

The value of listening activities implemented by the English teacher to enhance listening comprehension.

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Abstract

This study analyzed the value of listening activities implemented by English teachers to enhance listening comprehension. Comprehension is crucial for production because we can produce oral/written language when we understand the input received. Teachers must identify the significance of their teaching activities and resources in their student's learning process because every change they make has a result that counts. It is also true that finding the best methodologies is not an easy task. Hence, we rely on teachers' perspectives to identify listening activities that could be effective. Carrying out this study required us to choose a qualitative approach and interview research which enabled us to describe the evidence obtained in the semi-structured interview. In addition, to obtain evidence, we used transcriptions from the interviews and processed the information through thematic categorization.

Keywords: Listening comprehension, comprehensible input, English language teaching.

Resumen

Esta investigación analizó el valor de las actividades auditivas implementadas por profesores de inglés para mejorar la comprensión auditiva. La comprensión es crucial para la producción, podemos producir idioma oral y escrito cuando entendemos las entradas del idioma percibidas. Los profesores deben identificar la importancia que tienen sus

actividades de enseñanza y recursos en el proceso de aprendizaje de sus estudiantes, ya que cada pequeño cambio que ellos hacen cuenta en el resultado. Se sabe que no es una tarea fácil identificar las metodologías apropiadas, es por esta razón que nos apegamos en la perspectiva de los profesores para identificar actividades de comprensión auditivas que pueden ser efectivas. El desarrollo de la presente investigación utilizó un enfoque cualitativo y entrevista-investigación lo que nos permitió describir la evidencia obtenida a través de una entrevista semi estructurada. Además, para obtener evidencia utilizamos transcripciones de las entrevistas y procesamos la información a través de categorización temática.

Palabras claves: comprensión auditiva, entrada comprensible, enseñanza del idioma inglés.

Introduction

This research has been done to analyze the value of listening activities that English teacher implements in the EFL classroom to enhance students' listening comprehension. We targeted this research by having as a support the perception of two English teachers at the National Institute Augusto Salinas Pinell of Somoto, Madriz.

Teaching English in a foreign language classroom represents various challenges for teachers and students. One of these challenges English teachers may face in an EFL¹ classroom is the enhancing of students' listening comprehension. This misunderstanding of the language could be related to students' lack of self-motivation to learn the language, lack of time to practice speaking and listening, lack of resources to introduce new and attractive

¹ English as a foreign language

input in the class that engage students' learning, and so forth. Every single English student needs to enhance this skill in order to develop his/her comprehension about what he/she hears to produce the target language more effectively. That is why; teachers need to increase students' listening comprehension by implementing effective activities that may respond to students' language learning needs.

Problem Statement

Learning a foreign language can be a complex and frustrating experience for those who begin this learning process, especially when they do not have access to proper learning-teaching resources and methodologies. Nevertheless, several recurrent factors related to both teacher and student may affect the development of listening comprehension, for example, lack of interest in the EFL subject, demotivation when performing activities, student misbehavior, overuse of grammar-centered methods, lack of practice and repetition, poor quality of audio-visual aids, inadequate environment (large classes- more than forty students- limited space to move, classrooms without windows, etc.), and limited exposure to input (Nushi & Fereshte 2020, pp. 9).

According to Castro Cárdenas, (2012) the application of the teaching-learning discipline of this foreign language in Nicaragua is contemplated in the Basic National Curriculum so that students will learn and advance their English language abilities in secondary education. "The teaching-learning of the English language as a foreign language is to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic capacities that allow students to turn it into a useful tool for life" MINED, ²(2009, para.37). According to the Ministry of Education, high

² Ministry of education, Nicaragua (MINED).

school students must develop the English language skills in the secondary school in order to use these abilities to communicate in the real life using the target language. The reality is different, in the most of the cases only few students in Nicaragua high schools have the capacity to communicate in English when they finish their secondary education. Therefore, we pretended to analyze the value of listening activities implemented by the English teacher to enhance listening comprehension. Consequently, we have selected the following research question:

How do English teachers perceive listening activities to enhance listening comprehension in the EFL classroom?

