



**UNIVERSIDAD LATINA
DE COSTA RICA**
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Action Research Project

Strategies to improve listening in EFL classrooms

2018

(TFG E#07)

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Table of Content

Chapter I.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Purpose of the Study	7
1.2 OBJECTIVES.....	8
1.2.1 General Objective.....	8
1.2.2 Specific Objectives.....	8
1.3 Research question	8
1.4 Significance of the study.....	8
1.5 Definition of Terms:	9
Chapter II.....	10
Literary Review	10
2.1 Theories that make up this research.....	11
Chapter III.....	16
Design and method.....	16
3.1 Research Approach.....	17
3.2 Sources and Subjects of information.....	17
3.3 Population and Participants	17
3.4 Data collection procedures and tools	18
3.5 Summary	18
Chapter IV	19
Findings	19
4.1 Data Analysis	20
4.2 Restatement of questions and discussion of results.....	22
4.3 Summary.....	22
Chapter V	23
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	23
5.1 Conclusions.....	24
5.2 Implications.....	24
5.3 Strengths and limitations	24

5.4 Recommendations..... 25

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Every day, humans have to interact with others, this means that people need to speak out; but also they have to listen in order to react back to any situation. Listening gives an insight of what is around and through it people achieve success in communicating with others. With this project, it is pretended to focus on the relevance of listening, identifying some problems before, during, and after performing listening activities, and providing the necessary strategies to reduce the difficulties faced by students in English as a Foreign Language Classrooms. Furthermore, it is important to make the students to be aware of the importance and benefits of this skill. Most of time listening is taken for granted no giving the relevance it should have. The aim is not just to prepare students to perform an activity, but also to teach them how to listen, when to listen, what to listen to be successful in their lives. According to ND (2012),

“When you focus on the material presented in a classroom, you will be able to identify not only the words used in a lecture, but their emphasis and their more complex meanings. You will take better notes, and you will be more accurately remember the instructor’s claims, information, and conclusions.”

Once teachers motivate students to be good listeners, they get better results when students perform listening activities. However, it is important that teachers also improve their teachers’ skills to facilitate the performance in every listening activity; therefore, the main goal with this research is to provide strategies that can make this process even easier for both, teachers and students.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 General Objective

To evaluate different pedagogical tools to reduce some of the difficulties that students face with listening activities.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- a) To recognize listening skill as an important aspect to learn English as a foreign language
- b) To determine the main struggles that students face with listening activities
- c) To apply different strategies and activities to improve listening when teaching a foreign language.

1.3 Research question

After analyzing all the situations encountered at a specific group in Colegio Bilingue de Belen related to the listening skill, its factors, and looking for strategies to improve this skill in the English as a Foreign Language Classrooms; the conclusion lead this research to the following question:

How the use of some strategies and activities can improve listening as English as a Foreign Language in 9 graders at Colegio Bilingue de Belen?

1.4 Significance of the study

Having Knowledge in English as a Foreign Language is as indispensable as knowing how to breathe, every single person around the world must have at least some

knowledge to communicate with other cultures. English is required when applying for job, traveling abroad, communicating even with people from our country. English is a Lingua Franca. Most of the people undervalue the fact that English is necessary, but at this time, children, teenagers, young adults, adults, elders, everybody needs it. People cannot simply scape from it!

The idea with this research is to create awareness of the importance of listening skill, as well as find the tools and strategies to make this process even easier for both, teachers and students.

The fact that knowing a little bit of the types of listening, its stages, the constraints, among others, will make students feel more comfortable and less afraid of listening texts. Moreover, teacher will not feel they are enduring a heavy burden. The idea is to provide the information so that at the time of planning, teachers choose the best material to make the activities worthy.

1.5 Definition of Terms:

Strategies: According to Business Dictionary strategies are methods or plan chosen to bring about a desired future, such as achievement of a goal or solution to a problem.

Bottom up: It refers to processing sensory information as it is coming in. It is the way it is built up from the smallest pieces of sensory information.

