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**Students' perceptions on their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL  
classroom: An Ecuadorian case.**

**TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN**

**AUTOR: Ochoa Elizalde, Mirian Edith**

**DIRECTOR: Arias Córdova, María Olivia, Dra.**

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*2017*

## APROBACIÓN DEL DIRECTOR DEL TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

Doctora.

María Olivia Arias Córdova.

DOCENTE DE LA TITULACIÓN

De mi consideración:

El presente trabajo de titulación: “Students’ perceptions on their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classrooms: An Ecuadorian case” realizado por Ochoa Elizalde Mirian Edith, ha sido orientado y revisado durante su ejecución, por cuanto se aprueba la presentación del mismo.

Loja, enero de 2017

Dra. María Olivia Arias Córdova

## DECLARACIÓN DE AUTORÍA Y CESIÓN DE DERECHOS

“Yo, Ochoa Elizalde Mirian Edith declaro ser autor del presente trabajo de titulación: “Students’ perceptions on their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classrooms: An Ecuadorian case”, de la Titulación de Ciencias de la Educación mención Inglés, siendo María Arias Córdova directora del presente trabajo; y eximio expresamente a la Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja y a sus representantes legales de posibles reclamos o acciones legales. Además certifico que las ideas, conceptos, procedimientos y resultados vertidos en el presente trabajo investigativo, son de mi exclusiva responsabilidad.

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Autor: Ochoa Elizalde Mirian Edith

Cédula: 080248340-4

## **DEDICATION**

The present research project is dedicated to God, who has given me the opportunity to live and the wisdom to study and acquire the Bachelor Degree. I also want to dedicate it to all my family for their unconditional support to continue with the development of my research work that has been the main motivation to fulfill my career.

Mirian

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## **Abstract**

This research is about student's perceptions on their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classrooms: An Ecuadorian case. Its purpose is to know the listener factors that affect their listening comprehension, the speaker factors which interfere on the learners' listening skill, and how the listening passage hinders the EFL learners' listening comprehension.

The investigation project was carried out in the city of Quito, being the sample for this study, 125 students from second year of bachillerato selected from two private high schools, and 5 EFL teachers.

The methods applied in this research were quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative method was used for the narrative data in all of the process; and the quantitative method was utilized for the numerical data. The instruments employed were students' and teachers' questionnaires, and students' interviews.

Findings of this research show that the lack of knowledge of English language, poor vocabulary, pronunciation, varied accents, bad quality of the recordings, lack of conscious practice, and the demotivation, have been considered the main factors that cause listening comprehension difficulties to EFL learners.

**Key words:** listening comprehension, difficulties, English foreign language.



## **Resumen**

Este estudio analiza la percepción de los estudiantes sobre sus dificultades de comprensión auditiva en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera: Este es un caso Ecuatoriano. El propósito es conocer los factores que causan dificultad al estudiante de inglés en su comprensión auditiva: dificultades como oyente, dificultades con el hablante, y dificultades para entender mensajes orales.

Esta investigación se llevó a cabo en la ciudad de Quito, siendo la muestra para este estudio 125 estudiantes de 2do año de bachillerato, elegidos de dos colegios privados, y 5 profesores de inglés.

Los métodos aplicados en esta investigación fueron cuantitativos y cualitativos. El método cualitativo se utilizó para describir la información obtenida en todo el proceso; y el método cuantitativo para datos numéricos. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron cuestionarios dirigidos a estudiantes y profesores, y entrevistas a estudiantes.

Los resultados de este estudio muestran que la falta de vocabulario, desconocimiento de reglas gramaticales, incorrecta pronunciación, diferentes acentos, mala calidad de los audios, falta de práctica, y la desmotivación, han siendo considerados como los principales factores que dificultan la comprensión auditiva en inglés como lengua extranjera.

**Palabras claves:** dificultades, comprensión auditiva, inglés como lengua extranjera.

## **Introduction**

There is no denying that listening comprehension plays a key role in acquiring a language because it is the main source of communication into a classroom. For that reason, this research tries to explain the students' perceptions about their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classroom; being the objective of this study to know what are the factors that interfere on learners' listening comprehension and look for the best strategies to overcome those problems. For this purpose, three questions have been considered to determine those troubles; they are: how do the listener factors affect students' listening comprehension? Second, do the speaker factors interfere on the learners' listening skill? Third, how does the listening passage hinder the students' listening comprehension?

Some studies about listening comprehension difficulties have been considered to support this current research. One of those studies carried out by Camacho (2013) was focused on exploring and finding out what are the factors that affect listening skills and their implication on the development of communicative competence. When the whole data were gathered and then analyzed, the author identifies seven factors that affect EFL learners' listening comprehension; these are: (1) learners' motivation, (2) paralinguistic features (3) lack of vocabulary, (4) lack of concentration, (5) methodology, (6) the use of material, and (7) the background of the learners. Camacho concludes that the degree of motivation seemed to have an effect on participants' listening comprehension due to learners' motivation was related to external factors such as teachers and classmates' behavior, and internal factors such as frustration and anxiety.

Another study related to this research was carried out by Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011). This study was conducted to state the importance of listening skills into the communication. The results were the following: listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-

30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing about 9%.”. Taking into consideration these results, the author reported that listening is one of the most important skills to learn a language.

Additionally, Mianmahaleh and Rahimy (2015) consider that listening is a crucial skill for language learners because without understanding the spoken language, the problems in communication arise. For an effective communication comprehending the message is vital. Listening cannot be considered separately from any language learning process. It would be impossible to learn a language without listening.

The current research will provide important information about the kind of problems that Ecuadorian face in EFL classrooms when they participate in listening activities, and at the same time it will allow English teachers as well as students to find out what are the negative factor that interfere to get a good listening comprehension and look for the best strategies to overcome those problems and become better listeners. Nonetheless, this study could be regarded as a base for other studies about listening comprehension difficulties in EFL, generally for institution and people involved in education field related to English language teaching.

The present study had some limitations. First, some questions confused students and some of them had trouble to answer the questionnaire. A pilot questionnaire should be applied to students before the real one. Second, the amount of time available to administer the students’ questionnaires, interviews, and collect all the information was restricted.

In order to improve future investigations, it may be interesting to address research with participants from both kinds of high schools (private and public high schools) to compare the difficulties in listening comprehension related to those two groups of students.

## **Chapter I: Literature Review**

This section intends to explain the scientific information related to listening comprehension difficulties in English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms.

Listening comprehension is one of the most important skills a human being can have due to listening is essential to obtain information, understand oral messages and build up the necessary knowledge to learn a language; but some EFL learners have problems to get it.

In order to carry out this research, four items have been analyzed to determine the causes and problems that interfere with learners' listening, and activities to improve the listening skills; they are: listening comprehension, elements of listening comprehension, listening difficulties, and strategies to improve the listening skills.

On the other hand, six previous studies about EFL learning have been regarded to support this research and identify clearly which are the listening comprehension difficulties that EFL students face during their listening activities. Those previous studies will be a source to find out the causes and problems affecting listening skills, and at the same time, they will allow to English teachers and also learners look for the best strategies to improve the listening comprehension and become better listeners.

### **Listening comprehension**

Listening comprehension is the receptive skill in the oral mode. When we speak of listening what we really mean is listening and understanding what we hear. Barclay (2012) states that listening is a process that begins with an input of information and culminates with comprehension. And, many factors can affect that process, including hearing acuity, the physical environment and attention and language ability of the listener. These factors may be related to and have an impact on two subcomponents of the overall process of listening: the process that affect the receipt of an auditory message, both neurological and environmental,

and the cognitive processes which are related to the interpretation of the message. In addition, Aryadoust (2013) explains a history about this theme:

In the early decades of twentieth century, listening comprehension was perceived as a passive skill. Listening did not have a place in school curricula and language program until new movements in cognitive sciences, applied linguists and language assessment began to reveal its complexitive and importance (p. 47).

Likewise, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) provided an interesting approach in terms of listening activities in the classrooms and the lack of attention given to this skill. “For years, the role of listening in language acquisition and communication was undervalued and neglected. Second and foreign language (SL/FL) listening was often developed incidentally through language exercise where oral language was used” ( p. 395).

Nonetheless, to explore factors concerning to English Foreign Language (EFL) comprehension, it is important underline that the listening comprehension is the talent of getting a logical and realistic interpretation of a given spoken message due to “listening skill not only involves to a given spoken message, one should be capable of gathering information from that message” (Borromeo, 2013, p. 11).