Significance of the Study

This study pretended to analyze critical areas in the English teaching-learning process such as the teacher's perception in the implementation of listening activities, teacher's training, use of attractive methodologies, teacher's knowledge of the subject, response to learning needs, etc. In this regard, to improve education, it is important to find proper methodologies that facilitate teachers' performance and respond effectively to students' learning needs.

Objectives

General Objective:

- To analyze the value of listening activities implemented by the English teacher to enhance listening comprehension.

Specific objectives:

- To identify the listening activities implemented by the English teacher for enhancing listening comprehension.
- To describe the difficulties students present when developing listening comprehension.
- To suggest the narrow listening activities to develop listening comprehension.

Theoretical framework

Listening Comprehension

Developing listening comprehension is essential when learning a foreign language because it allows students to become good listeners and communicators (Mardhotilla, 2019). However, this competence could be complex because the listener requires exposition to input chosen based on their learning needs. Besides, such a process includes understanding pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and meaning (Gilakjani Pourhosein, 2016).

Stages of Listening Comprehension

Pre- listening

The first stage is pre-listening, in which previous knowledge and new vocabulary are activated to generate interest and understanding of the activity. This stage prepares the student for what they are about to listen to and gives them chances to succeed when completing the listening task. In other words, pre-listening activates schemata to help predict the content of the audio/passage. (Wilson J. , 2008).

While-listening

This stage requires greater participation from the student; it is the process of understanding and constructing meaning from the input. The relationship between both stages, pre-listening, and while-listening, is that the learner uses their background knowledge (vocabulary/grammar structures) to comprehend. In this regard, Srilakshmi, Purnachandra, Veliventi, & Maithreyi, (2022) explain that this process involves assessing listening comprehension through a variety of exercises. During this stage, the teacher's role is essential to identify the student's difficulties and to help them complete the listening task. (Wilson J. J., 2008, p. 61).

Post-listening

Post listening is the phase in which the teacher helps students to summarize the listening experience. This activity happens after pre and while listening. In this respect, Srilakshmi, Purnachandra, Veliventi, & Maithreyi (2022) claim that “post-listening exercises allow not only the teachers to test and review students' knowledge and assess their comprehension, but also the students to expand understanding beyond the literal level to the interpretative and critical levels” (p. 1503).

In addition, this final stage, post-listening, involves the summarizing of the three stages pre, while and post listening. In this process English learners may increase their capacity of listening comprehension, also once students are exposed to a comprehensible input, they may develop a good output, and they will be able to produce what they acquire by the meaning understanding of the context.

Difficulties in Listening Comprehension

Despite the essential role of listening in a foreign language, learners might face some difficulties that affect the development of listening comprehension when listening to the spoken language. For instance, some students fail to understand what a native speaker says. The misunderstanding of spoken messages causes a lack of meaning construction, hence, oral production (Gabrilla, 2021). Additionally, these difficulties are connected with some factors that provoke the students' misunderstanding of the input. Some of them are connected with the audio material that they are exposed such as: the audio quality and unknown vocabulary presented in the audio.

Comprehensible input activities to enhance listening comprehension

Short Stories

In the English language teaching process teachers must implement different activities in order to help students to develop their English language skills for example listening comprehension. The use of short stories is one of them, Hansen (2022) defines short stories as a short narration of a specific topic with the purpose to have a significant message. By implementing these activities in the English lessons, students may be exposed to vocabulary that may be unknown for them, this experience also allows them to hear new phrases that may also be learned and learners may produce them in real life situations.

Role plays

Harmer, (2007) defines role plays as activities that involve the practice of listening and speaking skills. In a role play activity learners use their imagination to be in a specific situation and a specific character and act it out. In the implementation of these role play activities, learners must use vocabulary previously taught by the English teacher so, every

student play a specific role and they use their background knowledge that they can produce. Role plays allows students to use their knowledge to adequate their role according the level they have and to learn about something which may be new for them.

