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Factores que dificultan la comprensión auditiva de los alumnos de inglés como lengua Extranjera: el caso del curso de inglés básico del Centro de Idiomas de la UV

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Abstract

The current English language learning is fundamental in different social contexts. When learning a language, developing the four language skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) is necessary for effective communication, the essential goal of the language learning process. From the four, listening comprehension, the central research aspect of this work, is an important part of the effective use of the language. At the same time, it is an essential element for English language learning development since the progress of listening skills enables the development of others. Speaking is the most obvious example of this situation. However, listening comprehension is difficult for many EFL learners, and a certain number have difficulties understanding what they hear in English. Hence, the main objective of this study was to identify the different factors hindering their listening comprehension and why they may be a problem—focusing specifically on the difficulties that are influenced by both the language knowledge of the listener and the speaker's utterances. The work also considered and reviewed important issues concerning listening comprehension. For this purpose, a mixed method was used; a survey and an interview were carried out to discover those same issues. It was concluded that although all the factors considered for this work hinder listening comprehension, some were more prevalent than others. Finally, it was demonstrated that the main factors that hindered EFL learners' listening comprehension were speech rate, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

Keywords: listening comprehension, importance, difficulties, factors, hindering.

Resumen

En el mundo de hoy, el aprendizaje del idioma inglés es fundamental en los diferentes contextos sociales. En el aprendizaje de un idioma, el desarrollo de las cuatro habilidades lingüísticas (hablar, leer, escribir y escuchar) es necesario para una comunicación eficaz: el objetivo principal del proceso de aprendizaje de idiomas. De las cuatro, la comprensión oral, elemento principal de investigación del presente trabajo, es una parte importante para un uso eficaz del idioma. Dicha habilidad es al mismo tiempo, un elemento esencial para el desarrollo del aprendizaje del inglés. Esto debido a que el desarrollo de la habilidad auditiva permite el desarrollo de otras. La expresión oral es el ejemplo más claro de esta situación. Sin embargo, la comprensión auditiva no es una actividad fácil para muchos estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera pues un determinado número tienen dificultades cuando intentan entender lo que escuchan en inglés. Por lo tanto, el principal objetivo de este estudio era el identificar los diferentes factores que dificultan su comprensión auditiva y las razones por las que pueden suponer un problema. Centrándose específicamente en las dificultades en las que influyen tanto los conocimientos lingüísticos del oyente como la forma de enunciarlo del hablante. Además de ello, a lo largo del trabajo también se consideraron y revisaron algunas cuestiones importantes relativas a la comprensión auditiva. Para el análisis de la cuestión considerada se utilizó un método mixto; se realizó una encuesta y una entrevista para descubrir esos mismos aspectos. Con esto, se llegó a la conclusión de que, aunque todos los factores considerados para este trabajo dificultaban la comprensión oral, algunos prevalecían más que otros. Por último, se demostró que los principales factores que dificultan la comprensión oral de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera son la velocidad del habla, la pronunciación y el vocabulario.

Palabras clave: comprensión auditiva, importancia, dificultades, factores, obstaculiza.

1. Introduction

The need for learning a language arises from its significance in communication. Being able to communicate in social contexts is one of the main reasons for learning a language (Vandergrift, 1997, as cited in Yildirim & Yildirim, 2016). Language is how people share information: ideas, thoughts, facts, and feelings with others. Additionally, it lets them build connections among themselves. More importantly, as stated by Harmer (2007, as cited in Riadil, 2020), language is widely used for communication among people who do not share the same language, as in the case of English language learning.

Hence, learning English has gained a particular place in the teaching context of all the worldwide languages. Nowadays, teaching the English language is part of many school curriculums globally. Their presence in such spaces is not limited to teaching students to pass an exam or obtain a grade; the objective of their teaching goes beyond that. The importance of currently learning English lies in its advantages to language learners. For example, it can be used as a tool for both educational and professional purposes.

In the teaching and learning context, it is said that to make efficient use of the language, one must develop four skills. In language teaching, these skills are classified into two types: receptive (listening and reading) and productive (writing and speaking). Moreover, according to different authors (Ulum, 2015; Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018; Bozorgian, 2012), there are substantial correlations between these four language processes. More importantly, if the language learning process lacks one, the final development will not be complete (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014). So, the key point to mastering the English language lies in the equal attention that should be paid to developing each language skill.

When learning the English language, the development of listening skills is essential. It is one of the four language skills aimed to develop while learning English as a foreign language (Ahmadi, 2016; Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). Listening, the primary skill researched in the present work, is recognizing and understanding what people are saying (Hamouda, 2013, as cited in Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). In addition, Mendelsohn (1994, in Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011) shares this view, and he defines it as the "ability to understand the spoken language of native speakers" (p. 978).