Top down: This on the other hand, refers to perception that is driven by cognition. Your brain applies what it knows and what it expects to perceive and fills in the blanks, so to speak.

Podcast: According to Dictionary, podcast is a digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new installments of which can be received by subscribers automatically.

Chapter II

Literary Review

2.1 Theories that make up this research

Wrench (2014:1) comes to explain the difference between Listening and Hearing by noting that:

Hearing is an accidental and automatic brain response to sound that requires no effort. We are surrounded by sounds most of the time. For example, we are accustomed to the sounds of airplanes, lawn mowers, furnace blowers, the rattling of pots and pans, and so on. We hear those incidental sounds and, unless we have a reason to do otherwise, we train ourselves to ignore them. We learn to filter out sounds that mean little to us, just as we choose to hear our ringing cell phones and other sounds that are more important to us. Listening, on the other hand, is purposeful and focused rather than accidental. As a result, it requires motivation and effort. Listening, at its best, is active, focused, concentrated attention for the purpose of understanding the meanings expressed by a speaker. We do not always listen at our best, however, and later in this chapter we will examine some of the reasons why and some strategies for becoming more active critical listeners”

It is clear now that hearing is an accidental process in which people do not have to make a lot of effort; it is involuntary since we cannot escape from hearing of what surrounds us. But, listening is voluntary; people can choose on having a concentrated attention or do not have any concentration at all. Everybody has to be focused to be an active listener.

Wrench (2014:2) also states being a good listener may bring some benefits such as becoming a better student, better friend, being perceived as an intelligent and perceptive person, and it can help people in their public speaking.

This author makes emphasis that if the students became good listeners, they would take better notes, they would remember teachers' instructions, and they would

not only be focused on identifying words used in the lecture but in their emphasis and their more complex meaning.

Based on Walker (2014: 1) in her study, she quotes Osada (2004:53) stating that “for a long time, the skill of listening did not receive adequate acknowledgement as a skill in its own right, but rather was long “regarded as a passive skill, [...] an ability that would develop without assistance”. Such lack of regard for developing listening skills may seem quite absurd”. Walker (2014: 1) supports the above by adding that “more than forty percent of our daily communication time is spent on listening, with thirty; five percent being dedicated to speaking, sixteen percent devoted to reading and only nine percent of our daily communication being occupied by writing”.

Walker (2014) added that it was until 1970s that listening started to be explored, which lead to a different view towards listening. In the stream of Walker (2014:1) with this newly found accreditation having only been proportioned very late on in comparison to the other three standardized language skills (reading, writing, and speaking), listening skill have been rendered the “least researched of all four language skills” This lack of research means that listening “remains one of the least understood processes, making the effective teaching of these skills a somewhat grey area, subjecting in too often being view as a “somewhat neglected and poorly taught aspect of English””

Rebeccal (2015) supports the above by adding that “listening is fundamental language skill, but is it often ignored by foreign and second language teachers”. This author also stated that while teachers and experts are more concerned on give direct instructional attention to the other three language skills, teachers most of the times pretend their students to develop listening skill naturally and without help.

These difficulties are well presented by Cotter (2014:1:2:3:4). Cotter cited the following list: Colloquialisms, Accent, intonation, inflection, and stress, Reduced Forms, Fillers, correction, and Repetition.

To support the above Abrantes (2006) in his study *improving how Listening Skills are taught in the EFL Classroom*, stated that the main difficulties that he encountered in Capeverdean EFL Classroom were Classroom environment, equipment, students motivation, teacher' s capacity and level of confidence

Walker (2014) and ND (nd), explain two possible ways to perform this task, which are Bottom-up & Top-down listening process:

“Bottom up processing is essentially a linguistic process in which we try to make sense of acoustic signals by using knowledge of language. According to this model, sound is assumed to be decoded by accreditation and in a linear fashion-from phonemes, to words, to phrases, to utterances, to complete meaningful texts-whereby “meaning itself is derived as the last step in the process, Top-down process goes from general to specific information. Students do not need to pay attention to specific details like in the Bottom-up process in which details are very important to understand the whole meaning. In top-down approach students take into account the context to get the meaning of the message

Walker (2014: 170) comes to present the metacognition regulation used in his study. He establishes that Metacognition is often simply defined as “thinking about thinking”. “Metacognition has further been categorized to include metacognitive knowledge, which can be described as knowing your abilities, for example a child’s belief that she is better at arithmetic than her friends, and metacognitive experience, which can be depicted as consciously identifying affective experiences, such as the sudden feeling of not understanding something another person has just said”. “Understanding and controlling cognitive processes may be one of the most essential skills that classroom teachers can develop in themselves and the students with whom they work” (Anderson 2005: 767).

