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TÍTULO DEL ARTÍCULO :

**ENGLISH LISTENING PROBLEMS OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF THE MODERN
LANGUAGES DEGREE**

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Resumen

La presente investigación descriptiva se enfoca en los problemas de escucha del idioma inglés de los estudiantes de primer año en la carrera de Lenguas Modernas UES-FMO. Teniendo como objetivo describir los problemas de comprensión auditiva en inglés. Además, este es un estudio cuantitativo con un diseño de nivel descriptivo. Para la evaluación de las habilidades de escucha, se utilizaron los exámenes estandarizados TOEFL Junior y TOEFL ITP Level 1, ampliamente reconocidos para evaluar las competencias en el idioma inglés de los hablantes no nativos. La muestra para este estudio fue de 25 estudiantes, que participaron anónimamente. De los resultados, se puede afirmar que los encuestados tuvieron un buen desempeño durante la sección inicial del examen, en la que los audios se repitieron dos veces. Sin embargo, a medida que la dificultad del test aumentaba, su comprensión oral decayó. Otro de los problemas más frecuentes incluían la comprensión del vocabulario, el reconocimiento de acentos y el procesamiento de información oral en tiempo real. Los resultados revelan una puntuación media de 5 sobre 20, en las que los participantes mostraron buen entendimiento de las ideas principales al comienzo pero sus capacidades de comprensión disminuyeron a medida que la dificultad del examen se hacía más compleja. Estos resultados muestran que existen problemas en la comprensión auditiva de los estudiantes de primer año.

PALABRAS CLAVE: **Habilidad de comprensión auditiva, TOEFL, Problemas de escucha, Alumnos del primer año, Investigación descriptiva.**

Abstract

The present descriptive research is focused on English listening problems of first-year students of The Modern Languages degree at FMO-UES, its aim is to describe the English Listening Problems encountered. Besides, this study is quantitative with a descriptive level design. For the assessment of listening skills, standardized TOEFL Junior and TOEFL Level 1 was utilized, widely recognized to test the English proficiency of non-native speakers. The sample for this study was 25 students who participated anonymously. From the results, it can be stated that respondents performed well during the initial section of the test where audios were played twice. However, as the difficulties increased, their comprehension declined. Other most frequent difficulties included vocabulary comprehension, accent recognition and processing of spoken information in real time. The findings reveal the average score of 5 out of 20 where participants showed a good understanding of main ideas at the beginning, their comprehension abilities declined as the difficulty of the test was becoming more challenging. These results showed that there are indeed problems in the listening comprehension skills of first year students.

KEY WORDS: Listening skill, TOEFL Test, Listening problems, First-year students, Descriptive research.

Introduction

This article, dealing with "English Listening Problems of First-Year Students from Intermediate Intensive English of the Modern Languages Degree at FMO, UES 2024," aims to describe the specific listening comprehension issues faced by first-year students in the Modern Languages program. It is well known that learning English as a second language is challenging, especially in environments where practice and interaction with the language are limited. This research focuses on identifying the difficulties students encounter when trying to understand spoken messages in English, a crucial aspect for developing communication skills.

An observation was conducted during the development of the English Intensive Intermediate I course taught in the second semester of the Modern Languages degree. Among the first year students, notable difficulties were identified in listening comprehension. These difficulties are manifested in problems such as understanding spoken messages, lack vocabulary, unfamiliarity with different accents, and decoding information. For this reason, it was decided to identify, analyze and classify these problems in order to make a description that helped us to answer our research question which was: what are the English Listening problems of first-year students from Intermediate Intensive English of the Modern Language degree?

The understanding and communication in English are very important in getting to know the wide range of knowledge expressed in this language. That is why it was decided to take into account a variable on English listening problems which is considered a categorical nominal variable. By using a nominal classification, there can effectively be categorized and quantified the specific challenges students face in listening comprehension without assuming any inherent order among the types of problems. According to Rost, (2011) Comprehension is often considered to be the first-order goal of listening, the highest priority of the listener. Many people even consider it the sole purpose of listening. However, learning a foreign

language, particularly English, presents a considerable challenge, especially in contexts where exposure to the language is limited. Listening comprehension, in particular, stands out as one of the most difficult skills to develop for students who do not have constant access to environments where English is spoken naturally.

Listening difficulties are defined as the internal and external characteristics that might interrupt text understanding and real-life processing problems directly related to cognitive procedures that take place at various stages of listening comprehension (Goh, 2000, as cited in Hamouda, 2013, Pag.117) In foreign language education, the majority of first-year students have the problem of poor spoken English understanding. These problems take on different forms: failure to understand the meaning of words or phrases, lack of ability to identify the speaker's intention, or an inability to follow the rate of speech. More concretely, in the case of first-year students from the Modern Language program at the University of El Salvador, the problem of listening comprehension is more pronounced in those enrolled in International Intensive English. These young and very primary students are faced with huge challenges in trying to process spoken messages in English for further understanding, which directly connects with their academic performance and confidence levels while using the language.