However, it must be noted that listening is not an easy task for the listeners. As mentioned previously, they should know many significant elements like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary to understand the language and communicate properly. Those same factors immersed in listening comprehension may facilitate or hinder comprehending what is said. If students lack some, they may have difficulties that could hinder their comprehension of a particular spoken text.

Although listening is an essential skill, it is also neglected in multiple EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. In addition, the lack of practice affects students' listening comprehension. Teaching English in many EFL classrooms usually focuses on developing reading and writing, with the aspects it involves (grammar, vocabulary, etc.), but listening is especially left aside. Moreover, the teaching of listening may be seen as challenging because of the elements involved, like pronunciation, stress, and intonation. These situations negatively impact the development of students' listening skills. As a result, the little attention paid to listening activity and practice in the EFL classrooms and the factors that may hinder students' learning affect their understanding of the spoken language.

That is why the importance of this study, which could provide evidence of the factors immersed when learning the listening skill. However, not all of these are positive, but some of them -the presence or absence of some- may have a negative impact on the learners' adequate comprehension of the spoken language. Then, this investigation could identify the factors hindering listening comprehension and why they cause difficulties for EFL students. In doing so, it is hoped that the study's findings will help teachers understand why students face difficulties during the listening comprehension process and help them improve their listening and language skills. Hence, it is crucial to find out the factors affecting students' listening comprehension to improve EFL learners' listening skills and other language skills.

Research objective and questions

This study aims to discover the main factors hindering learners' English listening comprehension and explores how the factors affect learners' English listening comprehension. This small-scale study aims to contribute to the existing literature on EFL students' difficulties with English language listening comprehension.

1. What are the main factors that hinder EFL students' comprehension of listening skills?

2. Why do these factors affect students' listening comprehension?

2. Methodology

Research approach

This study applies a mixed method approach to discover the factors that hinder EFL students' listening comprehension from the basic English course of the language department at the UV. In addition, the study intends to explore why the factors affect learners' performance when trying to understand what they hear. The factors hindering listening comprehension are presented in the literature review, but participants could offer more information or elements that, in their experience, hinder their understanding of the spoken language.

Creswell (2014) defines the mixed method approach as combining qualitative and quantitative research and data, where the expected outcomes are a more in-depth understanding of the quantitative results. Similarly, Harrison et al. (2020) state that this approach "combines statistical trends (quantitative data) with lived experiences (qualitative data)" (p. 474). The advantage of using this method in the research is that it allows the collection of two different types of data; it includes both open-ended and close-ended data to obtain information regarding the factors affecting listening comprehension.

As Hernandez et al. (2014) explained, mixed research uses quantitative and qualitative research strengths. Not just replacing them but combining them with that, trying to minimize their potential weaknesses. Similarly, Creswell (2014) says that its use for research minimizes the limitations of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Hence, integrating both types of research into one, such as the mixed method case, gives the researcher a more panoramic view of their research problem and, thus, a more complete understanding of it.

Type of study

The research uses an explanatory sequential mixed method study. Creswell (2014) defines it as "a two-phase project in which the researcher collects quantitative data in the first phase, analyzes the results, and then uses the results to plan (or build onto) the second, qualitative phase" (p.224).

This type of design is presented in the method and the data collection instruments used in the present research. First, to collect statistical information about the factors that affect students' listening skills, survey (quantitative) data was employed. It was administered to the English language students participating in this study in the basic English III course. After the data was obtained, the results were analyzed to select only a specific part of the initial quantitative sample to plan the second qualitative phase. This was also the basis for designing the questions asked to these participants. The second phase consisted of an interview with the selected population that enabled the researcher to obtain more in-depth information on the topic, specifically data about why the factors affect learners' listening skill development. In the end, with this type of design, the qualitative data obtained from the interview helped explain the initial quantitative responses from the survey in more detail. The qualitative results helped explain the initial survey results and better understand why the factors presented affect listening comprehension.

Context

This research was carried out with students of the language department Campus Xalapa at the Universidad Veracruzana. In this institution, dedicated to teaching languages, a total of 7 languages are offered: French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, and English, with levels from basic to advanced in some of these. Regarding the English language, three courses are offered: English 4 skills (9 levels), English area básica I and II (2 levels), and English text comprehension (1 level). Of all these, and due to the focus of the present study, this study was carried out with students of the basic English 4 skills course to find the factors hindering EFL learners' listening comprehension, especially a course that focuses on developing the four skills: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. The course is IBAS 300 (Inglés Básico 3).

Participants

The present study included a mixed-gender group of 13 students of the basic English course of the language department. Regarding their mother tongue, all the respondents had Spanish as their native language. It was a mixed group in terms of the area where they were enrolled as they were enrolled in different undergraduate programs. This group was selected as they were enrolled in a course where they received training on the four English language skills:

speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The participants of the quantitative study were 13 students from different undergraduate programs.