It is not an easy skill, English foreign language learners have to apply different techniques and activities to enhance their listening comprehension because it requires a clear accurate and efficient decoding to be able of processing information immediately and on fast-real time. To this respect, Borromeo (2013) found:

When a message is sent to a listener, effective communication only take place when the listener has received and understood the complete message. On the contrary, if the receptor of a message has failed to obtain information, the communication will not be successful (p.11).

In the same way, Long and Doughty (2011) also make emphasis on listening comprehension difficulties in the EFL classrooms, the authors note “in the process of comprehension, meaning is not simply extracted from the input; it is constructed by listeners based on their knowledge of the language system, their prior knowledge, and the context of the interaction” (p. 395).

As can be noted, it is not an easy skill to develop so EFL learners need to learn and apply different strategies to improve their listening comprehension. In this regard, one of the most common techniques which has been applied into EFL classrooms is the bottom-up processing strategy in which learners analyze the words and sentence structures to enhance their comprehension of the spoken text, and also the top-down processing strategy in which learners make use of their previous knowledge.

Regarding listening competence, Gamble and Gamble (2012) divide the listening skill into four separated steps: (1) appreciative listening that is carry out just to get pleasure, (2) comprehensive listening that is done to gain knowledge, (3) critical/ deliberative listening to analyze and assess contents, and (4) empathetic listening which is applied to understand emotional content of a message. That is why, a learner has to recognize what his/her listening goal is, and select strategies properly to strength his/hers listening comprehension and become a better listener.

Likewise, Vandergrift (2010) studied learners’ strategies and difficulties in listening to accademic lectures, and explains that listening (or listening comprehension) is defined as the process of interpret oral messages through a sequence of mental processes; perception, lexical recognition, and linguistic structures. Furthermore, listening is demonstrated as an action process in which learners should have a good listening skill to descriminate between similar sounds, stress, intonation, varied accents, understand unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical structures, prasal verbs, idiom expressions, slangs, and colloquial language.

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

### **The speaker**

Factors affecting EFL learners with respect to speakers include pronunciation, speech rate, accents, intonation, and natural speeches which are full of hesitation and pauses.

According to Harmer (2012), “one of the main important sources of listening for students is the voice of their teacher. However, it is important, where possible, for students to be exposed to more than just that one voice, with all its idiosyncrasies” (p. 133). Besides, it is indispensable underline that the paralinguistic features such as the accent, rate of delivery, pronunciation, and intonation cause difficulties to achieve an excellent listening comprehension owing listeners have no much exposure to the different English accents.

Based on previous studies, comprehending listening passages in a foreign language is a challenging task for a language learner. That is why, English teachers as well as EFL learners have to be aware about the factors that cause difficulties to comprehend spoken messages, and apply the best listening strategies in order to overcome those troubles and enhance the listening comprehension.

Nonetheless, one of the main elements a speaker should take in mind to speak clearly is to use properly the semantics, apply correct pronunciation, and avoid to break grammatical rules to express clear ideas; especially in conversations with foreign language learners. According to Cook (2003), “a communicatively competent speaker knows what is formally possible in a language; (...) a communicatively competent person knows what is feasible” (p. 42-43).

### **The listener**

According to Richburg and Fisher (2012), there are two factors which affect student's ability to access aural information in the classroom; those include: qualities related to speakers, as well as qualities related to listeners. The qualities of the speaker are the intent of

the message, language and speech patterns, accent, and vocabulary quality. However, the qualities associated to listener are their developmental age, lack of vocabulary, knowledge base, and willingness for learning.

Additionally, there are some targets that an EFL learner should accomplish to get a good listening comprehension; these are “discriminating between similar sound, coping with and processing fast speech, processing stress and intonation differences, processing the meaning of different discourse markers, understanding communicative function” (Lynch and Meldensohn, 200 cited in Nation and Newton, 2009, p. 41).

It is evident that listening is one of the most important linguistic ability for the lives of learners since it is used as a principal medium for acquiring listening skills. Nonetheless, there are various factors which interfere on the learners’ listening skills. Those problems are difficult to discriminate sounds and intonation, unfamiliar vocabulary, lack of motivation and willingness to interact with advanced or native English speakers. But according to Byram and Hu (2013), the improvement or progress of the listening skills depends on the EFL learner’s effort and commitment to improve their listening comprehension, because they should employ autonomous listening activities out of the classrooms.

### **The listening passage**

The listening comprehension problems related to listening passage have been a frequent problem for English learners, especially when the listening passage is long and full of slangs, idiom expressions, unfamiliar words and complex grammatical structures.

In addition, the listening passages have been seen as vital items in developing foreign language competences. Tsagary and Banerjee (2016) refer to some linguistic elements which are immersed in a speech and state that listening difficulties have been found to be associated with a wide range of linguistic characteristics of a listening that include phonological, lexical, syntactic and grammar.



In other words, it is important take in mind, when many of the verbal fillers and repetitive characteristics of natural speech are included in a listening passage, the passage can become too long, and too slight in content. On the other hand, if a listening passage is too semantically intense and exposed to a lot of redundancies, it can be too difficult to understand because EFL learners sometimes use to have a limited knowledge of the English language.

Another factor which may cause problems to comprehend a listening passage are the use of long and complex sentences because when the lecture end the listeners do not remember the first part of the passage. So, they do not understand the lecture. In this way, O' Bryan and Hegelheimer (2009) points out two external problems affecting listening comprehension. They are narrator' accent and the length of the listening passage.

Futhermore, the lack of vocabular or unfamiliar words are a huge obstacle to comprehend a listening passage. Camacho (2014) explains that when the learners found unknown words in a listening exercise, they stopped listening to think about the meaning of the word, missing the following part of the passage.

According to Ur (2012), another problem to comprehend a listening passage may be due to learners probably mostly listening to people who speak a similar variety of English to theirs, but they need to be able to cope with other accents in various situations outside their home community to train the ear and understand any kind of listening passage.

As can be noted, the dimension of difficulty involved in listening comprehension, (comprehension of listening passages) can be based on two very important components. The first assumption may be the act of mentally represent the message intended by the speaker. This is the application of language comprehension processes. And the second one, the mental exploitation, also identified as reasoning of the message to appreciate clearly the meaning of the passage.

### **Listening comprehension difficulties for EFL learners, (Listening Problems and causes).**

The problems that interfere to achieve a good listening comprehension is manifested by a number of causes. Some of them are: difficulty to discriminate sounds, difficulty to understand reductions and contraction, processing fast speech, trouble to understand different accents and unfamiliar vocabulary. In this way Birch (2015) reported that:

Discrimination of English phonemes, especially vowels, can be problematic for ESL and EFL learners because most language has fewer vowels than English does. A common vowel system in the language has five spoken vowels, roughly those in *Bach, bait, beat, boat, and boot*. There are also some consonants sounds in English that can cause discrimination difficulties because they are uncommon the initial sound in *this, thin, ship chip* (p. 70).

It is evident that the linguistic reduction is a natural practice to native speakers but the most English foreign language learners find it complicated to comprehend the sense of the words even during a normal speech process. For instance, the words “going to” *change* to “*gonna*”, or contractions such as, “*I’ll*” for “*I will*” are hard terms to understand. Smith (2016) claims that a number of causes bring about listening comprehension problems and states that English is difficult in a second language largely because of its ephemeral nature, rich prosody, and particularly in interactive situation- pressure to respond immediately to the interlocutor. Specific challenging aspects of listening, that make this skill especially difficult for learner are clustering (e.g. where many separate words are perceived as one), redundancy (e.g., rephrasing or repetition, or elaboration), reduced forms (e.g., *I’ll* instead of *I will*), colloquial language (e.g., use of slangs and idioms), performance variable (e.g., hesitation and pauses), and the speed of the speech. That is why, many EFL learners feel it difficult to

understand a message since they are unable to comprehend natural spoken English delivered at normal speed because they do not understand natural spoken content of the speech.

Nevertheless, other investigations have been performed in order to find out what are the causes that bring about difficulty that interfere with learners' comprehension. In this perception, Hamouda (2013) carried out a research and defined that:

EFL learners have serious problems in English listening comprehension due to the fact that universities pay more attention to English grammar, reading and vocabulary. Listening and speaking skills are not important parts of many course books or curricula and teachers do not seem to pay attention to these skills while designing their lessons. Most teachers take it for granted and believe that it will develop naturally within the process of language learning (p.114).

