a listening component by interacting with audio cassettes and watching VCD's in English.

The results about the research were that students at Quassim University encountered various kinds of listening problems in learning comprehension such as unfamiliar words, the length of spoken text, the speed rate, accents, lack of concentration and pronunciation. It revealed the importance of adapting some listening material and techniques from the teachers to be used in class to achieve students' proficiency.

The second study, carried out by Muniandy (2012), who investigated the effectiveness of the constructive learning theory in teaching and learning listening comprehension in Penang, Malaysia. The main objective was to prove that the constructive learning theory would help students to improve in their listening skills. This theory included prior knowledge, social interaction, motivation and constructions of meaning.

The investigation was carried out in one of the colleges with 24 EFL students from various nationalities for six hours during three months, from January to March 2010. The instrument used was a questionnaire categorized into four strategies: listening, vocabulary, speaking and translation. It measured the students' interest and capabilities as it gave information about the way one tackles the task of learning a foreign language. They had 20 minutes to fill in. The conclusion to the study was that teaching listening skills through constructive learning theory really helped the students.

The third study performed by Ismaili (2013) wanted to prove the effectiveness of using movies to develop the students' language competence and performance in academic settings. The participants were 60 undergraduate students between 18 to 25 years old, male and female in a multicultural classroom setting. The study took place over a three-month period. The type of data collection were questionnaires to find out student's attitude towards the movie strategy, and the quiz was given at the end of a reading section.

This research revealed that the usage of movies as a teaching material in class helped learners to improve vocabulary because they were hearing the words many times. Furthermore, they felt motivated and increased their proficiency in the learning process.

The fourth study corresponded to Bozorgian (2012) who investigated about the metacognitive instruction, which consist on predicting, monitoring, problem identification and evaluation; and, how this strategy benefits less-skilled listener's comprehension. This

procedure aimed to help students to evaluate their listening tasks thinking about their own knowledge to understand the message. The sample was taken from a group of 28 Iranian males aged between 17 and 24 years old. The instruments used in the study, were a pretest and a posttest containing four listening lessons based on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Also, an interview was apply to the listeners at the end of the study in order to gather information about the listening process.

Depending on the results obtained in the pretest, students were divided in two groups, less skilled and more skilled-listeners to compare their achievements. In conclusion, the research revealed that most of the less-skilled listeners made a considerable amount of progress compared to the more skilled-listeners. This outcome was due to the fact that the metacognitive instructions used in the listening lessons helped the less-skilled listeners to improve their listening skills.

The fifth study, carried out by Golchi (2012) aimed to investigate how anxiety affects students' listening comprehension skills. The participants were 63 IELTS students taken from two language establishes in Iran whose mother tongue was Persian. There were 29 males and 34 females respectively. In this research, four instruments were used: a Background Questionnaire, a Listening Anxiety Questionnaire, a Listening Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire and an IELTS listening test. Two sessions were given to the students to complete the four questionnaires. The findings revealed that when the learner's anxiety increases, their listening comprehension decreases. Therefore, when students felt less anxious they achieved better results in the listening tasks.

The last study, carried out by Gilakjani (2011) attempted to demonstrate how learning styles for Iranian EFL university students influenced their learning process. The participants were 40 male and 60 female students of English whose age ranged from 23 to 28. The

instrument employed in the research was a questionnaire that learners had to complete in order to find out the learning styled preferred (auditory, visual or kinesthetic). The results revealed that 50% of students preferred the visual learning style, 35% preferred the auditory style and 15% was given to the kinesthetic style. Therefore, the students that had the visual learning style were the ones who had accomplished better results in their learning process.

Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

The information displayed on the three tables below has been taken from the students' questionnaires to analyze, interpret and determine the listening difficulties learners meet most of the time inside the classroom, as listeners, with the speaker, and with the listening passage respectively. First, the collected data was to analyze the higher percentage and factor in each statement of each table corresponding to be the main reason students have difficulty in order to develop their listening comprehension skills. With the results, the strategy mentioned in each statement was emphasized to provide information about its importance to improve the listening ability. Lastly, the findings were contrasted with the teachers' questionnaires, the students' interview sheets and the corresponding theory related to the subject matter. The three questions below concerning the listener, speaker and the listening passage have been answered by using qualitative and quantitative approaches.