For the qualitative phase, the sample for this part consisted of 8 participants, purposefully selected from the total group population to participate in the study's second phase. The sample used was non-probabilistic. This, as Hernández et al. (2014) stated, "[they] involve a selection procedure oriented by the characteristics of the research, rather than by a statistical criterion of generalization" (p.189). It must be noted that for the findings section, a code was assigned to each one of these students in order to protect their identities for confidentiality. The codes were conformed by the letter S and a number assigned to each participant.

Data collection instruments

The research instruments employed to collect data for this study were two different instruments: a survey and an interview. Based on the mixed method used for this research, it was intended to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, to obtain such data, the instruments selected were a survey and semi-structured interviews designed for this research.

The first instrument employed in this study was a survey. A survey is a quantitative research method aiming to collect individual self-report data. The most common instruments for this purpose are the questionnaire or the structured interview. This kind of study can show data about many different problems. Participants can share opinions, experiences, feelings, or awareness about a particular topic (Hernandez et al., 2014). It allows researchers to explore the situation being investigated and make inferences about larger populations. Surveys are the most common way of obtaining large amounts of data in a relatively short period. Creswell (2014) states that it "provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (p.249). In this case, the present study used a quantitative phase to generalize the results of the population. It was administered since it could provide relevant and important data about the factors hindering EFL learners' listening comprehension and some reasons why they cause them difficulties.

The semi-structured interviews are based on a guide of questions, and the interviewer is free to introduce additional questions to clarify some concepts or obtain more information

about them (Hernandez et al., 2014). The main characteristic of this type of interview is that they are open-ended and neutral. This is to obtain the respondents' perspectives, opinions, and experiences in their own words (Hernández et al., 2014).

The survey was the first instrument administered to the participants in this study. It consisted of 25 close-ended (multiple choice) and open-ended questions and 2 questions to gather information about the participants. It was used to collect data for a large initial group of participants, and it helped to get a general perspective of the factors affecting their listening skills. The survey was administered to students through Google Forms, and the link was shared online through WhatsApp. The questionnaire was divided into four domains: English language learning, listening comprehension, importance of listening, and factors affecting listening comprehension.

Then, in the second phase, this study focused on obtaining qualitative data. For this part, semi-structured interviews were used to collect detailed views from the participants to help explain the first survey in detail. This type of interview is a mix of structured and unstructured interviews. While a few questions are predetermined, the others were not previously defined. The questions are open-ended, and, in this way, they allow for flexibility. The interviewer can add questions or ask for clarifications (Canals, L, 2017). In this case, the sample used for this research phase was a non-probability sample where 8 students were selected from the initial population. The interview consisted of 6 open-ended questions.

Data analysis

The data for this study were analyzed separately because, as stated by Creswell (2014), "the quantitative and the qualitative databases are analyzed separately in this approach (mixed-method approach)" (p.224). First, the answers obtained from the survey were analyzed so that they could be considered for the design of the second qualitative phase.

For the analysis, the survey questions were divided into three sections. The categories were importance and motivation for learning the English language, listening comprehension in English language learning, and factors affecting listening comprehension. Subsequently, the information was plotted to obtain the corresponding percentages and thus find out the factors that most affect listening comprehension. For the analysis of the results, some of the items were placed into tables that allowed visualization of the percentages obtained for each item. The items corresponding to the categories and themes were presented in these tables,

depending on the Likert scale type used. Those using a frequency scale were placed in one table, and those using an agreement scale in another, always considering the category to which they belonged. In this way, it was possible to identify the items with which the students mostly agreed, those with which they disagreed, and those with frequency.

Analyzing the data collected with the two instruments led to four categories for the results section. These were English language learning and language skills, listening comprehension in the EFL classroom, exposure to the authentic language, and the main factors hindering EFL students listening comprehension. It should be noted that the results of the second phase provided additional factors to those considered in this paper. These were located within the category of factors affecting listening comprehension.

Data collection and analysis procedure

Before creating and applying the research instruments, the teacher in charge of the group used for this research was contacted. She was informed of the research's purpose and asked permission to conduct the two data collection activities. She agreed to use her group for research.

The collection of quantitative data characterized the first phase. The quantitative phase aimed to identify the main factors hindering learners' listening comprehension, and for that purpose, the quantitative data were collected through a Google Forms survey. First, the questionnaire was designed to consider the research objectives and questions of the study as well as the aspects mentioned in the literature review. Then, it was translated into Spanish, the native language of the participants, so that the participants could easily understand the questions and avoid misunderstandings. Afterward, it was transferred to the Google Forms platform to be easily shared with the participants through a link.