As a consequence, a great number of English learners have to face some troubles to comprehend any kind of aural messages. It is important to highlight that the greatest listening comprehension difficulty is the problem that EFL learners have to control the sounds and understand the message when the speaker speaks at a rapid speed, even if the words spoken are the ones they are familiar with; but in addition to this issue, the teacher chooses words that students do not know, they have to stop to think about the meaning of that word and practically they will miss the next part of the speech.

According to Idrus, Erkoc, Gurgenidze, Boldisor, and Tcholacova (2014) "the problem of not understanding due to unknown words under the message scale appeared among the most frequently reported problem (53.6%). So, this result confirms that the unknown words are among the widely causes that affect listening comprehension" (p. 90).

Additionally, Wong (2010) states that sometimes a poor speech brings unpleasant situations to the L2 learner. However, a L2 learner can not put the blame on the teacher for his

poor listening; it is his responsibility to use effective strategies to improve his/her listening skills.

Another difficulty that affects listening comprehension is the lack of willingness and discouragement. Zou (2013) reported that many students articulated their need to practice English listening always. Nevertheless, as the semester progressed, their enthusiasm toward the extending online listening tasks faded and the effort that they put into the tasks gradually decreased as the semester progressed. In addition, Zou declares that motivation is really important in any human activity and, especially, it is vital for language learning. It leads to increase effort, energy and perseverance related to students' learning to build up the necessary knowledge to learn a language. In other words, a student with high motivation may learn faster than a student with lack of motivation.

The short time devoted to listening activities is another huge problem that EFL learners have to face to improve their listening comprehension. In this way White (2010) argues that the most of the teachers do not spend much time carrying out listening activities. Aproximatelly, two or for minutes is spent on listening to the tape or recording, and when finished, more time is spent on checking the answers to the comprehension questions than discussing the problems and why the answers were wrong. Other teachers prefer to play the recording again, hoping that learners will obtain right answer and avoid to discuse the topic.

### **Strategies and activities to develop listening comprehension skill.**

Previous investigations have been conducted to identify the types of listening strategies which learners can put into practice to improve their listenig comprehension.

Geranpayeh and Taylor (2013) state that the purpose for listening should be clear, and the listening activities have to be applied according to the listener's necessity. So, it is important make a distintion between transactional and interactional purpose. communication which has a transactional purpose is focused on transphering information. Transactional

listening is often used in situations which require accurate comprehension of a message and where there may be no opportunity for clarification with the speaker, as in the case of public announcements. On the other hand, the communication which is interactional in purpose occurs largely to satisfy the social needs of the participants. For example, a casual conversations. Interactional listening is therefore socially oriented and highly contextualised.

In addition, Harmer (2012) points out two types of listening which are known as intensive and extensive listening. Intensive listening is different from extensive listening in that students listen specially in order to work on listening skill, and in order to study the way in which English is spoken. It usually takes place in classroom or language laboratories, and typically occurs when teachers are present to guide students through any listening difficulties, and point them to areas of interest.

Regarding the listening strategies, Davis and Davey (2014) make emphasis on three forms of communication which can be useful as listening strategies in a classroom. Thus, learners can be engaged in effective communication in three ways: (1) in one way communication in which students are engaged as your audience through rhetorical questions, carefully constructed presentations, and multimedia; (2) in interactive communication in which the students are responding, asking questions, adding ideas, and reacting to your presentation; and (3) in transactional communication in which communication evolves based on the discussion of the topic.

Autonomous listening activities are very important to develop the listening skills due to language classrooms seldom offer sufficient listening opportunities for a sustained progress. Rost and Wilson (2013) state that it is necessary to carry on supplemental learning opportunities because when the learners practice autonomous listening, they improve their language knowledge successfully.

A great number of students have problems to identify the main idea of a listening passage because they are focused on comprehend the words separately. Thus, it is necessary encourage students make listening activities only to recognize the main idea and supporting ideas of the message. Barclay (2012 ) explains that students can practice by listening to a short lecture and then suggesting a title, summarizing a story, or picking out the main ideas, and supporting the details. Likewise, graphic organizers or guided notes can assist students to focus on essential ideas.

Herrell and Jordan (2012) also defined two valuable strategies which help students be engaged in listening. First of all, Read Aloud Plus involves the teacher reading text aloud to students. The students are actively involved in the plus part of the lesson and so they feel more motivated to listening carefully as the teacher reads aloud. Adicionaly, dictoglos is an exciting strategy because it gives students a chance to explore literary and academic language in depth. It exposes students to spoken and written English at a level above they everyday spoken English they hear and gives them practice in listening and writing more formal English.

In other words, it is important to draw attention to autonomous listening strategies which allow EFL learners be self-directed in listening activities in which learners choose what to listen to, seek feedback on their comprehension, respond in ways they choose, and monitor their own progress. All these activities do not involve teachers or classrooms, for that reason they are known as autonomous listening strategies.

Based on previous information, numerous studies have been regarded to identify the factors that may cause EFL learners´ listening difficulties, and determine the best strategies to overcome those listening problems. Besides, those previous studies help us to demonstrate the importance of perform listening activities in EFL classrooms; because without good strategies and a lot of listening, learners will not be able of understanding all kind of speech and

communicate effectively. For this purpose, six of those studies have been considered to support this literature review.

The first study was carried out by Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) in Malaysia. Its purpose was to identify the role that listening plays in daily and educational process. After analysing the data, the author found that the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing about 9%. Taking into consideration these results, it is possible to emphasize that listening is the most important skill to learn a 2L and a foreign language.

As well, the author declared that even if learners can understand the surface meaning of the text, they may have considerable difficulties in comprehending the whole meaning of the passage unless they are familiar with the context. Nonverbal clues such as facial expressions, nods, gestures, or tone of voice can also be easily misinterpreted by listener from different cultures.

Finally, Gilakjani and Ahmadi show three important statements that were analyzed during this study: the significance of listening, the study of listening teaching theory, and use of most advanced listening teaching methods. The authors claim that in many English language classes, grammar translation method is used for teaching, and according to the authors, this method has been found inadequate to produce efficient English speakers and listeners. Thus, Gilakjani and Ahmadi propose to use a new method called communicative approach because, according to them, it is crucial in the development of English language communicative competences.

The second study was carried out by Camacho (2013) at a public university in Colombia. The purpose of this study was to explore factors that affect listening skills, their implication, and development of communicative competence. The data analysis was conducted in the light of three research statements: the potential difficulties students faced

when the negative factors were presented, and the impact of those difficulties on their listening comprehension. After analyzing the gathered data, the author identifies seven factors that affect advanced-level EFL learners' listening comprehension: (1) learners' motivation, (2) paralinguistic features, (3) lack of vocabulary, (4) lack of concentration, (5) methodology, (6) the use of material and, (7) the learners' background.

Lastly, Camacho concludes that the motivation seemed to have an huge effect on participants' listening comprehension due to learners' motivation was related to external factors such as teachers and classmates' behavior, and internal factors such as frustration and anxiety.

The third study was conducted by Su and Liu (2012) at some English language schools in Taiwan. Its purpose was to promote a balanced English learning process, covering the four language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking with the goal of improving the English proficiency level in Taiwan. After analysing all the gathered information, the authors found six difficulties that EFL learners reported during this study:

(1) Hardship to link the words heard to the meaning in time, (2) failury to grasp the meaning of th sentences even when their understanding each word heard in the sentences, (3) mistaking one world for another that carries a similar pronunciation, (4) inability to remmber the words, phrases or sentences just heard, (5) incapability to break a long conversation into meaningful units, and (6) failure to integrate every word heard into a meaning.

Su and Liu concluded that in an EFL listening activities, it is imperative that teachers provide their students with authentic materials: Therefore, the author noted it is crucial for learners to acknowledge their own listening difficulties or weaknesses, learn from their mistakes to overcome their listening problems.



The fourth study carried out by Mianmahaleh and Rahimy (2015) at a public university in Iran had as objective to emphasize the importance of listening, identify some listening strategies and summarize the neglect that listening comprehension has to endure for a long time. Mianmahaleh and Rahimy briefly described the lack of attention given to listening activities in Iran and argue that listening is the most forgotten skill in second language learning, because the listening was paid the least attention of the four language skills. This neglect gets the fact that the teacher do not spend more time on students' listening and look for ways of improving students' listening skill. Unfortunately, it is supposed that listening comprehension is a passive activity, but on the contrary, it is an active process because people can not develop oral skill if the speaker is not understood by the listener. It is a process by which the listener share his/ her mutual beliefs because the communication is not only related to being able to speak. To get a good communication, the listener should understand clearly what the speaker is saying, and then give his/her opinion.