How do the listener factors affect their listening comprehension?

Table 1

How do the listener factors affect their listening comprehension?

<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Statements</i>	Never %	Seldom %	Sometimes %	Often %	Always %
1	I use my experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the listening passage	23.2	28	32.8	10.4	5.6
2	I listen to every detail to get the main idea of the listening passage	22.4	36	16.8	18.4	6.4
3	I find it difficult to do listening activities because of my lack of knowledge of English language	29.6	28.8	26.4	10.4	4.8

4	After my teacher stops the recording, I find it difficult to predict what will come next	23.2	32.8	25.6	11.2	7.2
5	I find it difficult to hold a short dialogue after listening to a passage	32.8	32.8	19.2	10.4	4.8
6.	I find it difficult to get a general understanding of the message from listening for the first time	27.2	28	25.6	13.6	5.6
7.	I feel nervous and worried when I do not understand the listening passage	25.6	28.8	21.6	12.8	11.2
8	I find it difficult to understand the listening passage because it is not of interest to me	26.4	33.6	16.8	13.6	9.6
9	I find it more difficult to listen to a recorded text than to my teacher reading aloud	22.4	30.4	19.2	18.4	9.6

Author: Andrea Espinosa

Source: Students' questionnaires

The statements presented above in table 1 are elements related to the listener, where each statement provides a wide view of the difficulties students might face inside the classroom when learning English as a second language related to their listening abilities. Furthermore, it shows with statistics how any of these problems could interfere in the process of communication.

I use my experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the listening passage. The findings in the first statement in table 1 reveal that 32.8% of the 125 students surveyed, *sometimes* use their prior knowledge of the topic to understand the listening passage. These results entail that there is not a major listening problem among the students because most of them know and understand English well. A prior knowledge has an

important role for listening comprehension for the students to process input more efficiently. Furthermore, they develop a conceptual framework for inference.

On the other hand, the results obtained from the teachers' questionnaires are different in their point of view because they consider that 60% of the students *often* use their prior knowledge to understand the listening passage. This might be attributed to the fact that the teachers are teaching their students the vocabulary used before the listening task to facilitate comprehension. Vandergrift (2003) claims that, for the listening process, it is necessary to have a combination of questions and prior knowledge (understanding) about the task to build a conceptual framework. According to Macaro et al. (2005), prior knowledge could be misdirected when used inflexibly. Moreover, Ausubel (1968) states that new information is obtained through prior knowledge to accomplish meaningful learning. Indeed, the more structured the prior knowledge is, the more flexible the achievement of new information becomes.

I listen to every detail to get the main idea of the listening passage. The results in the statement indicate that 36% of the 125 students surveyed, *seldom* have problems understanding the main idea when listening something in English. Consequently, this element confirms they do not have listening problems in the classroom, because most of them can grasp the main idea without any difficulty. When listening for main ideas students have a purpose to hear more carefully in class.

Certainly, the results from the teachers' questionnaires are different from the students' view. They consider that 40% of students *sometimes* listen to details in order to understand the main idea. This would perhaps help the students get a general idea about the text. Under this point of view, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) establish that having a reason for listening helps students organize their thoughts and display them in their learning. The students' interview sheets also reveal most of the learners like to learn English and are taking additional

classes to improve their proficiency. According to Lightbown and Spada, (2006) learners achieve success by showing a good attitude towards the language. In addition, Cameron (2001) states that when learning a second language, the receptive skills remain ahead of the productive skills, which also coincides to be a reason that the students do not have any problems when it comes to listening.

I find it difficult to do listening activities because of my lack of knowledge of English language. The outcomes above in table 1 show that 29.6% of the 125 surveyed students *never* find it difficult to do the activities heard in English, which makes it clear that it is not the main reason that students have difficulty with their listening comprehension. In fact, they do not have any lack of knowledge or gaps to fill. Therefore, listening activities such as post-listening are very important because they give the students opportunities to use language with a communicative purpose to interact in different situations and not only when they are controlled by the teacher.