The survey consisted of a total of 27 questions: 2 questions focused on personal information about the learner and 25 questions focused on obtaining data about the importance, practice, and factors that, in their experience, hinder their listening comprehension. The five factors that were handled in the survey were identified through the analysis of literature and studies by various authors who conducted research in the field. The survey was revised and piloted before it was administered to the students. This was done to identify errors or problems before implementation.

The criterion for selecting the participants for the quantitative phase was that they should be undergraduate students. A total of 13 students in the group met this criterion, all of whom responded to the survey. The participants were first told about the research objectives on the survey day. The purpose of the survey was also explained: to determine the factors affecting the listening comprehension of learners of English as a foreign language. After that, the link to the Google Forms survey was shared via a WhatsApp group. Before they started answering the survey, the researcher gave them clear instructions on how to avoid misunderstandings. Then, the students answered the questionnaire, and the answers were generated as they submitted their answers.

Once the responses of all participants were obtained, the results were analyzed. This was done to consider this information so that the second research instrument (interview) could be designed and further explored. Before proceeding to design the interview, the survey data was first analyzed. Firstly, all the responses were downloaded into an Excel sheet. After these factors had been identified, the interview was designed. This consisted of 6 questions: one focused on the role of listening comprehension, one focused on the difficulties students have in understanding what they hear, and four others focused on the factors that, according to the survey, most affect their listening comprehension.

The population chosen for this second phase was selected based on their answers to the questionnaire. Firstly, it was considered that the participant had selected the factors that, according to the survey results, had the most significant impact. The second selection criterion consisted of choosing answers congruent with the individual questions on these factors. Following this criterion, four students were selected. Moreover, four other students who did not meet this criterion were also selected.

Once selected, they were asked to participate by answering the interviews, to which all the selected participants agreed. Their purpose was explained to the participants when conducting each of the interviews. Additionally, permission to record the interview was requested, and all participants agreed to it. Once all the interview recordings were gathered, they were transcribed for analysis. After that, the most relevant parts of each interview were identified. Specifically, these are important aspects that reaffirm or contrast the results of the first research instrument used. Once the information had been classified, the most important and noteworthy inferences were drawn up.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are an essential part of the research. As stated by Creswell (2014) "Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research" (p. 92). Before collecting data, participants were informed of the research purposes to obtain consent from all the participants (students and teachers). In addition, to clearly state this, the survey contained the following legend: *This survey is intended to collect data for research purposes and specifically for a research project focused on the factors that affect English listening comprehension in learners of English as a foreign language. Your participation is therefore of great importance. Please note that the information provided is strictly confidential and will be used only for research purposes.* Moreover, for the interview, the participants were asked if the interviews could be recorded, and consent was obtained from all the participants interviewed.

3. **Results**

This chapter presents the results and findings obtained through the two research instruments implemented—the present study aimed to identify the main factors affecting EFL students' listening comprehension. Different themes are also discussed in this chapter. For example, students' views about the importance of the English language and the development of language skills, primarily listening. Moreover, the difficulties students face when comprehending what they hear in spoken English are also part of the discussion. Specifically, the factors that made listening comprehension a complex and challenging activity. Therefore, the results presented here are the analyzed information obtained from the two instruments provided by the sample used for this research.

From the data obtained through the questionnaire and the interview, four categories emerged for its analysis: English language learning and language skills, listening comprehension in the EFL classroom, exposure to the authentic language, and main factors hindering EFL students listening comprehension. It must be noted that the participants' perspectives were discussed about the information presented previously in the literature review.

3.1 English language learning and language skills

The first part of the research focuses on analyzing the importance of the English language, perceiving English learning as developing the four skills. Firstly, the participants were asked about their motivation for learning the language.
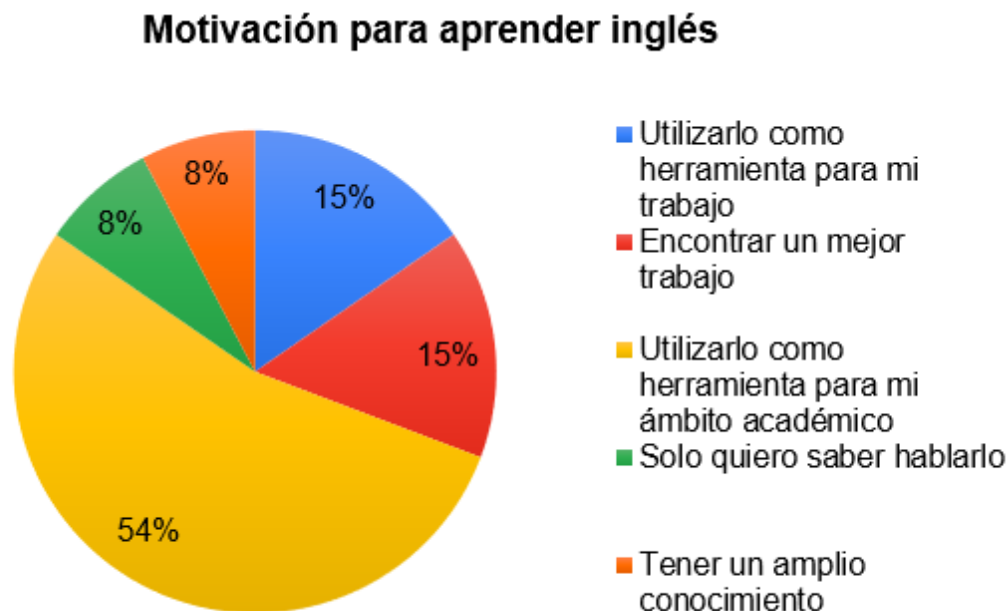