However, Abrantes (2006) proposes in his investigation to have best uses for different Listening Techniques. He stated that “When we teach listening skills it is essential that we identify the technique that suits the specific communicative purpose”. According to his research he proposes to take into account the purposes of listening

such as Listening for General Information, listening for specific information, listening for taking notes, listening for imitation or reproduction, listening to infer opinion and attitude”.

Chen, Wang, Xu (2014), in their project “A study of video Effects on English Listening Comprehension”, analyses the advantages of video effects in EFL classrooms. This study was conducted in A school in China. The theory and experts demonstrated that students did better in listening when using audio and video to perform the activities; however, in their research, they demonstrated that this is not always true. It depends on the level as well as the activity in which this method is carried out. For instance, in some interviews they applied, low level students said, when they were listening to the experts, the video on the computer would divert their attention.

Sharma (nd) on the other hand, comes to explain that “genuine materials and situations prepared students for the types of listening they will need to do when using the language outside the classroom”.

According to Sharma(2016) using music to practice listening can improve pronunciation, help with vocabulary, it also improves understanding, students will feel motivated due to the fact that is a fun way to practice listening, the last aspect is that music is more realistic, sometimes singers do not use perfect grammar, and expressions are different.

Summary

Over time, there have been many studies about listening skill that allows this project to be carried out. As it was mentioned above, listening was not part of the teachers’ favorite skills; it was rather an unforgotten aspect. Teachers and experts were paying attention to reading and writing process meanwhile students felt lost with their listening. Therefore, experts started to pay attention to the necessity of becoming listening as an ability to be developed.

Teacher in EFL classrooms must be aware of the necessities they encounter in the classroom regarding listening skill. It is very important to know the difference

between hearing and listening so that they can notice which of these students are more likely to do. Teachers must investigate and analyze each of the types of listening as well as the constraints they may face when implementing listening activities. It is necessary to be very careful when selecting material for students to undergo due to the possibility of confusing them instead of helping them.

Technology at this time is imperative in the EFL classroom; teachers should be good with it and take it as a fundamental tool. Activities like songs, videos, recordings, even the teacher himself reading a text, can enhance the listening process.

It is without saying that listening is a fundamental skill that everybody needs to develop at its maximum. Anderson (2005: 767) comes to say that “Understanding and controlling cognitive processes may be one of the most essential skills that classroom teachers can develop in themselves and the students with whom they work”. It is not only to assess listening, but also to understand the listening process as a biological process; at the end we will have great results.

Chapter III

Design and method

3.1 Research Approach

In order to get result, this research will be carried out using a mix of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods. The first one emphasizes objective measurements and numerical analysis and Qualitative research which analyses behavior and perceptions which is going to drive the project to a specific topic and issue. These two methods will lead this project to numerical as well as descriptive results. At the time of observing, the researcher will analyze the students' behavior, on the other hand, at the time of analyzing results, quantitative methods will be need to organize the findings and different opinions.

3.2 Sources and Subjects of information

In regards with the methodology, a considerably amount of visits to the high school will be need it. First, the researcher needs to go to observe the teacher, the environment in the classroom as well as the school, and to pay attention to the difficulties encountered, a survey will be applied to the teacher. In the second observation researcher will need to observe the students, their behavior, their level of English, their interest, their constraints, and apply the survey. Following the above, researcher will assume the role of the teacher to perform one activity, after that a survey to evaluate the activity will be given to the students. Researcher is going to perform at least four activities in order to get the results. Finally, the researcher will apply the questionnaire to the students to get results from the activities performed.