English listening difficulties can be present due to many factors. Indeed, the lack of vocabulary is one of the main problems that affects English Listening. Thornbury (2002) noted that without grammar very little can be transmitted, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Indeed, with lack of vocabulary there is no way students would be able to understand the meaning of what they listen to. Furthermore, there can exist a lack of comprehension, if it is taken into account that comprehension is often considered to be the first-order goal of listening, the highest priority of the listener. (Rost, 2011) which leads to be able arrive to the conclusion that with absence of comprehension there are in fact listening problems.

With the aim of addressing these difficulties, this research seeks to identify and analyze the specific listening comprehension problems faced by first-year students in the Intermediate Intensive English course of the Modern Languages program at UES. The main objective is to describe the factors that contribute to these difficulties, such as lack of vocabulary, unfamiliarity with different accents, and limitations in language processing speed. Additionally, the research aims to classify these problems to provide a clearer and more structured view of the areas that require greater attention and pedagogical support.

Understanding the problems that students face during listening comprehension is one of the important determinants in developing a more effective teaching strategy that teachers could be able to implement. If there is a conscious attempt to address these difficult areas from an informed viewpoint, this would help design pedagogical interventions that may facilitate learning English and instill confidence in the students in their communicative abilities. Thus, the present research has not only academic but also very important practical value for training future professionals within the field of modern languages.

This study is conducted with the purpose to analyze, identify and classify the listening comprehension problems in English presented by our studied population. This article is relevant because it addresses the specific difficulties students face in English listening comprehension. This not only impacts the process of acquiring a foreign language, but it could also impact their academic performance. Likewise, deficiencies in their English listening skills can impact the ability to understand and communicate effectively in English. Therefore, by identifying and focusing on these issues, it is possible to develop solutions that improve students' listening ability.

The methodology applied includes: an instrument which was centred on assessing these English listening problems. As a result, it was taken into account the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as it is a recognized standardized test that evaluates the English language proficiency of non-native speakers. Moreover, this test was applied in a

cross-sectional way to a sample of 25 students enrolled in the intensive intermediate English I course.

Method and material

In this study, a quantitative approach was employed to provide specific descriptions regarding the English Listening Problems presented by students who are currently enrolled in Intensive Intermediate English I, in the second semester of the Moderns Languages degree at The University of El Salvador - FMO. It was agreed to use a quantitative approach for this study because it not only enables the collection of accurate data but also facilitates drawing precise conclusions. According to (Anderson Dannels, 2018) The definition of research design is deceptively simple: it is a plan that provides the underlying structure to integrate all elements of a quantitative study so that the results are credible, free from bias, and maximally generalizable. Considering the information, this study employs a descriptive research design, selected for its ability to systematically describe and capture the specific characteristics of the measured variable, allowing a comprehensive understanding of students' English listening challenges. By using a descriptive approach, the study aims to accurately represent the experiences and problems faced by the participants.

It was a cross-sectional study, as it enables the observation and analysis of students' listening difficulties at a single point of time. This design allowed data collection in one session. The research adopted a prospective approach, with investigators present during data collection. Besides, this facilitates a direct observation of students' performance as they are involved with listening tasks, offering an immediate and precise perspective on their listening problems. The participants in this study were selected from second-semester students enrolled in the Modern Languages program at the University of El Salvador during the 2025 academic year.

The purpose of sampling in quantitative research is to draw inferences about the group from which you have selected the sample (Kumar, 2011). The sample included twenty-five first-year students from Group 3 of the intensive Intermediate English I course, II-2025. The population were chosen without the collection of personal identifiers, such as name, gender or age in order to maintain confidentiality. It was decided to take the sample from one group of the students of Intermediate Intensive English I, who belong to the first year of bachelor's degree in Modern Languages: specialization in French and English. This group was selected specifically to investigate the challenges in English listening comprehension they may encounter early in their language acquisition journey. As reinforcing language comprehension skills. While several sampling techniques, such as simple random sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling, are available in quantitative research, they were considered unnecessary here. Given the manageable population size of 25 students, data was collected from all members, suppressing the need to select a representative sample. $N = 25$ which means that all students had 100% of probability to be tested.

(Rowley, 2014) suggest that questionnaires are mostly used in conducting quantitative research, where the researcher wants to profile the sample in terms of numbers (e.g. the proportion of the sample in different age groups). Standardized tests such as the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) were employed to provide reliable measures of specific skills, with a primary focus on listening comprehension. As standardized assessments, the TOEFL test ensures that participants are examined under the same conditions , allowing researchers to accurately describe and compare the listening abilities of non-native speakers.