Figure 1

As seen from the graphic, most of the population (54%) was learning English to use it as a tool for their academic field. On the other hand, 30 % of the population was taking English classes for work purposes. That is, 15 % were learning the language to find a better job, and 15 % used it as a tool in their job.

Then, to discover the students' perceptions on this subject, the questionnaire asked them about the importance of the English language. Table 1 highlights the items about this criterion, where "T e d" is used for "Totally agree," "E d" for "Disagree," "N" for "Neutral," "D a" for "Agree," and "T d a" for "Totally agree."

Table 1. English language learning						
Item	Question	1. T e d	2. E d	3. N	4. D a	5. T d a
2	Creo que el idioma inglés es uno de los idiomas más importante para aprender hoy en día	0	0	0	15.4%	84.6%
3	Estoy tomando clases de inglés porque me ayudarán a comprender el idioma, tanto lo que escucho como lo que leo.	0	0	0	69.2%	30.8%
4	Estoy tomando clases de inglés porque me ayudarán a producirlo de forma oral y escrita.	0	0	0	69.2%	30.8%

The results showed that most respondents accepted that English is one of the most important languages to learn nowadays. In this respect, one of the participants stated:

"From my point of view, I believe it is quite important for any job or to participate in any school application process" (S3).

In terms of learning the English language based on the language skills, i.e., receptive and productive skills, there was an equality in the percentages. All the participants were taking English classes to understand what they heard, read, and produce it orally and in writing. That is to say, as it can be observed from Table 1, items 3 and 4, 69.2 % of the population totally agreed, and 31.8 % agreed with learning the English language to understand and produce it in its different forms.

3.2 Listening comprehension in the EFL classroom

The information provided in interviews and questionnaires demonstrated that listening is an important skill in the language learning process. This situation is reflected in the results obtained in the statement about the importance of listening. In that item, the 13 students agreed to that; while 76.9% totally agreed, the remaining 23.1% agreed.

Additionally, to get a general idea of students' views about the difficulty of this skill, they were asked about their experience with the difficulty of this skill. With a percentage of 61.5%, it was shown that most respondents agreed with this fact. 5 students, corresponding to 38.5%, agreed, and 3, corresponding to 23%, said they agreed. Meanwhile, 38.5 % remained neutral to this statement. Moreover, they were also asked in item 16 about their listening comprehension skill in English according to their level. Because of this, most of the respondents, corresponding to 69.2%, considered to have an acceptable level.

3.3 Access to practice listening comprehension

In order to investigate the emphasis that teachers place on the different skills, the participants were asked about their experience in this regard. Regarding whether they emphasize one or some skills more than others, most of the participants, corresponding to 9 students (69.2 %) said that the emphasis is placed on all four skills equally. However, 3 students, corresponding to 23.1 %, said writing, and the remaining 7.7 % said speaking is the skill that is more emphasized in their English classes. Moreover, to get more specific information about the listening comprehension practice, the statements are shown in Table 2, where N is used for "Never," "R v" is for "Rarely," "A v" is for "Sometimes," "A m" is for "Often," and "S" is for "Always."

Table 2. Practice of the listening comprehension						
Item	Statement	1. N	2. R v	3. A v	4. A m	5. S
10	Frecuencia con la que realizo actividades de las siguientes habilidades en el salón de clases:					
	Lectura	0	0	7.6%	53.8%	38.4%
	Escucha	0	0	0	53.8%	46.2%
	Habla	0	0	23%	38.5%	38.5%
	Escritura	0	0	0	30.8%	69.2%
12	Tengo acceso a práctica de escucha fuera del salón de clases.	7.7%	23.0%	38.5%	15.4%	15.4%
13	Escucho al maestro utilizar el idioma inglés en clase.	0	0	7.7%	30.8%	61.5%

As Table 2 shows, the results showed that writing, with 69.2 % for 'always', is the skill students had more practice with inside the classroom. It was followed by listening, with 46.2 %, and reading, with 53.8 % for 'frequently'. Meanwhile, speaking, with 23% in sometimes, was the skill students had the least practice, according to the results.