The learners must to have substantial awareness and control of their metacognitive activities and then cognitive and socio-affective strategies respectively. So, it is important highlight that the listening is a complex process for learners which should be monitored by the teachers to help learners become successful listeners.

Mianmahaleh and Rahimy conclude that listening is a main skill for language learners because without understanding the spoken language, problems in communication arise. For effective communication comprehending, the message is vital. Listening cannot be considered separately from any language learning process. So, it would be impossible to learn a language without listening.

The fifth study emphasises the lack of strategies and willingness to apply listening activities in EFL classrooms. According to this study carried out by Bozorgian and Pyllar (2013), shows that in English language institution the process of listening skills is not

emphasized despite teachers have a wide access to listening materials with supplementary audiovisual technology into the classrooms; such as: CDs, DVD, videos, tape recorders, computers, projectors and Internet. The authors found out that the English teachers do not give sufficient attention to the process of listening activities, and recognize that listening activities are undervaluated globally.

Bozorgian and Pyllar confirmed that the language used for listening instruction did not present an extra challenge for students because all the commands are given in the students' mother tongue. What is more, only a short time is devoted to English listening activities.

According to this study, currently listening skills are taught through vocabulary introduction in pre-listening to the students, then teachers examine correct responses in post-listening comprehension questions. The authors argue that the process of explicitly teaching listening skills is overlooked; but the product of listening skills is measured through exams involving multiple-choice or true/false comprehension questions which are regular features of classroom practice.

The findings of this study showed that despite some instructions and recommendation about listening techniques, strategies, and activities, which are specified in the syllabus of many English language institutions, English teachers do not put into practice those listening strategies in their EFL classrooms. Various teachers only consider the listening as an extra activity, but they do apply listening tests to their students.

The sixth study was carried out by Khan and Karim (2014) at district Bannun in Pakistan where the participants were secondary level students. The purpose of this study was to provide some innovative strategies for improving listening skill of English language. It brings to light a number of strategies and activities which can be applied to help students to progress in their listening comprehension. The authors propose six listening activities which may be performed by teachers into EFL classrooms:

- 1- Listening and performing actions and operations; in this category a response is shown by the listeners to things like directions, instruction and descriptions in various contexts. For example, listening and drawing a picture.
- 2- Listening and transferring information; there are two kinds of information transfer which are: spoken to-written and spoken-to-spoken. In spoken-to-written information one writes while hearing information, while in spoken-to-spoken one hears the information and transmits it in speech.
- 3- Listening and solving problems; various activities, belonging to this category, can be performed by a teacher. These activities include: word games in which the answer is derived from verbal clues. For example, a jigsaw mystery.
- 4- Listening, evaluating, and manipulating information; these outcomes challenge the intellect of the listener where the listener evaluates the information received. For example making predictions from information received.
- 5- Interactive listening-and-speaking; negotiating meaning through questioning/answering routines. It is focused to transmit the information as well as negotiate meaning in interactive listener/speaker exchanges.
- 6- Listening for enjoyment, pleasure, and sociability; activities in this outcome includes: songs, stories, plays, poems and jokes.

This study concludes that very few teachers followed the technique of reading aloud a paragraph for improving the listening skills of their students. Furthermore, a great number of teachers gave instructions to students in their native language and just very few teachers gave instructions in the target language.

## **Chapter II: Method**

### **Setting and participants**

This research was carried out in the city of Quito, being the sample for this study, 125 students from 5 different senior English classrooms taken from two private high schools. The participants were only second year of Bachillerato students.

The participation was anonymous, the sex of them was not considered for this study. As well as, neither the English level of the students nor the age was regarded.

### **Procedure**

The first step to carry out this study was to gather the theoretical information required to have the necessary source to define the aspects involved in this research. The subjects that were regarded in this paper as basic items to investigate and analyze the EFL learners difficulties are the following: listening comprehension definition, the elements of the listening comprehension (the listener, the speaker, the listening passage), listening comprehension difficulties for EFL learners (listening problems and causes), strategies and activities to develop listening comprehension skill.

Additionally, useful data on previous studies from researches done around the world were collected as a way to support the importance of listening skill. Those previous studies were a source of scientific backing, which demonstrated numerous listening comprehension problems that EFL learners have to face to comprehend listening passages or varied speeches into their classrooms or out of them.

This study was conducted by using a mixed method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative procedures. The qualitative method was used to describe the information in all of the process, which was carried out to identify the type of listening difficulties that interfere to comprehend different listening passages in English. The

quantitative research was applied for numerical data. It was focused on analyzing the teacher and students' perceptions about EFL listening comprehension difficulties in the process of learning, and determine the level of frequency to each listening comprehension problem.

The instruments applied were surveys, note- takings and a semi-structured interviews. The surveys were applied to collect the most relevant information and note-takings to collect first hand data that was as base of the investigation. Likewise, the interview was used as research instrument to know what was the student's opinion about their listening difficulties in the classrooms, which facilitated the process of gathering information.

For gathering the data, two high schools were visited in order to ask for permission to carry out this research. Having the authorization, three classrooms from a high school and two from another one were selected to administer the student's questionnaire. They were learners from second year of bachillerato. In each classroom twenty five students were chosen randomly to answer the questionnaire, and three students per classroom to reply the interviews. Besides, five teachers were selected to answer the teacher's questionnaire in terms of obtaining the teacher's opinion about the listening comprehension difficulties in English foreign language.

Likewise, the instruments designed for this research were a student's questionnaire and a student's interview. The student's questionnaire was composed of eighteen questions; nine of them were designed to obtain information about the listener's difficulties, four questions in relation to the speaker and five of them with reference to the listening passage. The interview sheet was planned in order to obtain the student's opinion about the factors that affect their listening comprehension and what they do when they do not understand the listening passage.

When the entire student's questionnaire and whole interview sheets were collected, the data gathered was organized in excel tables to be quantitative analyzed. Moreover, graphs

were created in order to facilitate the identification of the students' perception affecting listening comprehension difficulties and the description of the results. The outcomes obtained from the student's questionnaires were related to the results obtained from the interview sheet and the teacher's questionnaire was used to reinforce or contrast the results.

The listening comprehension difficulties exposed by EFL learners in the classrooms were the main aspects considered to carry out this research. As well as, the data according to student's perception were analyzed, described, and interpreted regarding the factors that may interfere to understand successfully a listening passage: grammatical structures, pronunciation, vocabulary, fast or paused speeches, recordings and listening passage quality.

Furthermore, the current research was designed to know the learners' perception on their listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classrooms. With the purpose of clarifying these subjects, the results obtained from students' interviews were essential to get important information about the problems that Ecuadorian students have to face to understand listening passages in English. For this purpose, three variables have been considered to determine the factors that cause those problems: difficulties as listener, difficulties to understand speaker's speech and difficulties to understand listening passages.

In addition, this investigation project was focused on finding out different strategies, techniques, and activities which can be applied by the learners to improve their listening comprehension in English as a foreign language.

Finally, this study was an attempt to further understand factors affecting listening skills and their implication in communicative competence. All the EFL listening comprehension problems, found in this paper, were described and analyzed by answering the following questions: First, how do the listener factors affect their listening comprehension? Second, do the speaker factors interfere on the learners' listening skill? Third, how does the listening passage hinder the students' listening comprehension?

## Chapter III: Results and Discussion

### Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

This section describes the results obtained in the field research carried out in two private high schools where English is taught as a foreign language to teenagers. The data obtained were tabulated in tables and graphs in order to facilitate the analysis.

The results were analyzed in qualitative and quantitative form. In the qualitative analysis, the student's interview was useful in gathering participants' opinions, ideas and thoughts. In quantitative analysis, the student's questionnaire was suitable to prove the frequency of some factors affecting listening comprehension.

#### Quantitative and qualitative analysis

##### How do the listener factors affect their listening comprehension?

English foreign language listeners, during their learning process, are exposed to face various negative factors which affect their listening comprehension. They might be lack of knowledge of English language, difficulty to discriminate between similar sounds, nerves and worry, and poor vocabulary.