Songs

According the author Harmer, (2007) “Using songs is a useful activity that allows teaching speaking and listening skills” (p. 320). An important point that teachers should consider when presenting a song, is that the song must contain known vocabulary by the students, this will help them to have a better listening comprehension from the audio they hear.

Games

In the English language teaching-learning process in EFL schools, teachers have the task to look for different activities that may be helpful in the students’ learning. One of these activities is the use of games with educational purposes. In this regard, using games offers the students the opportunity to have fun while they are involved in a learning activity. Games allow students to interact using the target language, it is important for every student because they practice in an interesting activity the oral skills (listening and speaking).

Narrow Listening Activities to enhance listening comprehension

Krashen carried out studies on narrow reading and listening. In this concern, this type of listening consists of the listener focusing on one subject for extended periods in which they can listen to inputs of the same author. In other words, narrow listening is the

repetition-crucial in language acquisition of a single topic until students understand it. In addition, researchers explain narrow listening might benefit beginner and intermediate-level students because they might use previous basic knowledge to understand the subject and master vocabulary.

Research Design

Research approach

This qualitative research approach uses only one method of data collection such one is a semi-structured interview. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, (2012) “qualitative approach refers to make emphasis on holistic description—that is, on describing in detail all of what goes on in a particular activity or situation rather than on comparing the effects of a particular treatment”.

The qualitative approach provides the opportunity to discuss and to describe the situation with the participants of this study. We identified the participants who took part in the study in order to complete the process of this research. Besides, this qualitative research is very significant in the analysis of existing literature about listening activities.

Ethical Issues

According to K. Yin, (2011), respecting ethical issues principles is to follow steps in a determinate order to show credibility in the research. Such steps, were followed in the process that we implemented to gather information. This study kept ethic and transparency for those who participated in the process. That is the case of recording our participants’ interview. Before recording them we firstly asked for permission to record the whole

interview and to sign a consent form for their participation in the research, also they were aware of the use of such audios. We have written evidence to support our findings. . We used the names of our two participants in their description because they gave us the permission. Such aforementioned action made our participants feel confident and comfortable to be part of our research study.

Types of research design

Interviews are an appropriate method when there is a need to collect in-depth information on people's opinions, thoughts, experiences, and feelings Jaber , Holstein, Marvasti, & Mckinney, (2001). Such interactions and communication with participants can be conducted online or in this case Face-to face. We decided to carry out a face-to-face interview in order to create a natural conversation. With a natural conversation our participants felt confident and comfortable when they talked about the Listening activities they implemented in the teaching of English Language. The aforementioned authors also describe Interview Research approach as the one that is based on interviewing participant for a specific purpose, in this case researching about teacher's perception in listening activities to enhance listening comprehension. Moreover, this approach allowed us to do a deep analysis into the teachers' perception about listening activities.

Context of the study and participants

Setting

This research is directed in one of the central high schools of the Department of Somoto. Before it was called Institute National of Madriz but currently it is known as Institute National Augusto Salinas Pinell (INASP). In this institute there are imparted

classes every day in two sessions: morning and afternoon. In the INASP there are around 1500 students and approximately twenty-five teachers for every class, which means there is a large number of students.

Participants

Our research study took place with the experience of two English teachers from the afternoon shift in the Instituto Nacional Augusto Salinas Pinell. A male teacher with the name of Ramon Garcia who have been teaching English during seventeen years so far. He was taught English by an American professor who came to Nicaragua when he was ten years old. From now on we are going to call him: teacher one.

The second participant is a female teacher with the name Jesking Pineda who graduated in the year 2010 in the university Martin Lutero in the major of English. One year later, she started teaching the English language. It could be said, she knows about some of the factors that may affect the development of this language. From now on we are going to call her teacher two.