Regarding the frequency of access to listening practice outside the classroom, most respondents, representing 38.5 %, said they sometimes have practice outside the classroom. That was followed by rarely, with 23 %. One of the participants commented on this regard:

> "From my perspective, I only use it to read and rarely to speak. I have not had the opportunity to use it since most of my classmates are Spanish speakers, so I do not practice it" (S12).

In addition to that, the aim of item 13 was to discover whether students had auditory exposure to the English language in the classroom, especially from the teacher. For this, 61. 5 % of them argued that the teacher always uses the English language in the class.

3.4 Importance of practicing listening comprehension

Firstly, to learn about the importance of listening practice, they were asked, in item 5, if listening is an important part of learning English. The results showed that all the participants agreed with this statement. Following this line, they were asked which skills are improved by listening practice. The results demonstrated that speaking, the skill most improved through listening, according to 84.6% of students, was speaking, followed by reading and writing (61.6%).

Moreover, related to these aspects, they were also asked which language elements can be developed through the learning of listening comprehension. The results revealed that vocabulary and pronunciation, with 92.3% respectively, are the elements that benefit the most from listening comprehension practice. In addition, grammar, the other element presented in this item, represented 76.9 %. Additionally, in item 14, which sought to determine whether lack of practice affected comprehension, most participants agreed. That is, 58.3% agreed, and 30.8% totally agreed. In this regard, one of the respondents interviewed commented:

> "I think it is essential to relate it to listening to and speaking it. Practicing it, just like we do it in Spanish, because that is how we learn another language. It is like when we learn Spanish, how do we do it? Because our parents started talking to us when we were little kids" (S7).

3.5 Exposure to the authentic language

As previously mentioned, English language practice is of paramount importance. However, the results suggest a practice that goes beyond those materials created for in-class language teaching. The responses of some of the participants demonstrate that exposure to elements of authentic language is indispensable. When asked about the importance of listening in language learning, one of the students commented:

> "It is important because we must adapt correctly to the speech of native speakers" (S12).

In this case, the student mentioned the importance of listening to native language speakers. This would surely enable them to become familiar with their production and articulation. It must be noted that although the participants did not mention the importance of using authentic materials for the language classroom, they mentioned some characteristics of that language. For example, one of the respondents mentioned one of those characteristics. That is, the fact that in spoken English, some words are reduced or grouped may cause problems in understanding for learners:

"The issue is that natives use a lot of words—words that I can see in some English-speaking series—and I don't understand them, especially when they use abbreviations of those words" (S13).

Another respondent commented:

"I try to adapt to everyday conversation, watching movies, listening to music in English, and watching anything in English to try to get used to everyday conversations" (S7).

3.6 Main factors hindering EFL students' listening comprehension

The information provided in the survey and the interviews suggests that all the factors presented in the questionnaire affected the students' listening comprehension. However, these same factors had different levels of influence on students' comprehension.

3.6.1 Speed rate

According to the results of item 17, this factor was the most selected by the participants as a factor affecting listening comprehension in English. That is, 84.6% selected this element, corresponding to 11 out of 13 participants' selections. In order to delve deeper into the way speed is affected, the survey contained the statements shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Speed rate hindering listening comprehension						
Item	Statement	1. T e d	2. E d	3. N	4. D a	5. T d a
31	Me cuesta trabajo comprender cuando el hablante habla muy rápido.	0	7.7%	38.5%	23.1%	30.8%
22	Tengo dificultad en comprender si el interlocutor habla muy rápido pues me toma más tiempo procesar lo que dice.	0	7.7%	46.2%	30.8%	15.4%

As can be seen, in item 21, most of the respondents (53.8%) agreed with the statement. Additionally, a smaller population remained neutral to it. These results were also consistent with the responses of the participants interviewed. For example, one of them commented:

> "Speed is important because we are used to teachers speaking a bit slower in order for us to understand. However, the way we hear it in the audio is very fluent, affecting us greatly. I think we should get used to speaking fluently or listening to it more fluently to get used to it" (S3).

Other participants commented on something similar regarding the speech rate hindering listening comprehension:

> "Some people's speed is sometimes very fast, so sometimes it takes a while to understand. However, some others speak slower, so you can better identify what they are saying" (S1).

> "Very much so, especially in the listening activities that we do at school. I can catch some words that I am familiar with, but in general, the fluency with which they speak is faster than I can perceive or understand" (S11).

3.6.2 Pronunciation

Pronunciation and vocabulary were among the most frequently selected items for understanding spoken language in item 8. These results agreed mainly with item 17, where 9 out of 13 students chose pronunciation as a factor affecting listening comprehension.