**Table 1**

<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
1	I use my experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the listening passage	11%	15%	20%	37%	17%
2	I listen to every detail to get the main idea of the listening passage	8%	24%	32%	24%	12%

3	I find it difficult to do listening activities because of my lack of knowledge of English language	4%	12%	20%	44%	20%
4	After my teacher stops the recording, I find it difficult to predict what will come next	6%	10%	22%	44%	18%
5	I find it difficult to hold a short dialogue after listening to a passage	9%	12%	31%	28%	20%
6.	I find it difficult to get a general understanding of the message from listening for the first time	8%	16%	36%	20%	20%
7.	I feel nervous and worried when I do not understand the listening passage	6%	12%	31%	31%	20%
8	I find it difficult to understand the listening passage because it is not of interest to me	5%	20%	35%	28%	12%
9	I find it more difficult to listen to a recorded text than to my teacher reading aloud	10%	26%	35%	15%	14%

Author: Mirian Ochoa

Source: Student's questionnaire

Once the data were collected and the research statements from the student's questionnaire categorized under three indicators: the listener, the speaker and listening passages; all these items were tabulated and analyzed one by one with the purpose of



explaining what is their rank of occurrence as listening difficulty and how these factors can impact or interfere to get a perfect listening comprehension in English.

The first research statement in Table 1, regarding the assumption that EFL learners use their experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the listening passage, the results demonstrate that the 37% of the students selected the option "often" with respect to this item; 20% "sometimes", and 17% "always", 15% "seldom", and a small number of them 11% marked the option "never" respectively.

These outcomes have similarity with the perception of the teachers who expressed that EFL learners, specially elementary and intermediate students, "often" use their experience and background knowledge to comprehend a passage because they do not have an excellent English level to comprehend a passage naturally as advanced level students do it.

However, previous studies highlight the importance of using background knowledge of a topic to understand certain listening passages. This technique has been considered as a good strategy to improve the listening skills because learners put into practice their previous knowledge by connecting them with the new information. According to Zhang and Barber (2008), on a cognitive processing level, the relevance of the passage to prior knowledge and the mental effort to connect the prior knowledge and the new information seemed to be crucial for enhancing the motivation and understanding of the aural passage.

In the second research statement, students were questioned if they listen to every detail of the listening passage to get its main idea. The participants responded in a variety of ways: 32% of the students selected the option "sometimes", 24% of them selected "often", 24% "seldom", and 12% "always". However, a minimum numbers of participants 8% reported that they "never" listen to every detail of the listening passage to get the main idea.

The students' perception about this assumption is alike to the teachers' estimation. Three English teachers replied that "often" students require listening to every detail of a topic in order to get its main idea.

This problem may be attributed to poor knowledge of English language which disable learners to understand the whole message and get the main idea without be focused on listening to every detail. For example, when an EFL learner is immersed into that situation, he/she feels anxiety and asks for listening to the recording three, four or several times in order to grasp every detail and comprehend the message.

The strategy of listening to every detail of the listening passage may provide some advantages but also disadvantages. In terms of advantages, if learners pay attention to every single detail of a listening passage, they will have the opportunity of learning vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm or intonation, and probably enhance their listening skills. On the other hand, one of the disadvantages is the huge effort that learners have to do to understand the speech because while they are trying to understand every single word they might lose the most important element that is the main idea of the topic. It may bring about lack of motivation and frustration to foreign language learners because they have to listen to a passage over and over to understand it.

Hamouda (2012) states that some foreign language learners try to understand every single word of incoming speech, but actually, doing so is both unnecessary and impossible. It is not even advisable because when they are trying hard to get every individual word or phrase, listeners are not seeing "the forest for the trees."

From the students' perception in Table 1, research statement 3, regarding to the assumption that students find it difficult to do listening activities because of their lack of knowledge of English language, the results show that it is one of the main problems that interferes with listening comprehension. A great number of participants 44% reported that

they "often" have to face this problem, 20% "sometimes" 20% "always", and the remaining groups 12% "seldom" and 4% of them answered that they "never" have experience difficulties to comprehend a listening passage in English classrooms.

These statistics are supported by the estimation of the teachers who declared that the lack of knowledge of English language is a problem that "often" cause hindrance to accomplish a good listening comprehension.

In relation to the students' interview, the interviewee 1 said "I am not good at my listening activities because of my lack of English language knowledge (limited English vocabulary and poor knowledge of grammatical structures)". The interviewee 3 replied "it is impossible for me to find out the main idea of the listening passage because of my poor vocabulary". The interviewee 2 said "sometimes, I recognize the meaning of many words in written texts, but I do not understand the same words when I listen to speeches".

According to the results exposed during this study, the lack of knowledge of English language (lack of vocabulary, poor knowledge of grammar, difficulty to discriminate between similar sound and interpret speeches) has been reflected as a huge problem that affects much to learners' listening comprehension. Bingol, Celik et al. (2014) determined that the trouble to understand a listening passage may be produced because there are many words that have more than one meaning and, if those words are used in their less common meaning, students get confused. In other words, it is clear that the unknown words are among the widely causes that affect listening comprehension.

In the fourth research statement, regarding to the assumption that after the teacher stops the recording, students find it difficult to predict what will come next, the students' perception table shows that 44% of them selected the option "often" to this item.

Additionally, 20% of participants remarked "sometimes" and 18% "always", 10% "seldom", and 6% supported the category "never".

According to the perception of the students, the difficulty to predict is not a problem that affects just to their listening comprehension in their foreign language, it is also a trouble that interferes with their first language listening skills. The interviewee 3 said “we usually listen to a passage superficially that is why we have problems to retain information or figure out the message that the speaker is trying to transmit”.

Besides, one of the teachers argued that the problem to predict something about a certain topic is “sometimes” caused by the lack of concentration of the students. As well, it may be attributed to the poor experience of the learner to interpret the main idea of a passage or trouble to deduce what the speaker is trying to say.

The fifth research statement focused on identifying whether students find it difficult to hold a short dialogue after listening to a passage, the perception of the students about this assumption shows that a great number of students have trouble to hold a short dialogue after listening to a passage. Thirty one per cent selected the option “sometimes”, 28% marked “often”, 20% selected the option “always”; the remaining groups 12 % “seldom”, and 9% reported they have “never” experienced difficulty to hold a short dialogue about a listening passage.

The findings clearly determine that the difficulty to hold a short dialogue about a certain topic has been considered as a frequent problem that EFL learners have to face on their classrooms. One the interviewee in his comment said “Sometimes, I understand more and less the listening passage, but I do not have enough vocabulary to express my opinion about the subject”.

The strategy of holding a short dialogue after listening to a passage may help learners to improve their listening skills and speaking skills. It may be applied as a technique that enables learners to consider the main ideas of a listening information, share and defend their

opinions in response to the listening passage and question ideas and opinions contributed by others.

EFL learners' difficulty to hold a short dialogue after listening to a passage may be attributed to the lack of knowledge of English language, lack of vocabulary, deficiency in grammatical structures, as well as sometimes the pronunciation of the students is not good enough and they feel nerves to express their opinion. Hamouda (2013) performed a study of listening comprehension problems in some English listening classrooms at a public University in Saudi Arabia. Findings of this research indicates that the lack of words is another major problem that interfere with students' listening comprehension. The author highlighted the comment of the participants, one interviewee says "my vocabulary is poor; it is very difficult to me to understand what the conversation is, especially when the word that I do not know is the key word, so, I cannot give my opinion about the topic".

The sixth research statement focused on evaluating how frequent EFL learners find it difficult to get a general understanding of the message from listening for the first time, the results showed that it is an obstacle that interfere to practice listening activities into EFL classrooms. Thirty six per cent of the students selected the option "sometimes", 20% "often", 20% "always" and 16% "seldom, and 8% "never". Thus, it is possible state the trouble to get a general understanding of the message from listening for the first time as one of the most frequent problem in EFL classrooms.

These results demonstrate that students have a huge limitation to comprehend a listening passage naturally. In relation to this item, one of the teachers reported that the difficulty to understand a message from listening for the first time is really a challenge that students have to face when they step in their classroom because they have problem to discriminate sounds and do not understand the message for the first time; that is why, it is necessary to repeat the recording three or four times an even more times.

To improve the comprehension of listening passage, it is highly recommended to listen to different kind of aural messages, slow and fast speeches every day, and guide students to get the main idea of the listening passage. This reflects in the findings by Barclay (2012 ) who states that it is important to guide students to listen for the main idea and supporting ideas. Students can practice by listening to a short lecture and then suggesting a title, summarizing a story, or picking out the main ideas, and supporting the conclusions. Additionally, graphic organizers or guided notes can assist students to focus on essential ideas.

According to previous studies, some EFL learners have found it difficult to understand a recorded passage because they have problems to discriminate sounds, poor of vocabulary, problems to understand the main idea of the message or simply because students are not willing to learn and do not pay attention to the listening passage. Birch (2015) supports this estimation and states that discrimination of English phonemes, especially vowels, can be problematic for ESL or EFL learners because most language has fewer vowels than English does.