Data collection methods

Semi-structured interview

Our choice for semi-structured interview as our instrument to collect data made sense in this research study, since Anne, (2013) defined semi-structured interview as “repertoire of possibilities” The Semi-structured interview allowed us to focus specifically in listening comprehension and helped us to cover it with natural conversation, our participants felt confidence and comfortable when answering the questions. Carrying out a

semi-structured interview also allowed us to learn about the motivation behind our participants' choices, beliefs and attitudes in enhancing students' listening comprehension.

Data analysis

In this study, the type of qualitative analysis selected was thematic coding which consists of creating and assigning codes to categorize data to make it more manageable when representing and interpreting it. Fundamentally, coding required identifying data from the semi-structured interview to illustrate theoretical concepts, and we linked these data by a common theme or idea to categorize them. After identifying the type of analysis, we followed three phases: data reduction, data reorganization/rearrangement, and data representation.

Results and Discussion

Results

To identify the listening activities implemented by the English teacher for enhancing listening comprehension

According to the information gathered from the teachers' interviews Listening activities offers advantages in the teaching of English language, for example teacher one explained the following: "I use reported speech because in this way I realize if my students are understanding me" he also explained that through this activity students practice their speaking skill and described the following, "I got them repeat just what I have said but in their own words". Teacher two supported the aforementioned by explaining the following, "I use these kinds of activities listen and point, listen and match, flashcards in order to help

the students' increase their capacity to understand what they hear". So, using listening activities in English learning is useful either for teachers and students. The use of resources such audios, videos and online games were also mentioned by the teachers, wherein both of them told us that such resources help them in creating attractive and interactive classes.

To describe the difficulties students present when developing listening comprehension

Through the application of the semi-structured interview, we could notice that developing listening skills in Nicaraguan high schools is a complicated task for English teachers. That is the case of the teacher one where he described the following: "Understanding English is hard for them". In this regard, though the information gathered from the teachers' interview we could find, that many factors influence in the development of such skill, such factors are: "Students' shyness", "students' anxiety", "the lack of vocabulary to understand the class", "The lack of practice", "Students' aptitudes", "Overcrowded classrooms", and "time for the lessons". Beside both of the teachers mentioned, that, "The speaker's speed" and "Speaker's intonation" are also factors that have to do with the students' understanding.

To suggest the narrow listening activities to develop listening comprehension

As aforementioned, findings obtained from the first and second objectives were relevant to answer the third one. We took data from the first objective, which explains that the activities chosen by the English teacher must be **flexible and vary** to achieve a specific learning goal, (e.g., to enhance listening skills). Besides, in the semi-structured interview, teachers one and two mentioned that these listening activities "should use **comprehensible input**"; thus, they should be easy to comprehend and appeal to the students' language level.

For example, some of the activities mentioned by the teachers were: reported speech, use of online slide sheet, listen and point, listen and match, use of flashcards, completing the lyrics of the songs, role plays, and the total physical response method, among others.

Discussion

The implementation of a semi-structured interview helped us to realize that high school teachers face several difficulties when teaching listening comprehension to their students, to get sense of it, some of them are: little amount of time to impart their learning lessons, demotivated students, large groups just for one classroom (more than 40 students), students' misbehavior, lack of students' vocabulary to understand the class and so forth.

Taking into consideration as has been described all the difficulties described in our research theory and same difficulties found through this research's results, it could be said that, developing listening comprehension in high school students is challenging for most English teachers-experienced and inexperienced. They must be aware of the difficulties they might experience before performing their lessons. For example, to enhance listening, students need repetition, but in Nicaraguan high schools, English is taught only twice a week- less than three hours of exposure to the language. Therefore, most teachers choose and modify their activities to achieve their teaching-learning goals. In addition, when time in the classroom is limited, some teachers opt to motivate their students to practice listening at home, but this is not always the case. Through the interviews implemented, we could find out that students do not have the proper amount of time to be exposed to the target language, what makes hard for them understand different kinds of input, firstly because they do not have enough practice and second, they do not have enough vocabulary beside

input's speed and intonation is not usually appropriate for their language's level. In this regard, such factors provoke students' confusion when they listen to the language and get stressed when don't understand.