One of the most common problems with this factor is that for the students, the way the words are written does not correspond to their real pronunciation, which causes them conflict. However, in item 20, where this was asked, the majority of the respondents (79.9%) were neutral about this fact. 15.4% said they agreed with this fact. 15.4% agreed and 7.7% disagreed. Moreover, although most students remained neutral to the view of authors such as Bloomfield et al. (2010, as cited in Walker, 2014) that words are pronounced differently from how they see them written, this fact was still highlighted. That is, pronouncing words as they see them written, generally using the phonology of their native language. In this regard, the respondent commented:

> "Well, for many people, it is not easy because the pronunciation of words sounds different from how they are written. So, I think pronunciation is necessary to know what they are saying" (S7).

Additionally, one of the participants highlighted the fact of learning incorrect pronunciation and how this can be a problem:

"It affects how they say it; that is, if you hear it one way, you will reproduce it that way. If it is wrong, you are going to transmit something you don't want" (S11).

Another respondent commented on the familiarity with some words:

"Pronunciation has not been a big problem for me. Well, in certain words, since some of them are, so to speak, easy. This is because we have been used to listening to them since middle and high school, but as we move forward, the level of complexity is higher and sometimes quite difficult" (S3).

3.6.3 Vocabulary

One of the first questions to find out whether vocabulary was a factor affecting listening comprehension was item 8. This asked students which elements (vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar) were necessary to understand what they heard in English. With 76.9 %, the equivalent of 10 out of 13 selections, vocabulary was one of the items that, according to the students, was most needed to understand what they heard. In addition, items 18 and 19 contained statements related to this factor, which can be seen in Table 3.

The results regarding vocabulary as a factor affecting comprehension were different. In item 18, most of the population agreed (69.9%) that they would have difficulty understanding if the vocabulary was insufficient. Additionally, in item 19, 46.2% of the population, that is, most of the participants, remained neutral to the fact that they would have problems, in this case, if the vocabulary were above their level. However, one of the students interviewed commented concerning vocabulary as a factor affecting listening comprehension:

"Sometimes, we as students do not have the vocabulary we should have for our level" (S3).

Furthermore, there was a similarity in the responses regarding the lack of knowledge of vocabulary and how this causes them difficulty:

"Not knowing the words is as if you heard the text, I mean the dialogue, and you hear words you do not know because there is no logic in what you hear" (S8).

3.6.4 Accent

The accent was one of the least selected elements by the participants in item 17 as a factor affecting listening comprehension of spoken English. In this item, 4 out of 13 students selected it, corresponding to 30.8% out of 100%. The results were somewhat related to item 25, where they were asked whether encountering an accent different from the one they were used to caused them difficulty. In this case, neutral perceptions were found towards accent as a factor affecting listening comprehension. Thus, as can be noticed, this factor was not very relevant for the students.

3.6.5 Grammar knowledge

According to the results in item 8, grammar is also an important part of understanding what is heard. In this item, 10 out of 13 participants selected this element, equivalent to 76.9%. However, grammar was below vocabulary and pronunciation, with 92.3% respectively. These results are consistent with item 17, where grammar was the least selected factor affecting English listening comprehension. Only one student out of 13 selected this factor in this area, representing 7.7 %.

Additionally, item 23 aimed to discover how complex grammatical structures cause them problems understanding what they hear. The results show that 46.2% of the population agreed, another 46.2% were neutral, and the remaining 7.7% disagreed.

Moreover, they were asked in item 24 whether recognizing the spoken text's grammar could help them understand the content of what they hear. To this, most of the population agreed: 38.5% agreed, and 15.4% totally agreed. In this area, one respondent commented:

> "Of course, I think it is necessary. Grammar tells you how language works, so you can listen to something, but if you do not know how it is structured, for example, when using short forms? I mean. No. You cannot understand it; that is why it is essential" (S10).

3.6.7 Additional factors hindering listening comprehension

In addition to the factors considered for this study and mentioned in the literature review, other factors that may affect English language comprehension were also mentioned in the interviews. One of these additional factors that were mentioned was motivation, to which the participant said:

> "Because I do not practice it much, a small amount of it is due to a lack of personal motivation since, from my perspective, I only use it to read and rarely to speak" (S12).

Moreover, regarding this factor and the consideration for this study, one of the participants commented that they have difficulties understanding due to concentration. Sometimes, the language used in the audio made it difficult for her to concentrate on what she was listening to:

> "Perhaps one of my difficulties is that I get very unfocused, so sometimes the accents, even those who speak, can confuse me a little between words, making it difficult for me to understand" (S11).

4. **Discussion**

The findings of this study support prior research indicating that EFL learners are primarily instrumentally motivated. It is they learn English for academic or professional purposes. This aligns with Quijano (2020) and Sandoval (2011), who argue that external factors such as the desire for jobs or educational opportunities often influence learners' motivations. In this specific case, they learn the language to meet the requirements of schools and for working purposes, whether to find a better job or to use English as a tool in their work (Hong & Ganapathy, 2017).

