
Awareness of Listening Comprehension Importance among Languages Students: A Cross-sectional Study

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Abstract:

The process of listening comprehension was neglected for years in the English classroom. It was thought to be a passive skill until some authors highlighted its importance in language acquisition and communication. In order to find out the extent to which students are aware of the importance of listening comprehension to learn English, a descriptive study was conducted. To collect the information, a questionnaire was sent to 166 students of language teaching at the Language Faculty of the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Mexico, Tijuana. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, the first containing demographic information; the second dealing with the basic principles of listening comprehension; and the third one with information about listening comprehension activities.

Keywords: Listening Comprehension, language students, English Teaching.

1. Introduction

In ESL/EFL classrooms, listening comprehension (LC) was considered through the approaches of the audiolingual approach and the communicative approach. Although in the former, listening was more of a memorization process than an effective listening dynamic, and over time, both professors and students realized the

importance of listening comprehension in the language learning process; as a consequence, for the communicative approach LC is more valuable. According to Rost (2013) and Kurita (2012), a major difference between more successful and less successful learners is related to their ability to use listening as an instrument of learning.

In recent years, a great deal of research has been conducted on listening comprehension, and at the same time, students have intuitively explored various listening comprehension activities on their own. Rost (1994) stated that listening is significant in language learning because it provides input for learners, and it plays an important role in the development of learners' language.

2. The Importance of the Listening Comprehension

In English language learning and teaching, we speak of four skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The skill of listening has been referred to as the key to all effective communication and as the process that enables the listener to understand, determine, and identify what the speaker is saying, as well as a means of generating interest for pleasure and social reasons (Vandergrift & Goh, in Atiyah & Izzah, 2019). As a process, "...listening is central to learning and to improving students' future employment opportunities" (Lastochkina & Smirnova, 2017); "listening is the most important component of language learning and teaching because learners listen more than they speak in the classroom." (Brown, 2006; Morley, 2001; Rost, 2013).

According to Wolf, Muijselaar, Bonstra, and de Bree (2019), "Given the increasing importance of listening comprehension in daily life, the status of listening comprehension in education may need to be reconsidered, and insights into the development of this skill are needed."

Mendelsohn (2001), addressing the importance of listening comprehension for both researchers and teachers in the classroom, states that "there is no communication between researchers and teachers in the classroom, so researchers find valuable information that teachers do not use in the classroom; teachers have requirements that researchers do not meet; researchers should write English books; and researchers should also be teachers.

Ferris (1998), Murphy (1991), Vogely (1998), and Hamouda (2013) expressed that listening is the most frequently used skill in language classrooms. Therefore, it is obvious that listening is very important for the lives of students since it is used as a means of learning at all phases of instruction. Furthermore, LC is important for both sides: for the research field and for the practitioner field."

Nowadays, listening is the skill you need most in everyday life. Listening comprehension is the foundation for your speaking, writing, and reading. To train your listening skills, it is important to listen actively, i.e., to pay active attention to what you hear (Egamnazarova & Mukhamedova, 2021)

Notwithstanding all that has been mentioned previously, the skill of listening comprehension (LC) has been neglected for years in the English classroom (Landry, 1969), considered a "poorly taught aspect of English in many EFL programs" (Mendelsohn, 1994), a passive skill (Osada, 2004), and a "Cinderella skill" overlooked by its older sister "speaking" in second language learning (Nunan in Saha & Talukdar, 2008).

3. The Listening Comprehension and the English Teaching Approaches

Doing a brief historical review, we could say that LC went from minus to plus. First approaches and methods to teach English neglected that skill but nowadays it is part of the syllabus of every approach.

Analyzing the evolution of the LC in English language teaching classrooms, we observe that under the Grammar-Translation Method (based on learning through translation) LC was practiced only through dictation: students listened to lexical items or grammar structures that were translated (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005) but we could not say that LC was really practiced because it was only a via to get information.

Rixon (1986) and Mendelsohn & Rubin (1995) stated that different techniques should be used in the classrooms like authentic materials and technology. Mc Bride (2009) and Rost (2013) expressed that the use of technology can promote the expansion of listening comprehension by providing students with interesting materials. Though these types of materials are some of many we can get hold of, using authentic materials can ensure students' motivation and success in their learning skills.

The Direct Method (based on the principle of learning English through monolingual teaching, using realia and demonstration) could be considered the first approach that gave importance to LC before the other language skills but did not develop formal activities to practice the skill (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005: 6). Again, LC was just the media to be exposed to the language, but it was not exercised.