On the contrary, the teachers' questionnaires state that 60% of the students *often* find it difficult to do the listening activities due to their lack of knowledge. It might be due to the traditional approach applied in class and the teacher-centered learning. Rivers states concerning to this kind of approach that "teachers must learn how to promote language-using activities in which there is as much student involvement and as little teacher direction as possible" (1981, p. 230). The fact that the results between the students and teachers' questionnaires are wide different would perhaps be to the lack of authentic tasks applied by the teachers to achieve meaningful learning to the students.

After my teacher stops the recording, I find it difficult to predict what will come next. The results concerning this statement in table 1 reflect that 32.8 % of the 125 students surveyed *seldom* find it difficult to make predictions about the text heard after the teacher

stops the recording. Regarding the low percentage, this issue does not demonstrate to be a main reason students have problems in developing their listening skills. In addition, making predictions is a strategy used in class to construct meaning; usually, the students have to fill in information related to the text.

According to the teachers' questionnaires, they are very close to agreeing with the students' answers because the results show that 40% of the learners *seldom* have difficulties to make predictions about the text, probably due to the fact that the activity was carried out with the students' active participation in class. With regard to this asseveration, Bar (2011) argues that by making predictions the students recognize complex structures to construct meaning and the benefits are to respond quickly the learnt words in a social context. This assertion is related to the one of Ashcraft (2006) and Van der Meer (1995), who declare that students generate new information by using background knowledge and incoming information respectively.

I find it difficult to hold a short dialogue after listening to a passage. The report showed in table 1 indicates that 32.8% of the 125 students surveyed both *seldom* and *never* claimed to find difficulty to hold a short dialogue about the text heard in English. Due to the percentages, it is evident this is not the reason students have difficulty to develop their listening abilities when learning English as a foreign language. Moreover, making short dialogues or role-plays help the students to increase confidence by practicing speaking and reduces anxiety when speaking in public.

The information collected by the teachers' questionnaires differ from the students because they ratify 40% of the students *often* find it difficult to hold a short dialogue, perhaps because some learners might feel anxious to speak in front of the class or would have developed negative feelings about the language. Tavakoli (2013) connects this behavior with

Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which states that the best achievement will happen in situations where anxiety is low. The findings of MacIntyre (1995) argue that students who feel anxious to speak will not be able to learn and produce as good as the relaxed ones.

I find it difficult to get a general understanding of the message from listening for the first time. The data above in table 1 shows that 28% of the 125 students surveyed *seldom* find it difficult to get a general understanding of the message from listening for the first time. This is a small number of students who have this difficulty, which evidences not to be the main problematic students have when it comes to developing their listening skills. When hearing a text for the first time, it is usually difficult to get the message at once because students need time and practice to understand the information. Moreover, the learners through these tasks recognize different accents and pronunciation to develop their listening skills and learn in a natural way.

However, the information gathered from the teachers' questionnaires manifest that 40% of students *seldom* have difficulties to get a general understanding of the message from listening for the first time. On the other hand, the students' interview sheets testify that the majority of them know and understand English well. It might be because learners are still young and grasp the information fast. These results agree with Davis (2010), who states that young learners have an innate ability to acquire language; in a natural way, just like they learned their first one. Furthermore, Cameron (2001) remarks that students who have an early start with the language will achieve better outcomes in listening comprehension.

I feel nervous and worried when I do not understand the listening passage. The information above in table 1 displays that 28.8% of the 125 surveyed students *seldom* feel nervous and worried when they do not understand the listening passage. The results show that this statement is not the main reason for the students to be affected in developing their

listening skills. Understanding the listening passage, which is an important task, needs enough practice and strategies to be successful in class. Furthermore, the teachers have to focus more in the process of listening rather than in the product.

On the contrary, the information obtained in the teachers' questionnaires shows a wide difference in the results. They state that 60% of the students *sometimes* feel nervous and worried when they do not understand the listening passage. These results agree with the information in the students' interview sheets, which also manifest, they feel very nervous when do not understand the language. This might be attributed to the fact that learners do not have a good attitude and motivation to listen. In addition, they could get involved in an affective dimension, where their emotions could increase or decrease their ability to understand the text. Mathewson (1985) proposes that, through affective dimension, students decide to listen and maintain concentration on the task. On the other hand, Horwitz et al. (1986) explain that the emotions that the learners have experienced when learning a second language such as, anxiety, feeling worried, nervous and stress has to do with their personality. Moreover, Gilakjani (2011) claims that personality has a significant impact on success in language learning because the students' attitude towards the target language cannot be controlled by the teacher. Regardless motivation, Anderson and Lynch (1988) coincide that learners should develop skills to practice how to understand the main idea when learning a second language.