The research statement 7 in Table 1, regarding the assumption if learners feel nervous and worried when they do not understand the listening passage, shows that a considerable number of students reported have felt afraid when they do not understand the listening passages. The results were the following: 31% “often”, 31% “sometimes”, 20% “always”, and 12% “seldom”. On the other hand, only 6% of the participants responded that they have “never” experienced panic when they fail to understand the spoken passage.

The most of the teachers confirmed these results, they reported that students feel nervous, frustrated, and exasperated when they do not understand the listening passage. Likewise, one of the teachers said “The nerves and worry have been always an obstacle to learn a foreign language because it drives learners to fall on anxiety, frustration and demotivation to interact with others in the target language”.

As can be noted, the nerves and anxiety have been considered as very negative factors which create psychological problems that interfere with learners' listening comprehension because it causes panic and demotivation. Zou (2013) declares that the motivation is the most important in any human activity and, especially, it is vital for language learning because it leads to increase effort, energy and perseverance which is very important to build up the necessary knowledge to learn a language. In other words, a student with high motivation may learn faster than a student with lack of motivation.

Regarding the eighth statement in Table 1, related to the assumption that EFL learners find it difficult to understand the listening passage because it is not of their interest, the results reveal that a great number of students reported have problems to concentrate and understand uninteresting passages. The rates were the following: 35% "sometimes", 28% "often", 20% "seldom" and 12% "always". But, only 5% reported they "never" experience difficulty to comprehend topics that are not interesting for them.

Additionally, some teachers proposed that "almost always" the themes which are not interesting for the learners cause difficulty to enhance the listening skills because those topics do not call the attention of the students, which drive them to feel bored and demotivated to develop the listening activities.

On the other hand, during the interview, one of the students expressed an extraordinary perception. The student said "I am interested on improving my English, and to enhance my listening comprehension in English, I have to read and listen to any type of topics in order to get familiar with all kind of vocabulary. It should not be an obstacle to learn a foreign language".

According to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), a listening text is easier to understand when students find the topic of the listening passages interesting. However, students

sometimes feel that the listening activities are very tiring even if they are interested because it requires an enormous amount of effort to follow the meaning.

The ninth research statement in Table 1, focused on assessing whether EFL learners in the classroom find it more difficult to listen to a recorded text than to their teacher reading aloud, shows that the 35% of participants reported that “sometimes” it is difficult for them to understand recorded texts, 26% “seldom”, 15% “often”, and 14% “always”. However, 10% of students reported that they “never” have problem to understand recorded information and they prefer to listen to a recorded text than to their teacher.

According to the opinion of some students, these two factors (the recorded text and the teacher) in some cases can be considered as negative elements because interfere to enhance listening proficiency. One of the participants said “in terms of teachers, the problems may be caused because sometimes they do not have a good English, the pronunciation is not clear, and the accent is really different to the native English speakers; and in relation to the recorded texts, the problems may be caused due to the tape recorders sometimes do not produce clear sounds and have poor quality”.

Additionally, some participants declared to prefer listening to recorded information rather than their teacher reading aloud. Eight out of fifteen participants reported that the recorded texts almost always have good pronunciation and the rhythm and intonation of the voices change in accordance to the circumstances or scenes emphasizing different emotions; such as: happiness, sadness, pleasure, exclamation, etc.; especially when they listen to dialogues, conversations or stories.

But at the same time, seven out of fifteen students highlighted some advantages about their teachers. The interviewee 5 said “when we listen to our teacher we have the opportunity to ask clarification questions or ask to repeat just the word that is unfamiliar for us, and see the teachers’ body movements or facial expression as clues to understand better the message”.



According to Harmer (2012), “one of the main important sources of listening for students is the voice of their teacher. However, it is important, where possible, for students to be exposed to more than just that one voice, with all its idiosyncrasies” (p. 133)

From Table 1, the assumption which was found as the most frequent, and that affects to the learners’ listening comprehension in English classrooms is the difficulty to do listening activities due to the lack of the knowledge of the English language. Inside this assumption, there are immersed several factors that adversely affect to listening comprehension; they are: trouble to discriminate between similar sounds, problem to process fast speech, stress and intonation, lack of vocabulary, difficulty to process the meaning of discourse markers and understand all the meanings of the words due to the most of words have more than one meaning.

Barclay (2012) explains that listening is a process that begins with an input of information and culminates with comprehension. Many factors can affect that process, including hearing acuity, the physical environment and attention and language ability of the listener. These factors may be related to and have an impact on two subcomponents of the overall process of listening: the process that affect the receipt of an auditory message, both neurological and environmental; and the cognitive processes that relate to interpreting the message.

### **Do the speaker factors interfere on the learners’ listening skills?**

Problems of listening comprehension related to speaking can be seen in relation to natural speech, fast speech, pronunciation, hesitation and pauses in speeches, and varied accents.

**Table 2**

<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	6%	8%	24%	34%	28%
11.	I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly	8%	10%	24%	36%	22%
12.	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk too fast	4%	15%	21%	23%	37%
13.	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk with varied accents	8%	14%	22%	20%	36%

Author: Mirian Ochoa

Source: Student's questionnaire

Regarding the evidence seen in Table 2, it is possible to conclude that in the first assumption the view of the students is negative. A great group of students 34% reported that they “often” have difficulties to understand natural speeches which are full of hesitation and pauses. Additionally, the 28% of participants selected the option “always”, 24% “sometimes”, and 8% “seldom”. On the other hand, only a small number of students 6% expressed that speeches which are full of hesitation and pauses “never” bother them to understand the spoken messages.

The students' perception is similar to the teachers' estimation who said that natural speeches which are full of hesitation and pauses "often" cause difficulties to learners' listening comprehension.

As can be noted, those kind of speeches really are a challenge for EFL learners because they only learn and practice English when they step in their classroom. For example, some students probably just hear very careful pronunciation and do not have opportunities to interact with native speakers. For that reason, they do not develop the ability of understanding different accents and intonation.

Nevertheless, to improve the listening skills and comprehend natural speeches full of hesitation and pauses, learners should not just listen to the same type of English speeches all the time. They must listen to varied aural messages, listen to news, watch TV shows, and conversations between native speakers from different English countries. Thus, when the students encounter this language in real life conversations, it will not be strange to them.

In consequence, when native speakers speak, they often hesitate and say phrases or sentences which are ungrammatical structured. These situations are natural features of an English speech spoken by a native speaker but it may be either a help or a hindrance, depending on the listeners' ability to interpret a message. Hasan (2010) states that hesitation and pauses in spontaneous speeches cause perceptual problems and comprehension errors for non-native speakers.

The second research statement in Table 2, based on the assumption that EFL learners find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly, the statistics about this item show the following scale: 36% of participants selected the option "often", 22% "always", 24% "sometimes", and 10% "seldom". On the other hand, only a minimum number of students 8% reported that unclear pronunciation "never" interferes with

their listening comprehension. As can be noted, understanding the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly really is not an easy task for EFL learners.

Based on the perception of the students about their difficulties to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly. One strategy to overcome this problem may be to watch videos or listen to audios between native speakers talking in informal language where they use slangs, idioms, jargons, reductions, and colloquial language to get familiar with real life conversations.

Consequently, it means that the most native English speakers sometimes do not pronounce the words clearly, and they speak using slangs, idioms, contractions, or use informal pronunciation of the words causing really an obstacle to comprehend the listening passages. Wong (2010) declares that sometimes a poor speech brings unpleasant situations to foreign language learner. However, an EFL learner can not put the blame on the teacher for his poor listening; it is his responsibility to use effective strategies to improve his/her listening skills.

From the students' perception in Table 2, regarding the research statement 3 focused on identifying if EFL learners find it difficult to understand well a message when speakers talk too fast, the results show that the 37% of participants selected the option "always", 23% "often", 21% "sometimes", and 15% "seldom". And only a small number of students 4% did not consider it as a listening comprehension obstacle, so they remarked the option "never".

As well as, three out of five of the teachers reported that the speed of delivery is one of the greatest obstacle to understanding because learners "often" find it easier to understand speakers who had a slow rate of speech and difficulty to understand speaker with a quick speech, even if the words or phrases spoken are the ones they are familiar with. That is why, the movies and TV shows seem too difficult to comprehend.