With the emergence of the Audio Lingual Approach that seemed to be focused on LC, it was believed that if students listen to the target language all day, they will

improve their listening comprehension skill through the experience (Osada, 2004). Later, experts realized that “The traditional audio lingual approach does not see listening comprehension as a priority and gives little opportunity to practice listening” (Mendelsohn, 1984; Osada (ibid.)). Mendelsohn also considered that the proposals presented during the Conference of the International Association of Applied Linguistics in 1969 were favorable to changing the mindset of linguists and teachers toward LC. Two of those proposals were: to proclaim listening as a non-passive and very complex receptive process, and to recognize listening as a fundamental skill.

In the communicative approach (which is based on learners' linguistic needs), developing effective communication is the core of all four skills. For this approach, the practice of LC is used to convey messages efficiently (Rahmatian & Armiun, 2011), which empowers the role of the skill in communication.

To sum up, the importance of listening comprehension has been acknowledged in the English teaching nowadays and its inclusion in the classroom is a fact from a theoretical point of view - even if not every professor includes it in the teaching process (but we will not go further into this aspect in this paper; that would be a topic for another study) - it is important to emphasize that the awareness of the importance of LC for the English learning process is not limited to professors or linguists. Students from different educational levels and geographical environments are also aware of the importance of this skill for English language learning.

4. Definition of Awareness

Before going further into the details of dealing with awareness towards LC, it is important to state a definition of awareness. According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, awareness is defined as the “perception or knowledge of something. Accurate reportability of something perceived or known is widely used as a

behavioral index of conscious awareness. However, it is possible to be aware of something without being explicitly conscious of it”.

According to this definition, awareness means that the “perceiver” (the students in this work) is conscious that LC is important; probably, the perceiver is not able to state the rationale of the subject, but conscious about the importance of listening comprehension for the English language learning. This definition could be insufficient for our work, considering that we need to get more insights dealing with the subject of matter. As a consequence, we present an alternate definition of awareness.

Merikle (1984) concluded that awareness is “...the ability to make better than chance-level, forced-choice decisions concerning either the identity or the presence of the primes (prime is a measure of the sensitivity for correctly detecting or remembering a stimulus in a task or test), and, conversely, it was assumed that observers were unaware of the primes when these decisions were at a chance level of performance.” This definition goes beyonds perceptions and it includes the realization that the “observed item” exists and the observer is conscious of its existence and also the item is memorable to the observer. Thus, from our perspective, a student is aware of the importance of listening comprehension in the English learning process because listening awareness is critical as an activity.

To state the premises of our work, we are going to consider that students are aware of the importance of listening comprehension if:

- They are able to identify theoretical principles of the listening comprehension process (derived from knowledge or intuition).
- They state that LC is an important skill in English language learning.
- They are able to identify the presence or absence of LC activities in the English class.

- They are able to identify the source of their lack of abilities in the English language.

But also, teachers' awareness is a demand. According to Paulston & Bruder (1976, as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2016), listening comprehension lessons have certain goals and all teachers and learners should be aware of these goals. Lessons should be gradually planned, and require progress from simple to complex activities. Learners should also be active participants at all times. Therefore, teachers should provide feedback on task results for student motivation. It should also provide a necessity for remembering to develop concentration in students. This skill increases memory capacity in the learner and therefore it will be impossible to separate listening, thinking, and remembering.

5. Studies Dealing with Awareness of the Importance of the Listening Comprehension

In a review of literature, we found that there are works of awareness of the importance of the listening comprehension practice for English language learning; awareness about the difficulties the students encounter during listening comprehension in English; and the awareness of the problems and limitations of the listening comprehension in English.

Some works developed about the awareness of the problems and limitations of the listening comprehension in English include the one from Ramadhianti & Somba (2021); their study revealed the problems that university students had with English as a foreign language LC had; the findings were:

- Problems taking notes (16.4% always have problems and 74% sometimes have problems).

- Understanding long texts (56% sometimes have problems, 34% often have problems).
- Understanding spoken instructions (17% often encounter this problem).
- understanding informal language - idioms, phrases, and colloquial expressions (86% of the sample reported that problem).
- understanding multiple speakers in the same conversation (89.5% reported to have that problem).
- understanding fast speaking (85% of the students have that problem); difficulties understanding accents (98.8% have difficulties understanding different English accents).

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- They state that LC is an important skill in English language learning.
- They are able to identify the presence or absence of LC activities in the English class.
- They are able to identify the source of their lack of abilities in the English language.

The objectives of this work were:

1. Assess awareness dealing with basic principles of LC among language students at the language faculty of Universidad Autonoma de Baja California.
2. Assess awareness dealing with the practice of LC among language students at the language faculty of Universidad Autonoma de Baja California.

3. Assess the association between the semester the students are taking and awareness towards basic principles and practices of LC among language students at the language faculty of Universidad Autonoma de Baja California.