I find it difficult to understand the listening passage because it is not of interest to me. The results showed above in table 1 manifest that 33.6% of the 125 surveyed students *seldom* find it difficult to understand the listening passage because it is not of their interest. Clearly, it can be noticed this is not a main reason why the students have difficulty to develop their listening skills. When hearing a text, it is important to choose meaningful listening

activities that help students to be engaged into the lesson. By applying this strategy in class, learners feel motivated and become part of the task interacting actively.

On the contrary, according to the teachers' questionnaires about this statement, they argue that 60% of the students find it difficult to understand the listening passage because it is not of their interest. This information agrees with the data collected in the students' interview sheets, who claim the listening problems are due to the lack of interest. It might be because the students are subject to traditional classes without carrying out important tasks neither in pair work nor collaborative group to share information. Freeman and Freeman (1998) state that in traditional classes, the teacher makes the decision and selection of what the students should learn according to the curriculum. Furthermore, the authors emphasize the importance of selecting different learning tasks, which are meaningful for the students, giving special attention to pair and group work. Richards and Renandya (2002) agree with this affirmation about the importance to work in collaborative groups because it is aimed to improve listening strategies. As each member of the group has different prior knowledge, every student can add a different conclusion about the topic. Hiltz et al. (2000) add that collaborative learning increases leaning situations that help students to engage with the task actively. Freeman and Lewis (1998) conclude with the idea that students learn things that are important for them to keep their interest.

I find it more difficult to listen to a recorded text than to my teacher reading aloud.

The data gathered from table 1 reveals that 30.4% of the 125 surveyed students *seldom* have difficulty when they listen to a text rather than the teacher reading aloud. According to the results, the item above does not seem not to be the main reason students have problems when developing their listening ability. The process of listening needs to be taught in class to achieve success when the students are to perceive the words with their ears in either the recordings or the teacher's voice.

On the other hand, the teachers' questionnaires claim that 60% of the students *often* meet this difficulty in class. The students' interview sheets also corroborates this statement expressing there are few learners who have not developed well their listening skills. This might be attributed to the fact students cannot complete the listening task effectively because during the listening process, a breakdown happens. Carter and Bishop (2006) point out that within the four-phases in listening comprehension (perception, interpretation, evaluation and reaction) the listening error can be identified accurately where it took place in order to make the suitable corrections to build meaning. Furthermore, Hinkel (2001) testifies that listening comprehension focuses in metacognition. Goh (2008, p. 459) gives support to this asseveration because she states that "metacognitive knowledge consist primarily of knowledge and beliefs about the task-person- and strategy – related factors that interact during any cognitive activity." This is a mental process where the students are aware of their knowledge to regulate their listening four-phase process.

In conclusion, the reason that has more incidences concerning the listener and the factors that affect listening comprehension among students shown in table 1 is the first statement: *I use my experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the listening passage*. This appears to be is highest score of the results above, which indicate that only 32.8 % of the surveyed students *sometimes* have to use their prior knowledge in order to understand the listening passage. In fact, along the analysis of this information it was clear that the majority of the learners do not face listening problems in class because they state to know the language. Moreover, the understanding of the idiom the students have achieved, helps them to activate their prior knowledge when listening to the text and completing the task successfully in the classroom. Furthermore, most of them manifest that they like to learn English. On the other hand, the students who claim to have difficulties understanding the listening passage is due to the circumstance of how the tasks are managed by the teachers

without activating prior knowledge to accomplish good results.

Do the speaker factors interfere on the learner's listening skills?

Table 2

Do the speaker factors interfere on the learner's listening skills?