As is evident from the results, understanding English listening passage spoken by native speakers is challenging for many EFL learners. However, this is not just because of speed, even more than speaking quickly, the reason why English speakers seem difficult to understand is related to the changes or informal pronunciation of words and phrases that native speakers use in real life conversations. This transformation of sounds means that there is a huge difference between the English language spoken in classrooms and the real English spoken by native speakers.

According to Hamouda (2013), faster speech rates, whether computer-manipulated or natural produce, tend to have a negative impact on the comprehension of the EFL learners. Likewise, when the speaker speaks at a rapid speed, it is difficult to learners to comprehend what is being said, even if the words spoken are the ones they are familiar with.

The fourth statement in Table 2, regarding to the hypothesis that students find it difficult to understand well when speakers talk with varied accents, the results show that the 36% of the participants “always” have problem to comprehend speeches with different accents, 22% “sometimes”, 20% “often”, and 14% “seldom”. However, 8% of the students marked that the varied accents “never” has been an obstacle to comprehend a speech.

Considering the students and teachers’ estimation, the varied accents in English language has been regarded as a frequent trouble that causes listening difficulties to EFL learners. One of the teachers said “the entire English individuals have their accent and use slangs or colloquial language to talk and communicate among them. But, the difficulty to understand a listening passage which is full of hesitations, pauses and varied accents may not be overcome if the learner does not have much exposure to listen to different English accents.

Nonetheless, there are some activities which can help to improve the listening skills and understand diverse accents. It is really recommended to watch diverse TV programs, conversation and films where the speakers use different accents. The interaction with native

speakers is also very helpful to enhance the listening skills because when someone listen to more real English, the ear soon adapt to hearing various accents.

According to Smallwood Becnel (2013), the difficulty to understand well when speakers talk with varied accents not necessarily means lack of understanding of English. Adult learners of English often have a strong accent but also have a good command of English. Likewise, it is impossible to get familiar with the entire English accent around the world because English is a world language.

The accents in English, as a world language, have a huge variation from individual to individual. Ur (2012) states that we need to take into account the wide variation in the way English words are pronounced by people coming from different communities, whether native or non-native speakers. Learners probably mostly listen to people who speak a similar variety of English to their own, but they need to be able to cope with other accents in various situations outside their home community.

Findings from Table 2, which was focused on analyzing how factors related to the speakers interfere on the learners' listening skills, showed that the four statements specified in this table have been considered as very frequent problems that interfere with EFL learners' listening comprehension.

The results are the following: the most of participants reported that almost always they face difficulty to understand natural speeches which are full of hesitation and pauses, problems to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly, difficulties to understand well when speakers talk too fast, and hindrance to understand well when speakers talk with varied accents.

It is evident that real English is difficult to understand because English spoken in classrooms is different from how people speak in real life. In natural English, the native

speakers speak at a rapid speed, do not pronounce clearly the words, make pauses and use contraction.

According to Borromeo (2013), when a message is sent to a listener, effective communication only take place when the listener has received and understood the complete message. On the contrary, if the receptor of a message has failed to obtain information, the communication will not be successful.

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

The listening comprehension problems related to listening passage or message have been a huge problem for English learners, especially slang, idiom expressions, unfamiliar words, grammatical structure and long listening text.

**Table 3**

<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	8%	12%	22%	40%	18%
15.	Some grammatical structures in the listening passage interfere with my listening comprehension	9%	11%	22%	40%	18%
16.	The length of the listening passage hinders me to interpret the message	6%	8%	20%	56%	10%
17.	The content of the listening passage is abstract	4%	14%	42%	26%	14%

18.	The poor quality of recording does not allow me to understand the listening passage	4%	14%	32%	34%	16%
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Author: Mirian Ochoa

Source: Student's questionnaire

When students were questioned on their perception about listening comprehension problems that they have to face in their classrooms related to listening passage, they responded in a variety of ways. Statement 1 in Table 3 focused on investigating if the unknown vocabulary used in the listening passage interferes with learners' listening comprehension, shows that a great number of the students reported that unfamiliar words, jargon and idioms interfere with their listening comprehension. The results were the following: 40% "often", 22% "sometimes", 18% "always", and 12% "seldom". Although, a small group 8% claimed have "never" experienced misunderstanding of a passage interfered by unfamiliar vocabulary.

The lack of vocabulary, according to the perception of the students, is one of the main obstacles that interfere with their listening comprehension. The majority of all the students reported not to have enough knowledge of vocabulary about their different meaning, and a small number of them declared that their vocabulary is too poor so they do not understand varied listening passages.

The strategies which can be applied to improve the lexicon may be to read different topics and when unfamiliar words are found, do not skip over them. Try to puzzle out its possible meaning in the context of the sentences, then look it up in the dictionary and confirm its definition. Another key can be to look up synonyms of the known words and practice a lot to memorize their use and pronunciation.



As can be noted, it clearly indicates that the lack of vocabulary and poor ability to discriminate sounds cause limitation to comprehend listening passages. This finding coincides with Idrus, et. al, (2014) who declared that the problem of not understanding due to unknown words appeared between the most frequently reported problem, and among the widely causes that affect to listening comprehension.

In the same way, Camacho (2014) carried out a research in order to identify the factors that interfere with EFL learners' listening comprehension at a university in Colombia. Findings of this study indicated when participants found unknown words in a listening exercise, they stopped listening to think about the meaning of the word, missing the following part of the activity.

In regard to the second research statement in Table 3, related to the assumption if some grammatical structures in the listening passage interfere with learners' listening comprehension, the results show that more than three quarters of the participants 40% rated themselves "often" have experienced listening comprehension difficulties caused by complex grammatical structures, 22% "sometimes", 18% "always", 11% "seldom", and 9% of them reported have "never" been interfered by unknown grammatical structures during their listening activities.

Additionally, some participants were aware about the importance of grammatical rules in relation to listening comprehension. The interviewee 1 expressed "My grammar is poor so my English is not good. My ability to listen to long sentences is too bad".

According to teachers' opinion, it is evident that complex grammatical structures "often" generate troubles to comprehend the listening passages because in linguistic the grammar is the basic element to structure words, phrases, and sentence which are used into a conversation.

A study carried out by Hamouda (2013) in a public university in the Al-Qissim province of Saudi Arabia, show that complex grammatical structures obstruct with the learners' listening comprehension. The great majority of students 50/60 (80%) responded that difficult grammatical structures (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension.

In the third statement in Table 3, regarding to the assumption that the length of the listening passage hinders learners to interpret the message, the results show that the majority of the students 56% marked that "often" the length of the listening passage hinders them to understand the message, 20% "sometimes", and 10% "always". Only a minority of students 8% selected the option "seldom" and 6% reported that "never" the length of listening passage has been an obstacle to develop their listening activities.

These results were supported by the teachers who said that the length of the listening passages often cause distracttion to learners interfering with the interpretation of the message. Consequently, the use of long and complex sentences make it hard for EFL learners to understand a lecture. O' Bryan and Hegelheimer ( 2009) point out two external problems affecting listening comprehension; these are: narrator' accent and the length of the listening passage.

The fourth research statement in Table 3, focused on investigating whether when the content of the listening passage is abstract it causes difficulty to interpret the message, the results showed that a great number of students reported have experienced listening difficulties caused by abstract passages. The rates were ranked in the following scale: 42% "sometimes", 26% "often", 14% "always", 14% "seldom", and 4% "never".

Ten out of fifteen participants stated that they couldn't understand some listening passages because they did not know anything about the topic. The comments of the interviewee 5 determined that sometimes they have to listen dialogues or listening passages

about unknown topics for them, such as: economy, oil, medicine, and technology. He argues that he and their classmates do not know anything about these themes, and the vocabulary is totally unfamiliar for them, which is difficult to understand.

According to four out of five teacher, it is not recommended to ask students listen to abstract passages during their listening activities because those passages “often” interfere with their listening comprehension. A teacher argues that an abstract topic causes frustration, demotivation and anxiety to the learners because they do not understand it. In accordance with Hamouda (2013), when the learner feels uncomfortable about an unpleasant theme, his or her ability to listen is greatly reduced.

The fifth research statement in table 3, related to the assumption that the poor quality of recording does not allow learners to understand the listening passage, the outcomes show that a great number of participants reported have faced difficulties to understand the listening passages due to the poor quality of the recording. The rates were stated in the following levels: 34% “often”, 32% “sometimes”, 16% always, 14%”seldom”, and a small number of participants 4% selected the option “never”.