3.3 Population and Participants

The population to study will be 9th Graders Students at Bilingual High School as well as their Teacher. This High School is Located in San Antonio de Belen.

3.4 Data collection procedures and tools

In regards of data collection, this was arranged in the following schedule. The first visit focused on observing the environment, the teacher methodology as well as an interviewing the teacher. In addition, it is necessary to observe the students and apply a Survey. The second visit has the purpose of implementing some activities in order to get results. At last, the main goal of the las visit is to get some opinions from students by applying a questionnaire.

3.5 Summary

This project will use a mix of two important methods: Qualitative and Quantitative, which allows an open scope to different necessities in the classroom as well as the students and teacher opinions in regards of listening skill. The main goal after observing and analyzing the environment is to apply the activities selected and get the results.

Chapter IV

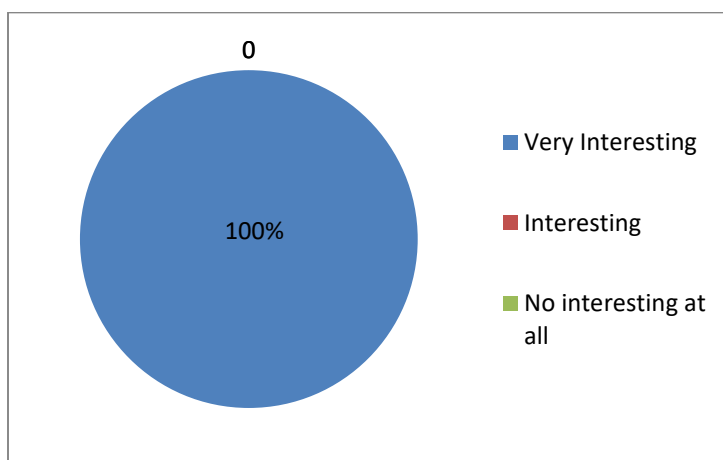
Findings

4.1 Data Analysis

Researcher planned to apply five activities and these are the findings:

Regarding the Activity # 1, the purpose was to evaluate how good students performed with songs. The chosen Song was “Have you ever seen the rain” by Rod Stewart.

This activity was settled to start the class in a different way. Students are not used to these kinds of activities. Since they were studying about the present perfect, this song was chosen with the purpose of introducing the topic. There were some missing words that they had to complete as the song was going. The results were amazing 100% of the students considered the activity very interesting. Every single student participated and they sang the song, it was really impressive. 80% of the class agreed that the song was really good to study the current topic.



On the other hand, 70% stated that songs are useful to learn more vocabulary, 20% agreed that songs help improve pronunciation, and the 10% left stated that they had fun learning this way.

Regarding the Activity #2, researcher chose a video about the use of present perfect. The main idea with this video was to illustrate when and how to use the present perfect. Students had to pay attention to the points the video displayed, then the teacher

asked the students for these four uses of the present perfect. The first question for this activity was: Regarding the video explaining the use of present perfect, what is your opinion? 80% of the students agreed that with the video they could understand better to due to the images, those made them understand the context. The other 10% respond that they could not notice a difference at all. In this activity the teacher had 100% of participation from the students.

In the Activity #3, researcher chose a video, which was a part of the movie Jack, and Jill. With this activity students had to pay attention to all the activities the actors performed in the movie. Once they got some activities, teacher will ask them to make sentences orally using the activities these activities. In this activity 70% of the students answered that they felt comfortable to give the opinion and the other 30% said that they could understand better because of the English Subtitles.

The Activity # 4, with this, the idea was to listen to an audio regarding present perfect, and then students had to complete the sentences. In this activity the teacher wanted to know how prepared students are to face listening activities without watching a video. This was just an audio. They must complete the sentences using present perfect. Every single student participated, and according to the survey students rated no difficult at all, In fact 50% chose medium level and 50% low level for them

The Activity #5 was about interacting with native speaker. This activity was performed with the help of a native. Researcher wanted to know how interested students are when they have to speak with a native, how secure they feel, and how well they understand. The activity was about Erick's life experiences, he had a power point presentation with pictures about his trips around the world and the sports he practiced. Students must payed attention and ask questions well as interact with him.