In the first instance the TOEFL junior was applied followed in second instance by the TOEFL ITP Level 1 test which were selected for their comprehensive assessment capabilities to assess language skills, specifically in listening, reading and language structure. However, since the focus of our study was to identify and analyze listening problems among first-year

students, the priority was decided only on listening skills. This decision allowed us to have a more detailed and specific analysis of how students interact with the language in listening situations.

One of the most familiar types of test questions is the “multiple-choice” format. Also called selected-response, this format presents two or more possible answers from which the student chooses. Typically, there is only one correct answer while the other possible answers represent common errors (Zucker, 2003). Based on this information, a test with a multiple-choice structure was designed, consisting of 20 questions.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, ethical considerations were high-priority to protect the integrity of participant involvement. Before administering the standardized test aimed at measuring listening comprehension, participants were fully informed of the study’s purpose and process through a detailed consent letter. This document highlighted the voluntary nature of participation and ensured participants of their answers, explaining that all data would be anonymous and exclusively utilized for research purposes. By obtaining informed consent, the autonomy and rights of the contestants is respected, assuring that they were fully aware of what their involvement entailed and that their contributions were made voluntarily and with a clear understanding of the study's objectives.

Results

Table 1

categorisation of vignettes according to the score obtained

CATEGORY	SCORE
GOOD	>18/20
AVERAGE	>12/20
POOR	<11/20

Source: Database

Description: This table shows the range of each category in which students were measured.

Table 2*Categories into which students fell*

CATEGORY	ABSOLUTE	
	FREQUENCY	
GOOD	0	0
AVERAGE	5	0,2
POOR	20	0,8
Total of students	25	1

Source: Database

Description: Of the population studied the majority fell into the category: poor. Only 5 students fell into the average category and any student fell into the category: good.

Table 3*Identification of the Mode based on the results*

Data type	per scores	per vignette
mode	5	Poor

Source: Database

Description: Of the population the most popular score obtained in the TOEFL test was 5 out of 20, representing that the mode according to the categorization of the results by vignettes is poor.

Analysis and Discussion of the results

The goal of the present study was to investigate if the first year students of the modern languages degree have english listening problems. Taking into account the results obtained in the standardized test that was carried out, it can be observed that the most popular score was 5 out of 20, which is equal to the 20% of the population, providing us the MODE of the results collected; Likewise, the highest score obtained was 15 out of 20 equal to 4%, only one student was able to get this note. On the other hand, the lowest score was 3 out of 20, which is equal to one student, 4% of the participants. Furthermore, an equal part of 8% obtained low scores, 2 students got 13 out of 20 and other 2 had 14 out of 20; Besides, another 8% of the students got 9 out of 20. Similarly, the second most popular scores were 6 out of 20 and 10 out of 20 having both 16% of the tested students. In addition, the score 7 out

of 20 equivalent to 12% and 11 out of 20 equivalent to 4% were also shown. In conclusion, the paragraph provides an overview of the scores obtained by students on the TOEFL listening comprehension test, highlighting the range of results from the lowest to the highest scores and identifying the most common score among the participants. This analysis sets the stage for understanding the overall performance of the group.

Furthermore, as can be observed in table number 1 a categorization of the scores into vignettes was made in order to analyze in a deeper way the performance of students in the test. It was decided to create 3 different vignettes into which students were classified. The 3 classifications are: good, average and poor. In order to understand the category where students fell, it can be explained that participants who obtained a score $> 18/20$ fell into the category classified as good. Besides, those who obtained a score $>12/20$ but $< 18/20$ fell into the average category. For those who scored a note $< 11/20$ a category called poor was defined. Understanding the previous information, as shown in table 2, it can be observed that any student was able to reach the higher category, only 5 students representing 20% of the population could get to the average category and the majority of participants which were 20 (80%) fell into the lowest category being this poor.

Based on the descriptive data analysis done and the categorization of the results in tables 2, it was decided to classify the problems students showed in order to provide a better understanding of the findings. As stated in a previous study by Azizah (2020), due to the significance of listening skill, it is very important to be mastered by the learners, especially EFL learners, although in fact, most of the EFL learners do not have a good listening skill. In her study the author classified significant problems students presented such as the pronunciation (accents), fast speech, long listening passages, physical conditions, unfamiliar vocabulary and terminology, among others, which are very consistent with our findings presented below.