According to the teachers’ perception, the poor quality of recording often interferes with learners’ listening comprehension. Sometimes, the quality of the audio is poor, distorted, and noisy, with garbled speech or indistinct music. Those factors of bad quality bring about confusion and misunderstanding during the listening activities, causing listening difficulties to the EFL learner.

The bad quality of recordings might be attributed to two causes. First, possibly the CD was recorded while there was noise around, and second the reason because the CDs have been used for such a long time. Thus, the quality get worn out and the audio loses its authenticity, which causes problems to understand the listening passage or misunderstanding in the comprehension of the listened message.

On the other hand, it is important to take in mind that there are other tools which can be applied by teachers and students into or out of the classrooms to enhance listening skills. Thus, it is highly recommended to use multimedia presentation; PowerPoint, Internet sources and materials in multimedia language. Herrell and Jordan (2012) argue that multimedia presentation in the classroom support students in conveying information to their peers. The use of many types of visuals help students and teachers to connect vocabulary and meaning, particularly for English learners. The use of computers and other technology in the classroom is appealing to students and motivate them to be more innovative in completing assignments.

From table 3, there are three assumptions which were considered by the participants as frequent problems that interfere with their listening comprehension: (1) lack of vocabulary, (2) the length of listening passages, and (3) complex grammatical structures.

## CONCLUSIONS

The most common factors that cause learners' listening comprehension difficulties in EFL classrooms, in Ecuadorian private high schools, are not just difficulties about students' lack of knowledge of English language they are also those difficulties attribute to negative factors related to the speaker and listening passage.

The findings of this study showed that the reason why EFL learners have problems to understand varied speeches is due to the lack of vocabulary, difficulty to discriminate between similar sounds, trouble to understand main ideas of a listening passage, and nerves and anxiety when learners do not comprehend the passages.

Students reported that the factors which interfere with their listening comprehension are the following: problem to understand speeches with full of hesitation and pauses, trouble to discriminate sounds when speakers speak very fast, words not pronounced clearly, use of varied accents, slangs and colloquial language.

The listening comprehension problems related to listening passages have been a huge problem for English learners, especially when the passage has unfamiliar words, complex grammatical structures, idiom expressions, and length listening text.

Likewise, it was found that in various cases the recordings do not have a good quality, because they are recorded in a noised place or simply deteriorated by the use. Or sometimes, the information is not interesting, which cause listening difficulties, too.

In general, understanding messages spoken by native speakers is a challenge for learners because their ears are not aware of some dialects and accents due to they just listen to their teacher and recorded information about few subjects. So, when learners try to converse with native speakers, they can barely catch some words. It is not that they are speaking fast. They are speaking naturally but learners are not familiar with those sounds and vocabulary.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The speech is a series of sound units that are connected together quickly when are spoken by a native speaker which are difficult to distinguish with an untrained ear. The only way to train the ear to distinguish sounds in a foreign language is by lot and lot of listening.

One strategy, very useful to enhance the listening skills, is “listen and listen” any type of speech every day. Likewise, if it is a product with high quality, natural audio or human being (even better) the learners’ listening comprehension level in the target language will improve gradually.

Interactive listening could be regarded as the best strategy to improve the listening skills. In other words, it is better to talk with a person than just listening to a recorded information, radio or TV program, and podcast. When foreign language learners talk to people live, he/she has the opportunity of carefully listening the idea of the speaker and think about the answer that he/she has to give to continue in the discussion.

Listening texts are easier to understand when students find the topic of the listening passages interesting. For that reason, if learners spend hours and hours listening to people speaking English, but if the information is not interesting for them, it will be boring and hard to continue with the listening activity.

It is highly recommended review the quality of the recordings, because not all the recorded information has a good quality, sometimes the listening passages are recorded in a noised place or have been deteriorated by the use, which damage the authenticity of the audio.

Generally, when students only learn English in a classroom, they probably hear very careful pronunciation. Thus, they won't be prepared to understand something that sounds naturally or a little different. That is why, foreign language learners should not just listen to the same kind of English speech all the time.

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## **ANNEXES**

## ANNEX 1



### UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

#### OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

#### ENGLISH DEGREE

#### STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Estimado estudiante,

La presente encuesta tiene como objetivo obtener información para conocer cuál es su opinión sobre las dificultades que usted tiene para escuchar comprensivamente en las clases de inglés.

Cabe señalar que esta información será utilizada con propósitos académicos exclusivamente; por lo que, le solicitamos comedidamente contestar el siguiente cuestionario:

**Instrucciones:** Marque por favor la opción de frecuencia que más refleje su criterio (UNA SOLA RESPUESTA POR NÚMERO).

#### Dificultades como oyente

No.	Enunciado	Nunca	Rara vez	A veces	Frecuente mente	Siempre
1	No entiendo el tema que escucho en inglés y por ello debo usar mi conocimiento o experiencia previa					

	sobre el mismo					
2	Me es difícil entender lo que escucho en inglés y por ello debo escuchar todos los detalles para entender la idea principal					
3	Tengo dificultad en hacer las actividades del texto que escuché en inglés por la falta de conocimiento del idioma					
4	Después de que el profesor pausa la grabación, me es difícil predecir (adivinar) la idea que continúa en el texto escuchado.					
5	Me es difícil mantener un diálogo corto en base al texto que escuché en inglés.					
6.	Es difícil para mí tener una idea general del texto después de la primera vez que lo escuché en inglés.					
7.	Me siento nervioso y preocupado cuando no entiendo el texto que escuché en inglés.					
8.	Me es difícil entender el texto que escucho en inglés porque el tema no es de mi interés					
9	Me resulta más difícil comprender en inglés el texto grabado que el texto leído en voz alta por mi					

	profesor(a)					
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### **Dificultades con el hablante**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Enunciado</b>	<b>Nunca</b>	<b>Rara vez</b>	<b>A veces</b>	<b>Frecuente mente</b>	<b>Siempre</b>
10	Me es difícil entender lo que dice un extranjero que habla inglés porque titubea (duda) y hace varias pausas mientras habla					
11	Cuando escucho me es difícil entender el  el significado de las palabras en inglés porque el que habla no las pronuncia claramente					
12	Me es difícil entender lo que escucho en inglés porque quien habla lo hace muy rápido					
13	Es difícil para mí entender lo que escucho en inglés por las diferentes formas de pronunciar de los hablantes					

### **Dificultades con el texto que escucha**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Enunciado</b>	<b>Nunca</b>	<b>Rara vez</b>	<b>A veces</b>	<b>Frecuente mente</b>	<b>Siempre</b>
14	El tipo de vocabulario utilizado en el texto que escucho en inglés no me permite comprender el tema					
15	Las estructuras gramaticales que hay					

	en el texto que escucho en inglés interfieren con mi habilidad de escuchar comprensivamente.					
16	La extension del texto que escucho en inglés me impide interpretar el mensaje					
17	El contenido del texto que escucho en inglés es abstracto.					
18	La mala calidad de las grabaciones de los textos que escucho en inglés en el aula no me permiten comprender el mensaje del tema.					

**¡Gracias por su colaboración!**

## ANNEX 2



### UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

#### MODALIDAD ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA

#### TITULACIÓN DE INGÉS

#### CUESTIONARIO DEL ESTUDIANTE

#### STUDENTS' INTERVIEW

1. ¿Cree Ud. que le es difícil escuchar comprensivamente en inglés dentro del aula?

Si ( ) No ( )

¿Por qué\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. ¿Cuál de los siguientes elementos cree Ud. que dificulta su habilidad de escuchar grabaciones

en inglés en su aula?

Usted como oyente ( )

El texto que escucha ( )

El hablante (quien emite el mensaje) ( )

¿Por qué\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. ¿Según usted, qué factor(es) hace(n) que escuchar grabaciones en inglés en su aula sea difícil?

Mencione al menos tres por cada elemento y el por qué

El oyente ¿Por qué?

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El texto que escucha ¿Por qué?

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El hablante (quien dice el mensaje) ¿Por qué?

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4. ¿Qué hace Ud. cuando no entiende el texto de la grabación en inglés que les hace escuchar su profesor en el aula?

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APUNTES EXTRAS DE LA ENTREVISTA EN RELACIÓN AL TEMA:

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**¡Gracias por su colaboración!**



### ANNEX 3



## UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

### OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

### ENGLISH DEGREE

### TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear teacher,

The aim of this brief questionnaire is to obtain information concerning your opinion about your students' listening comprehension difficulties in the EFL classroom. 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**

#### The listener

Item no.	Statements	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					

**The speaker**

Item no.	Statements	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
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					

**The listening passage**

Item no.	Statements	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
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 collaboration**