<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Never %</i>	<i>Seldom %</i>	<i>Sometimes %</i>	<i>Often %</i>	<i>Always %</i>
10.	I find it difficult to understand natural speech which is full of hesitation and pauses	16	33.6	25.6	17.6	7.2
11.	I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly	12.8	31.2	35.2	13.6	7.2
12.	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk too fast	11.2	32	33.6	16	7.2
13.	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk with varied accents	10.4	36.8	30.4	12.8	9.6

Author: Andrea Espinosa

Source: Students' questionnaires

The information presented above on table 2 corresponds to the results obtained in the students' questionnaires in the section related to the speaker. Each statement provides important evidence to analyze carefully the difficulties students might have during English lessons, and how those affect their listening skills. Therefore, it shows statistical results of how the difficulties have an impact in learning.

I find it difficult to understand natural speech, which is full of hesitation and pauses. The information collected in the table 2, reveals that 33.6% of the 125 surveyed students *seldom* find it difficult to understand natural speech because it is full of hesitations

and pauses. Nowadays, students learn to speak the language in a natural way just like they speak their mother tongue. The results obtained in table 2 display that the statement mentioned above does not seem to be the main reason students have regardless to their problems in listening comprehension.

On the contrary, the teachers' questionnaires, in fact, claim that 80% of the students *sometimes* have difficulties understanding natural speech because of the hesitations and pauses made. The high percentage scored would be perhaps because the students are not exposed to spontaneous conversations. According to the research carried out by Yagang (1993), people use slang, ungrammatical sentences and hesitations when having spontaneous conversations. Furthermore, Clark and Wasow (1998) state that the use of fillers, unwanted pauses, repeated words and so forth, seem to happen when the speakers cannot organize their ideas and need to change or suspend their speech. In addition, Hasan (2000) corroborates that hesitations and pauses cause comprehension problems for non-native speakers.

I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words, which are not pronounced clearly. The outcomes presented above in table 2, show that 35.2% of the 125 surveyed students find it difficult to understand the meaning of words when they are not pronounced clearly. According to these results, there is a reduced number of students who face this difficulty. This does not seem to be a main reason students have difficulty when it comes to developing listening skills. In fact, pronunciation it is an important sub-skill to learn when learning a second language for successful communication because the words need to be understood clearly. On the other hand, the teachers' questionnaires claim that 80% of the students *sometimes* have difficulty to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced correctly.

This wide difference evidences that within the teachers' point of view there is a difficulty among the learners. The teachers' information coincides with the students' interview sheets who affirm that the lack of understanding is because of the mispronunciation of the words. This might be attributed to the fact that students are not familiar with the pronunciation system, which it is related to the sound of the language. Kelly (2000) agrees that when a student mispronounces the words constantly, it can be very difficult for a speaker to understand. The author claims that when students have a lot of pronunciation mistakes in class, some actions should be taken to reach a successful communication. Moreover, Derwing and Munro (2005) manifest that having a good pronunciation of the English language helps people to have a natural communication. Cook (2008, p.67) states "Language conveys meaning from one person to another through spoken sounds." Also, evidences that by teaching students different techniques to practice English sounds, they will be more aware about pronunciation and will develop a natural conversation among classmates.

I find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk too fast. The results obtained in table 2 show that 33.6% of the 125 surveyed students *sometimes* have difficulty to understand well when the speaker talks too fast. This percentage represents a low group of students who manifest they have problems when listening, but due to the results, this is not the main reason learners have with their listening skills. Indeed, understanding a foreign language is a very difficult activity for EFL learners.

On the contrary, the teachers' questionnaires point out that 60% of students *often* have difficulties to understand well when the speaker talks too fast. This is probably because the students have a different language background and find it difficult to comprehend someone speaking English in a natural speed, not to mention when speaking fast. The results coincide with the study carried out by Chen (2005), where the participants claim that when the speaker talks too fast, it is difficult to understand even the key words. This information agrees with

the research carried out by Renandya and Farrell (2010), who state that speech rate has a relationship with comprehension success.

I find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk with varied accents. The data showed above in table 2 entails that 36.8% of the 125 surveyed students *seldom* find it difficult to understand well when the speakers talk with varied accents. By looking at the results, it can clearly be seen that this statement is not a main reason students have difficulty in order to achieve listening skills. Furthermore, recognizing a different variety of accents from different people helps students to understand better either a native or a non-native speaker when learning English as a second language.