6. The Methodology

6.1 Study Design, Setting, and Population

We used a cross-sectional survey to find out the awareness of basic principles and practices of LC among language students at the language faculty of Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. The target population was undergraduate students that were between semesters 3 and 8 in the program of Language Teaching from the four campuses (Tijuana, Mexicali, Ensenada and Tecate). We excluded students from 1st and 2nd semesters because our main interest was to find out if future language teachers were interested in the importance of LC. The questionnaire was submitted exclusively by email to all the students that fit the prerequisites. In total, 166 responses were received.

6.2 Collection of Data

To collect the data in this study, we designed, tested and validated a questionnaire. As a model to design the questionnaire, we used questionnaires from similar studies (Sorayyaei y Nasiri, 2014; Al-Shamsi et al., 2020; Shadiev et al., 2018; Pinto et al., 2020). The questionnaire consisted of three sections: students' socio-demographic characteristics (section 1); awareness of theoretical and practical aspects of LC (section 2); and awareness of LC activities (section 3). Data was collected between November 2021 and January 2022.

Section 1, demographic information, included gender with whom he/she identifies, age, marital status, a primary financial contributor to the family household, the

highest level of education achieved by the head of the family, number of people living with the participant, type of housing while studying at UABC, and semester participant is currently taking.

Section 2 allowed us insight into the student's awareness of the basic principles of listening comprehension such as the importance of LC in the learning of a language (Namaziandost et al., 2019; Al-Shamsi et al., 2020); the time of exposure to auditory stimuli (amount of time in which we are listening to the language, whether native or foreign) versus the time we are exposed to the language through other means (Rivers, 1987; Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011 in Saraswati, 2018); and awareness of the concept of passivity of listening comprehension (Morley, 2001; Artyushina & Sheypak, 2018; Putri, Fauzan, & Toba, 2018).

Section 3 was intended to measure awareness of LC activities. The activities selected were taken from Celce-Murcia's book Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language (2000).

6.3 Analysis of Data

The data collected was organized, coded, and tabulated using the SPSS version 27.0 and Microsoft Office Excel. Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics and Pearson's chi-square test.

7. Results

7.1 Participants' Characteristics

In total, 166 students participated in the study; 2 were excluded due to missing data; 35 (21,3%) from 3rd semester; 28 (17,1%) from 4th semester; 20 (12,2%) from the 5th semester; 22 (13,4%) from the 6th; 27 (16,5%) from the 7th; 32 (19.5%) from

the 8th semester. 31.9% were aged between 16 and 20 years old; 60.8% between 21 and 25; 3,6 between 26 and 36; and 3.6% more than 31 years old.

7.2 Awareness of the Importance of LC for English Learning

145 participants (87.3%) are very aware that LC is important for English language learners; 92 participants (55.4%) are very aware that it is essential to understand what you hear in English to be able to speak the language; 102 participants (61.4%) are very aware that during the oral interaction in English, you must listen carefully to what you hear in order to understand the messages.

We did a correlation between the awareness of the importance of LC for English learning and the semester or the students and we found the following results:

LC is important for English language learners: 91.4% of the students in the 3rd semester strongly agree with the item; 96.4% of the students in the 4th semester strongly agree; 90,0% of the students of the 5th semester strongly agree; 72.7% of the students in the 6th semester strongly agree with the item; 88.9% of the students in the 7th semester strongly agree with the item; and 81.3% of the students in the 8th semester strongly agree with the item.

It is essential to understand what you hear in English to be able to speak the language: 60.0% of the students in the 3rd semester strongly agree with the item; 60.7% of the students in the 4th semester strongly agree; 60.0% of the students of the 5th semester strongly agree; 36.4% of the students in the 6th semester strongly agree with the item; 70.4% of the students in the 7th semester strongly agree with the item; and 46.9% of the students in the 8th semester strongly agree with the item.

You must listen carefully to what you hear in order to understand the messages: 60.0% of the students in the 3rd semester strongly agree with the item; 60.7% of the students in the 4th semester strongly agree; 60.0% of the students of the 5th semester

strongly agree; 36.4% of the students in the 6th semester strongly agree with the item; 70.4% of the students in the 7th semester strongly agree with the item; and 46.9% of the students in the 8th semester strongly agree with the item.

7.3 Awareness of the Time of Exposure to Auditory Stimuli versus the Time We are Exposed to the Language Through other Means

Awareness of the time of exposure to auditory stimuli: 73 participants (44%) are very aware that in our daily routine and social interaction, we listen twice as much as we speak; 59 participants (35.5%) are aware and 62 participants (37.3%) are very aware that during that same interaction, we listen four times more than we read; and 49 participants (29.5%) are aware and 75 participants (45.2%) were very aware that we listen five more than we write.