The results of the emphasis on the four skills proved equal. According to the students, the teacher emphasizes all four skills equally. These findings contrast with the views of authors like Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), who say that EFL classes pay more attention to other skills, such as reading. Additionally, a small proportion mentioned the emphasis on writing and speaking. It is worth noting that listening, according to students' experience, was not a skill that the teacher emphasized the most. In addition, students said that they do more writing skills activities in the classroom.

Meanwhile, reading and speaking were the skills they reported doing activities less commonly. Listening was acknowledged as an important skill, particularly for improving speaking, vocabulary, and pronunciation. These results reinforce those of Renukadevi (2014) and Asriati (2017), who emphasize the value of spoken language exposure in language development.

Although the importance of listening was recognized, practice—especially outside the classroom—was limited. Participants cited environmental factors, such as predominantly Spanish-speaking peers, as obstacles to meaningful exposure. It is worth noting that some of the population said that they practice it frequently, and others always do. Although it might

be thought that these learners of English as a foreign language do not have access to exposure other than in the classroom, because as some of them commented that the people around them do not speak English but Spanish, others showed that they get exposure in other ways. For example, some mentioned listening to the language in songs, movies, and series. In other words, although they do not have the opportunity to listen to people using the language in everyday situations, they could have the opportunity to listen to it in other contexts and mediums.

Students recognized authentic language—complete with its rapid pace, reductions, and idiomatic expressions—as both a challenge and a necessity. They noted that exposure to real, unscripted language better prepares them for actual conversations than the scripted dialogues often found in textbooks.

The main difficulties they encountered were linked to how the speaker delivered the language, particularly the speed of speech, followed by issues with pronunciation and vocabulary. The literature highlights these difficulties (e.g., Wagner & Toth, 2017; Hamouda, 2013). Fast speech, for example, was especially problematic, as it left less time for processing. Unfamiliar pronunciations also created confusion, especially when they did not match what students had learned from written forms.

Vocabulary gaps were another significant hurdle. Students pointed out that limited vocabulary—whether due to mismatched levels or lack of exposure—made it harder to understand conversations or texts. This finding is consistent with previous research by Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) and Diora and Rosa (2020), emphasizing the importance of vocabulary knowledge for effective listening strategies.

While grammar helped understand sentence structure, it was not considered a significant obstacle. Similarly, accent differences were mentioned less frequently, suggesting that students might not be exposed to a wide range of accents or are perhaps more focused on other challenges.

Lastly, motivation and concentration emerged as key factors influencing language learning. If students lack motivation or struggle to focus during listening exercises, their performance can suffer, no matter how strong their linguistic abilities are.

In conclusion, the study highlights that while students recognize the importance of listening, their opportunities to develop this skill, both inside and outside the classroom, are

still limited. The main barriers stem from speech factors, vocabulary gaps, and attention issues, which could be addressed through more targeted teaching strategies.

5. Conclusion

In this section, the conclusions obtained from the study's result analysis are presented. Other themes, such as the study's limitations and further research, are also explained.

This study was conducted to identify the factors that hinder EFL students' listening comprehension of the English language and how they affect their comprehension. These were focused on the listener's knowledge of the language and the speaker's mode of enunciating the message. In addition, elements related to this skill and the English language were also investigated. Among those was the importance of this skill for developing elements of the language, other skills, and English language development.

The findings of this study show that students consider English one of the most important languages to learn today. The motivation of these EFL students to learn the language was mainly instrumental. In other words, they were taking English classes to use their language knowledge as a tool either in their study area or in their work. Their focus was not on developing a specific skill but on all of them equally. They were learning the language to understand and produce it in any of its forms.

One of the ways of understanding the language is comprehending what they listen to, which is the central theme of this study. In this respect, students recognize that listening is an important skill for language learning. Moreover, practice of this skill and exposure to the spoken language are necessary because they help the development of elements such as pronunciation and vocabulary as well as language skills such as speaking and reading. In terms of practicing listening skills, participants reported having frequent listening practice. This was both in the class and out of the classroom.

However, due to different factors, students reported having problems understanding what they were listening to. In terms of their knowledge of the language, vocabulary and pronunciation were the factors that, according to them, affected their listening comprehension the most. The former affects when the vocabulary is unfamiliar to the students. As for pronunciation, students reported unfamiliarity with pronouncing words that are less common and difficulties because the words are different from how they are written.

Regarding the speaker's utterance, the speed rate was the most affecting factor. This is mainly because, according to the results, the listener takes longer to understand what they hear when the speed is fast. Moreover, some students mentioned additional factors to the ones considered for this study: motivation and concentration.

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