On the other hand, the information collected from the teachers' questionnaires have a different point of view because they argue that 40% of the students *sometimes* and *often* find it difficult to understand the speakers' varied accents. This might be attributed to the fact that students are not familiar with different accents, but only with the intonation that the main English teacher has in class. In addition, learners may not have been exposed to other teachers' accents in the institution. The students' interview sheets mention that they find it difficult to understand a native speaker as well. They claim that the teachers' voice sounds weird and hoarse in some circumstances. With regard to this, Gass and Varonis (1984), Wingstedt and Schulman (1987) agree that when listeners are familiar with the accent speech, it might influence in their listening achievements. Furthermore, unfamiliar accents cause listening comprehension problems in both, native and non-native speakers (Eisenstein and Berkowitz, 1981).

Briefly, the information related to the speaker gathered above in table 2 reported that the highest score comes from the second statement, which is, *I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly* (35.2% - sometimes). According to

the results, there is not a high percentage of students who manifest they have difficulty due to the lack of proper pronunciation from the speaker. Moreover, with the undergraduates who seem to have difficulty, the aim of a teacher should be to teach the students to learn to speak the language as natural as possible, reducing the accent as much as possible. In addition, when students practice different listening tasks to recognize people's intonation, they will not be scared to hear other people's accent.

How does the listening passage hinder the students' listening comprehension?

Table 3

How does the listening passage hinder the student's listening comprehension?

<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Never %</i>	<i>Seldom %</i>	<i>Sometimes %</i>	<i>Often %</i>	<i>Always %</i>
14.	Vocabulary used in the listening passage interferes with my listening comprehension	27.2	31.2	26.4	12	3.2
15.	Some grammatical structures in the listening passage interfere with my listening comprehension	29.6	32	23.2	8	7.2
16.	The length of the listening passage hinders me to interpret the message	31.2	28.8	25.6	9.6	4.8
17.	The content of the listening passage is abstract	20.8	36	32.8	6.4	4
18.	The poor quality of recording does not allow me to understand the listening passage	20	22.4	30.4	14.4	12.8

Author: Andrea Espinosa

Source: Students' questionnaires

The listening passage has to do with recordings used in class as a main source to hear natural spoken English to carry out a listening task. The statements displayed above in table 3 have to do with the problems students face in class to understand the text.

Vocabulary used in the listening passage interferes with my listening comprehension. The data showed in table 3 reveals that 31.2 % of the 125 surveyed students *seldom* have difficulties with the vocabulary used in the listening passage to interfere with their listening comprehension. However, learners must know the meaning of the vocabulary words in advance to understand and complete the task. Regardless to the results, it is evident this statement is not a main problem for developing their listening skills.

On the contrary, the teachers' information differs because they claim that 40% of students *seldom* and *often* face the difficulties mentioned above. Moreover, in the students' interview sheets, they express that they have problems with the listening passage due to the fact that they hear new words that they do not understand the meaning of. This is perhaps because teachers do not review the vocabulary with the students in advance, and for this reason they are not familiar with the words to complete the task. In addition, Underwood (1989) states that a big obstacle for listening comprehension falls on the lack of vocabulary of the learners. Therefore, Allen (1983) points out that students do not have to learn all the vocabulary, but understand the words that are going to be used when listening to a text.

Some grammatical structures in the listening passage interfere with my listening comprehension. The results obtained in table 3 show that 32% of the 125 surveyed students *seldom* feel that the grammatical structures in the listening passage interferes with their listening comprehension. Since the majority of students do not seem to have this difficulty, this statement cannot be the reason students have problems when developing their listening comprehension abilities. In fact, when it comes to grammar, students must know how to

structure sentences correctly. For instance, the subject, verb and complement are elements that should be put in the correct order to achieve meaning.

On the other hand, the teachers' questionnaires express that 40% of the student *often* have difficulties with the grammatical structures in the listening passage that interferes with their listening comprehension. This is probably because students cannot remember the grammar structures and the rules to be used; therefore, they get confused when listening to a text. According to Lougheed (2008), students need more practice rather than explanations to learn how to use grammar. Hence, the study carried out by Al-Mekhlafi (2011) arguments to see grammar as a resource people have in language to communicate. Furthermore, it relays on what people want to say and how others interpret the use of the language.