First of all in this present study, the students showed a basic recognition of vocabulary and verb tenses. When the first audios of the listening test were played twice, they demonstrated a good understanding of the message. However, as the test progressed and the audio difficulty increased, their comprehension decreased, suggesting they might struggle with recognizing stress, rhythm, and intonation as well. Secondly, the results of the test indicated that students were able to grasp the main ideas of the audios, particularly in the first part of both sections of the exam, where the initial questions focused on identifying the main idea. They successfully performed in these parts, achieving good scores. However, they struggled to recall specific details in long conversations, which made it difficult for them to completely interpret and understand the content, leading to gaps in their overall comprehension and bad answers. This confirms the Krashen hypothesis which states that a learner indeed needs to develop the listening skills as a prior in their learning process, because without this ability they will most likely not be able to receive adequate input. (Krashen, 1985)

Furthermore, The capacity to process and interpret information in real-time was notably limited among the students, as reflected in their poor test scores, with the most common score being 5 out of 20. This low average indicates that students struggled significantly with immediate comprehension and response during the test, suggesting that they had difficulty processing and making sense of information as it was presented. This finding aligns speech perception theory by Liberman and Mattingly which suggest that difficulties in distinguishing phonemes, intonation patterns, and stress in English can lead to listening problems (Liberman & Mattingly, 1985,). Their performance highlights a need for improvement in their ability to quickly and accurately interpret spoken content. In conclusion, students demonstrated strong initial comprehension of main ideas but struggled with detailed recall and real-time processing, as evidenced by their low average score of 5 out of 20. This highlights the need for targeted improvement in their ability to quickly and accurately interpret spoken information.

The outcomes of the investigation can be also related to the ones in a previous study done in the University of El Salvador by García Gómez & Cea Cruz (2012), which showed that more than 50% of students failed the listening TOEFL test section. Additionally, the study claims that classroom observations revealed two significant problems: students did not understand the importance of listening comprehension and lacked effective listening strategies. In our study also more than 50% failed and showed a low performance in listening skills. This indicates that students do not give the attention needed to the auditory comprehension which leads them to not have the capacity expected.

This descriptive study presented certain limitations. Firstly, the data were obtained only from a sample of students from a single degree, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Additionally, the research did not account for external factors that could affect difficulties in oral production, such as the level of exposure to the language outside the academic environment or the anxiety associated with time constraints and accessibility to materials. Future research could address these elements qualitatively and utilize experimental or longitudinal designs, thereby enabling a deeper analysis of students' listening comprehension issues over time. This would allow for an assessment of the impact of specific interventions aimed at improving skills such as listening.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to describe the English listening problems faced by first-year students enrolled in the Intermediate Intensive English I, in the Modern Languages degree at the University of El Salvador. Through the administration of a standardized TOEFL listening test, it was evident that a significant number of students struggle with listening comprehension, as indicated by the mode score of 5 out of 20, which reflects a relatively low understanding of the language.

Through a quantitative approach, the study sought to understand and quantify the issues related to listening comprehension that students encounter. The primary hypothesis posited that there would be significant difficulties in students' listening comprehension. The results from our data collection unequivocally support this hypothesis, confirming that students indeed experience notable problems with listening comprehension.

Afterward, it can also be concluded that all objectives were successfully addressed. Firstly, all data was successfully described, the English listening problems were identified, and a huge analysis was conducted in order to classify them. On each aspect of the investigation from the description of the problem until the last step of the research a description was made. Furthermore, the variable was correctly addressed by identifying and classifying the English listening problems observed. Overall, the data collected from the test revealed various areas where students struggled with listening comprehension. Problems were notably present in understanding announcements, long conversations, and specific details within dialogues.

Our hypothesis that said that there are problems on the listening comprehension of first-year students was unequivocally supported by the findings. The consistent pattern of incorrect responses across the different parts of the listening test corroborates the statement that there are significant problems affecting students' ability to understand spoken English. This alignment with our hypothesis underscores the validity of our research and provides a

clear basis for addressing these listening challenges in the future.

The research question, which sought to determine what were the English Listening problems of first-year students, was also effectively answered through this study. The findings reveal a clear pattern of difficulties in listening comprehension, validating the initial hypothesis. The data highlights that students have trouble with various aspects of listening tasks, including understanding announcements, extracting key information from conversations, and retaining details.

This study indeed faced some challenges, nevertheless they were successfully worked out and the investigation was carried out satisfactorily. Apart from this, it can also be said that the challenges identified in this study are multifaceted. The most common issues include difficulties with vocabulary comprehension, accent recognition, and the ability to process spoken information in real-time. These challenges are compounded by external factors such as limited exposure to English in natural contexts.

Summarizing, while the study faced some limitations during the data collection process, it has successfully identified key areas where students need support. The understandings gained from this research can serve as a basis for future studies and interventions aimed at improving listening comprehension among language learners, ultimately contributing to their academic and professional success in an increasingly globalized world. The findings of this article highlight the importance of incorporating more comprehensive listening exercises into the curriculum and providing additional resources to students who are struggling with this skill

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