Through this study we have identified that English teachers and students face many challenges in the teaching-learning process. So, it is the main reason to suggest narrow listening activities by using comprehensible input in order to help English teachers and students to facilitate this complex process and also to increase the student's listening comprehension.

In addition, through this research we have noticed that the participants of this study perceive listening activities as an effective tool when helping students to enhance student's listening comprehension. In spite of the difficulties that are present in the process of teaching listening comprehension, EFL teachers in Nicaragua attempt to overcome such difficulties with the implementation of listening activities. For example, EFL teachers use reported speech to motivate students engage with the class, so students practice their oral expression and at the same time their listening skill, EFL teachers also do use online slide sheet (technology) to get students interact with the language, in the same way they avoid students' misbehavior since students are entertained with attractive and relevant learning's strategies. Activities such as: listening point, listening match and flashcards are used by EFL teachers to provide students a clearer understanding of the words and phrases of English language by having the students practicing in the target language. These types of listening activities also may help English teachers in Nicaragua to face the students lack of vocabulary to understand the input they hear. When they understand what they hear, they

feel motivated when enhancing English language skills; in this case, they may be able to enjoy the enhancing of listening comprehension.

Conclusion

During this research, we could identify the significance of learning from the teachers' perspectives on educational subjects. Their viewpoints combine background, knowledge, and expertise, which are crucial when interacting with their students and performing their lessons. The value they give to the activities and resources they apply comes from what they have seen and done in their classrooms and the results they have obtained. For that reason, educational systems need to rely on their teaching staff to determine difficulties, challenges, and strengths to improve the quality of education.

Concerning the value of listening activities implemented by the English teacher, the main findings reflect those teachers perceived listening activities as effective, since, they are able to prepare their students in understanding the main message from someone else's speech. Teachers exposed their students to listening activities in the most of their classes because they believe that if students understand the language, the speaking skill will come naturally. Teachers expressed that, they boost a lot of listening activities during their lessons, activities which help them in creating a natural environment. Such activities are: Reported speech, use of online slide sheet, Listen and point, listen and match, flashcards, songs, role plays, TPR³ (...). These activities are perceived as effective because they are supposed to help overcome the following difficulties found in the EFL classroom:

³ Total Physical Response: Language teaching method built to coordinate action with speech (Asher, 1996).

“Students’ shyness”, “students’ anxiety”, “the lack of vocabulary to understand the class”, “The lack of practice” and “Student’s aptitudes”.

Taking into consideration, the difficulties and activities described by the teachers, we found a similar activity (narrow listening) which fosters extensive listening focused on one single topic. Consequently, we suggested narrow listening as a possibility for the English teachers to enhance listening comprehension. Through narrow listening teachers create an enjoyable classroom and students feel confident beside they learn naturally.

To conclude, as aforementioned English teaching-learning process is a very complex process for teacher students. Therefore, it represents several difficulties for students, one of them is the misunderstanding of the language. That is the case English teachers should consider these difficulties when implementing different activities to response students’ learning needs.

In addition, there are varied activities to be implemented, but to be effective, repetition must be present, and they should be adaptable to students’ language level (comprehensible input). For that reason, we suggested Narrow Listening; this approach exposes students to the language through repetition, which facilitates comprehension.

Recommendations

The findings of this research describe that enhancing students’ listening comprehension requires the use of different activities in the classroom. We recommend English teachers to continue implementing effective activities to foster students’ listening comprehension. These activities should be flexible and comprehensible to generate students’ interest on learning English. We suggest to MINED to continue training English

teachers in Nicaragua with good methodologies that may increase students' second language acquisition.

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