The length of the listening passage hinders me to interpret the message. Through the results gathered from table 3, they show that 31.2% of the 125 surveyed students *never* have difficulties with the length of the listening passages to hinder information to interpret the message. Regarding the results, it can be noticed this is not a reason, which would cause problems to the students to develop their listening skills. The length of a passage to listen to in class brings to the students an opportunity to acquire comprehensible input.

On the contrary, the results obtained in the teachers' questionnaires are different because they show that 60% of the students *seldom* have difficulties with the length of the passage. The few learners who face this problem might be attributed to the fact they have difficulty understanding a long text because the students cannot remember everything and get distracted after a while. According to Moyer (2006), one important thing to evaluate listening comprehension is the text and its different types, for example: natural speech, street talk, interviews, news, academic text, and so forth. Furthermore, Long (1990) claims that with the right length of the text (3 minutes limit), speed and prior knowledge, the students' attention

and memory will sustain. In other words, Kintsch and Kozminski (1977), and Sinatra (1990) argue that the listening process might diverge due to the length of the text.

The content of the listening passage is abstract. The data collected in table 3 manifests that 36% and 32% of the 125 surveyed students *seldom* and *sometimes* respectively find the content of the listening passage abstract. The two percentages of the results entail that this statement might be one of the main reason students have difficulty with their listening abilities. The use of authentic material is helpful in EFL classes because it brings students to experience a real world listening situation task in the classroom. Therefore, these kind of activities become meaningful to the learners rather than abstract.

Certainly, the results obtained by the teachers do not have a wide difference from the students. The teachers' questionnaires point out that 40% of the students *sometimes* have the difficulty mentioned above in class. This agreement with the results is probably due to the fact that learners are interacting with texts that are not authentic and do not have a connection to the real world. In fact, Long and Crookes (1992) express that pedagogic activities must rely on real world intended assignments. For example, going to the train station, buying a ticket for a movie, making a report, and so forth. Furthermore, the authors state that when the task has a connection with the real work, then it becomes authentic.

The poor quality of recording does not allow me to understand the listening passage. The information above in table 3 indicates that 30.4% of the 125 surveyed students *sometimes* have difficulty understanding the listening passage because of the poor quality of the recordings. Concerning to the results, this does not seem to be the problem the students have difficulties when it comes to their listening skills. The usage of authentic and good quality material is very important to achieve successful listening tasks in class.

Indeed, the teachers' questionnaires answers are very close with the students' data. They manifest that 40% *seldom* have difficulty understanding the passage due to the poor quality of the recording. The few students who seem to have this problem might be to the fact there is too much noise in the classroom. This asseveration coincides with the students' interview who agree at first that it is hard to understand the recordings because of the noise, but also the quality. Furthermore, they point out that the acoustics in the classroom are not very good. The findings of Andrade (2006, p.8) supports the students concerns because the researcher points out that "It is difficult to teach listening in a noisy environment." In fact, listening activities cannot be accomplished if the acoustics in the class are bad. Apart from that, if the noise arises it is because the teacher cannot control the students. Moreover, in order to achieve successful listening tasks the sound has to be good. According to Yagang (1993), when having poor-quality material in class, students have difficulty to understand and that circumstance interferes with their listening comprehension.

In short, the statement that has more incidence concerning the listening passage and how it hinders students' listening comprehension presented in table 3 is *the content of the listening passage is abstract*. This report has the highest score (36%, *seldom* and 32,8% *sometimes*) which shows that many students claim to have this difficulty. Teachers should plan carefully their lessons incorporating authentic tasks to bring the real world into class to engage the students with the activities of their interest. Furthermore, the learners will activate their creativity using authentic material in order to carry out meaningful tasks. In conclusion, when the students have to face abstract listening activities without any meaning to them, it is very difficult that they achieve good results.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrated that the majority of the students do not have many listening problems. Furthermore, students use their prior knowledge of the language in class to recognize familiar words and understand well. Moreover, their high level of understanding was because learners are liked by learning English as a foreign language.

The research revealed that some learners have problems related to the accent and pronunciation that other people have. This event is because they did not have opportunities to interact with others to encourage the process of listening word recognition. The learners were exposed only to the main teacher's accent who either pronounced the words incorrectly or spoke unclear.