With these activity 90% of the students felt a lot of curiosity to listen of this native had to tell them, and the other 10% did not feel any interesting at all. Regarding the results in the graphic, some students asserted that they were very interested at listening to Erick's life and all the things he went through, all the sports he practiced. Some other, said that the native was sympathetic and that made the activity very pleasant.

The Activity #6 was to assign homework. The idea with homework was to evaluate how well students can evaluate themselves. They had to look for an audio from the website <http://www.esl-lab.com/> and complete an activity that the teacher chose. The results were not good as it was expected. Just two people did homework, and one of them went beyond to find the meaning of words he or she could not understand. The other student just completed what he was assigned. The rest of the students forgot at all.

4.2 Restatement of questions and discussion of results

How the use of some strategies and activities can improve listening as English as a Foreign Language in Ninth graders at Colegio Bilingue de Belen?

According to the results mentioned above in the Findings section, it is clear that the use of songs is the very useful, students enjoy and at the same time they are learning new vocabulary. When teachers get out of the daily routine, they can get amazing results. For example, a simple activity like bring a native speaker (if the teacher has the opportunity) to the class so that students can interact and have real life situations, that can change the whole students' perspective.

On the other hand, it is important that teachers use activities in which students feel identified such as short part of a funny movie, introduce a topic with a video and then ask questions. With these activities students could get good input as it was explained in the section above.

4.3 Summary

As a matter of fact, it is important to highlight the great performance students had with the activities implemented in this research. Actually, students were willing to help with all of them, and researcher got 100% of participation. The students' opinions were very receptive. These results could help teachers to improve their skills as well as improve students' skills

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

In a way to conclude this research, everybody should be clear about the importance of Listening Skill the classroom. As it was mentioned at the beginning of this research, this skill was totally forgotten. Experts were more concentrated in speaking, writing, and even reading, those were above listening. However, the discovered how important this skill was for everybody, listening is communicating.

After studying some different strategies and methods to enhance listening activities in the classroom, it is without saying that the results are very pleasant for this investigation. Every single student could participate and the most important, they enjoyed these activities.

5.2 Implications

This research implies to investigate about the theory first in order to have a wide scope of the importance that listening skills has when people learn a second language. In addition, it was necessary to investigate and implement strategies to get results. These results can help teachers with listening activities, for sure after these results, they can have a different view of the different activities and they will know how to perform them. Actually, teachers and students might be open to give more importance to this skill that sometimes may turn very difficult if it is not approach in the right way.

5.3 Strengths and limitations

Some important strengths found, during this process, are related to the support that the teacher gave to the researcher. She was always aware of the helping at any moment, providing support with the group, and activities. On the other hand, the classroom had all the necessary equipment, TV, computer, speaker, and good environment. Also, it is important to high light how well the students behaved and cooperate with the researcher.

Regarding to the limitations, it was found that at the time to assign the homework just 3 students completed it. They did not take such a responsibility because they did not get anything back. Therefore, it was complicated to have a wide scope for this strategy.

5.4 Recommendations

As a recommendation, it is important for teachers to study the different methods they could use in class to make students have better performance in listening activities. At the same time, if teachers make a good use of the strategies, they will increase participation due to the fact that students will lose that fear of not being understood or that feeling of not understanding anything. Students learn more when they are given the opportunity of participate. They feel more comfortable with audio and video, with music and sometimes using videos with subtitles to help the ones who find listening the most difficult skill.

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Annexes

Appendix 1

Session	Place	Activity	Objective
Week 1	High School	Teacher-Observation Teacher Survey Students-Observation Students- Survey	To get reliable information about the environment, and teacher's and students' opinion
Week 2	High School	Activities	Apply the different activities in order to get results
Week 3	High School	Questionnaire	Apply the questionnaire to know students opinions about the scitivity