We did a correlation between Awareness of the time of exposure to auditory stimuli versus the time we are exposed to the language through other means and the semester the students are taking, founding the following results:

In our daily routine and social interaction, we listen twice as much as we speak: 42.9% of the students in the 3rd semester strongly agree with the item; 42.9% of the students in the 4th semester strongly agree; 50.0% of the students of the 5th semester strongly agree; 36.4% of the students in the 6th semester strongly agree with the item; 37.0% of the students in the 7th semester strongly agree with the item; and 53.1% of the students in the 8th semester strongly agree with the item.

We listen four times more than we read: 42.9% of the students in the 3rd semester strongly agree with the item; 50.0% of the students in the 4th semester strongly agree; 40.0% of the students of the 5th semester strongly agree; 9.1% of the students in the 6th semester strongly agree with the item; 37.0% of the students in the 7th semester

strongly agree with the item; and 40.6% of the students in the 8th semester strongly agree with the item.

We listen five times more than we write: 60.0% of the students in the 3rd semester strongly agree with the item; 39.3% of the students in the 4th semester strongly agree; 55.0% of the students of the 5th semester strongly agree; 18.2% of the students in the 6th semester strongly agree with the item; 37.0% of the students in the 7th semester strongly agree with the item; and 56.3% of the students in the 8th semester strongly agree with the item.

7.4 Awareness of the Concept of Passivity of Listening Comprehension

Awareness of the concept of passivity of listening comprehension: Listening comprehension is passive (does not require any action or effort to achieve it). Participants were not very aware of this concept. 28 participants were very unaware, 53 unaware, 37 neither aware or unaware, 28 aware and 20 very aware; although, in relation to their agreement to that concept, 28 participants strongly disagree, 53 disagree, 37 neither agree or disagree, 28 agree and 20 strongly agree.

We did a correlation between Awareness of the concept of passivity of listening comprehension and the semester the students are taking, founding the following results: 17.1% of the students in the 3rd semester strongly disagree with the item; 25.0% of the students in the 4th semester strongly disagree; 5.0% of the students of the 5th semester strongly disagree; 4.5% of the students in the 6th semester strongly agree with the item; 25.9% of the students in the 7th semester strongly disagree with the item; and 18.8% of the students in the 8th semester strongly disagree with the item. But on the other hand, 42.9% of the students in the 3rd semester strongly agree with the item; 42.9% of the students in the 4th semester strongly agree; 45.0% of the students of the 5th semester strongly agree; 13.6% of the students in the 6th semester strongly agree with the item; 14.8% of the students in the 7th semester strongly agree

with the item; and 21.9% of the students in the 8th semester strongly agree with the item.

According to the results, we might conclude that the students are not aware of the concept of passivity of listening comprehension. The percentage of students that expressed agreement with the concept of listening as a passive skill is higher than the percentage of students that express disagreement with the concept of passivity. Hence, there is no knowledge about the concept.

On the other hand, we can observe that the answers in this item are relatively equal:

	3rd		4th		5th		6th		7th		8th	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Strongly disagree	6	17.1%	7	25.0%	1	5.0%	1	4.5%	7	25.9%	6	18.8%
Disagree	8	22.9%	4	14.3%	9	45.0%	8	36.4%	12	44.4%	11	34.4%
Undecided	10	28.6%	9	32.1%	3	15.0%	5	22.7%	4	14.8%	6	18.8%
Agree	7	20.0%	3	10.7%	5	25.0%	5	22.7%	3	11.1%	5	15.6%
Strongly agree	4	11.4%	5	17.9%	2	10.0%	3	13.6%	1	3.7%	4	12.5%
Total	35	100.0%	28	100%	20	100.0%	22	100.0%	27	100.0%	32	100.0%

Item: Listening comprehension is passive.

The overall results lead us to conclude the lack of knowledge regarding the concept of passivity of the listening comprehension skill.

8. Conclusions

Listening comprehension skill had been neglected for years until some language specialists (Rivers, Rost, Morley) highlighted its importance in the learning process. Teachers as well as students have expressed its importance. It was necessary to find out the awareness of listening comprehension importance among language students in the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Language Faculty. The sampled students are future language teachers and the awareness of that skill is crucial for

them. We realized that intuitively, they are aware about that importance in the following dimensions: the importance of LC for English learning, awareness of the time of exposure to auditory stimuli versus the time we are exposed to the language through other means, although they are not aware of the concept of passivity of listening comprehension.

Future language teachers must be aware of the LC process, relevance and theoretical principles in order to be able to design strategies and materials appropriate for different ages, levels and interests of students. The implementation of courses devoted to the development and exploration of the LC skill means an opportunity for the future generations.

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