Another finding in the investigation that shows the students have listening problems is due to the lack of quality of the recordings. Therefore, as the acoustic in the classroom is not very good, the sound of the text is not clear. Consequently, they do not pay attention to the listening passage properly.

Also, the big factor that contributes to listening comprehension problems obtained in this research is the constant noise students make in class. Additionally, the teachers are not using different strategies to control and keep learners quiet and engaged in tasks.

This study revealed some listening problems regarding the content of the passage that seems abstract to learners. The results show that students are not involved in authentic tasks that are meaningful to them and could bring real experiences in class.

The qualitative analysis shows that listening comprehension problems are due to the fact students feel nervous when they do not understand the language. Hence, they can neither participate actively, nor keep concentrated with the tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The fact, that the majority of learners use their prior knowledge and are liked by learning English, should be considered by the teachers. This advantage would help them to plan their lessons more effectively in order to achieve language proficiency among the students. They could guide the students through the process of listening to accomplish better results.

Teachers also need to expose their student to other teachers or people who speak English in order to develop their listening skills to understand another accent and pronunciation. Otherwise, movies and videos could be presented in class to help students interact with different speech patterns to achieve success.

In relation to the quality of the recordings, teachers should adapt high quality material to be used in class. Teachers should ask the school to invest in new and actualized material or find other interesting sources according to the students's needs to accomplish the processs of listening.

Another important thing to consider is the noise made by the students in class, teachers should encounter some strategies to regulate the students behaviour and maintain the discipline. Moreover, teachers should focus on implementing more dynamic activities to increase the student's alert level to remain them enthusiastic with the tasks.

It should also be considered to perform activities among students based on the real world to engage them. Teachers should change their methodology and strategies to be more creative and apply authentic tasks in class to achieve good language proficiency.

Finally, motivation should be taken into account to increase students' concentration on the tasks avoiding their nervousness. For instance, teachers should create a good environment and pay attention to the students who have problems with self-esteem to enhance their confidence.

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ANNEXES



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

ENGLISH DEGREE

STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRES

Dear student,

The aim of this brief questionnaire is to obtain information concerning ***your opinion about the difficulties you have in listening comprehension in English class.***

The following information will only be used for academic/research purposes. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible based on the following criteria.

**Instructions: Place an (X) in the box that best reflects your personal opinion.
(ONLY ONE ANSWER PER NUMBER)**

Difficulties as a listener

<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Statements</i>	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I use my experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the listening passage					
2	I listen to every detail to get the main idea of the listening passage					
3	I find it difficult to do listening activities because of my lack of knowledge of English language					
4	After my teacher stops the recording, I find it difficult to predict what will come next					
5	I find it difficult to hold a short dialogue after listening to a passage					
6.	I find it difficult to get a general understanding of the message from listening for the first time					
7.	I feel nervous and worried when I do not understand the listening passage					
8	I find it difficult to understand the listening passage because it is not of interest to me					
9	I find it more difficult to listen to a recorded text than to my teacher reading aloud					

Difficulties with the speaker

<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
10.	I find it difficult to understand natural speech which is full of hesitation and pauses					
11.	I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly					
12.	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk too fast					
13.	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk with varied accents					

Difficulties with the listening passage

<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
14.	Vocabulary used in the listening passage interferes with my listening comprehension					
15.	Some grammatical structures in the listening passage interfere with my listening comprehension					
16.	The length of the listening passage hinders me to interpret the message					
17.	The content of the listening passage is abstract					
18.	The poor quality of recording does not allow me to understand the listening passage					

THANKS FOR YOUR COLABORATION



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

ENGLISH DEGREE

STUDENT'S INTERVIEW

1. Do you think it is difficult a listening comprehension in the classroom?

Yes ()

No ()

Why? _____

2. Which of the following elements do you think hinders your ability to hear audio recordings in your classroom?

You as a listener ()

The listening text ()

The speaker (who issues the message) ()

Why? _____

3. According to your opinion, what factors make that listening to audio recordings in English in class be difficult? Name at least three for each element and why.

The listener. Why?

The listening passage. Why?

The speaker (who issues the message) Why?

4. What do you do when you do not understand the listening passage in English that the teacher makes you to hear in the classroom?

EXTRA INTERVIEW NOTES REGARDING TO THE TOPIC:

Thanks for your collaboration!