

UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ART AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT



“IMPROVING LISTENING COMPREHENSION THROUGH A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH: THE CASE OF STUDENTS FROM CONSEJO DE BECAS Y DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTIFICAS DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE EL SALVADOR”.

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INTRODUCTION

Given the worldwide adoption of English as a foreign language, it is important to look for new and effective teaching methodologies that guarantee that students learn this language as a whole, overcoming some aspects that prevent them from mastering it more effectively. One of the aspects, the listening comprehension, which is the central point of this research, deserves special attention. Educational institutions such as universities, public and private schools of El Salvador have been teaching English for so long. Unfortunately, instruction in effective listening strategies is often not part of these institutions. It is frequently assumed that since the students have many opportunities to hear spoken English, through audiotapes, videotapes, cable television, and interactive computer software, this exposure will improve their ability to comprehend oral English, and therefore, the language programs focus more on grammar, speaking and writing.

However, for many students, this is not the case. Even though they listen to music programs or any other type of videos, they do not succeed in understanding what they hear. Even when listening is the focus of lessons in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom, it often consists of testing student's ability to listen to oral information and answer comprehension questions, without providing any specific instruction in the skills and strategies necessary to accomplish this task (Field, 1998)

They need to be taught listening strategies that might help them to have better performance when they try to understand something. For its nature and importance, English is becoming a more and more required tool in many areas. Every day, schools need more English teachers; some enterprises need personnel in their call centers with good mastering of

English. Some institutions, organizations and enterprises need good interpreters and the need of translators is increasing as well.

OBJECTIVES

General objective:

- To test listening strategies via instruction in a period of four intensive weeks of English classes in order to improve the listening comprehension skill in students of level XIV of the Scholarship Program carried out at the UES.

Specific objectives:

- To develop one strategy every single class during a one hour and forty minutes class, accompanied by a series of exercises applied in real contexts.
- To prepare students to internalize and decode listening comprehension tasks in order to get better grades in oral texts.
- To help students improve their score in the standardized tests they are asked to take when applying for scholarships.

JUSTIFICATION

This study is qualitative- comparative due to the small sample which was chosen according to our purposes and limitations. However, it uses some quantitative instruments (questionnaire and tests). This study is about the listening comprehension of English. Which has been considered necessary to carry out because of the difficulties that students at the Consejo de Becas e Investigaciones Científicas of the UES face when they talk with an English speaker, especially a native speaker or when they tune in a radio or T.V program in English. Another important reason to do this research is that many enterprises, universities and schools need more and more people with a high mastering of English, and the students must improve their listening comprehension. Besides, many of these students will apply for scholarships to study abroad, and it is necessary for them to pass the TOEFL test, so they have to be prepared for it. Arthur Hughes, in his book *Testing for Language Teachers* (1989) states that information about people's language sometimes is often very useful and sometimes necessary. It is difficult to imagine, for example, British and American universities accepting students from overseas without some knowledge of their proficiency in English. Looking forward to finding an answer to these gaps, the treatment group will be taught a series of strategies to improve their listening comprehension and their English in general.

Many authors such as (Gary Buck, 1995) (Judy Gilbert, 1993, 2001)(David Mendelson, 1994) and (Joan Rubin, 1975) have shown their concern about the difficulty in understanding spoken English and have written many books in an attempt to give the students some important tools to improve listening comprehension. It has been considered useful to include books of these and other authors because in them we can find information

about strategies that can help us to carry out this research. The material will cover strategies to understand academic English and slang, which is generally more used in everyday conversations.

Listening comprehension is an important macro skill of any language since we create output according to the input that we get in a conversation. In real life situations, there is not always a “second chance” to get the message in an accurate way (Mendelsohn and Rubin, 1995). For this reason, different strategies should be taken into account in the language teaching-learning process in order to help students understand the target language in a clear way.

In this research, the study was focused on the listening comprehension of English and this study is going to determine whether or not English language learners need to be systematically involved in abundant oral comprehension drills which enable them to internalize and decode the content of the messages uttered by English speakers, especially by native speakers, whose language presents more problematic aspects such as different pronunciation of words, reductions, idiomatic expressions, familiar and slang language and cultural patterns.

This study proposes to answer the question: *How could the teaching of listening strategies help the students of the Consejo de Becas y de Investigaciones Científicas de la UES improve listening comprehension?* A group of students has been chosen in order to teach them a number of listening strategies with the purpose of helping them to improve the listening comprehension skill and their English in general.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theoretical framework for this study was based on cognitive theory. Cognitive theory posits the notion that learner is actively involved in the learning process (Anderson, 1983, 1985; Bruner, 1990). The cognitive theory also states according to Anderson and Bruner that learning is a process of relating new information to previously learned information. As a result the new information is easily acquired when people can associate it with things they have already learned. Therefore as children grow, they become able of increasing more sophisticated thoughts. Furthermore; it asserts that we construct our cognitive abilities through our motivations or actions in which we are focused on, so people control their learning. It has also contributed notions about declarative knowledge (what we know how to do) to our view of learning (Anderson, 1983, 1985). Being an active participant in one's own learning, whether it involves declarative or procedural knowledge, requires metacognition, or thinking about your own thinking (Brown & Palincsar, 1982). Declarative knowledge is the one about things; procedural knowledge is the one about how to do things. Both procedural knowledge as well as declarative knowledge are complementary and essential in the teaching –learning process because you may know the fact that English relatives clauses are introduced by who, which or that is declarative knowledge, but being able to put them together with other words to make relative clauses is the procedural knowledge.

One of the ways learners become actively involved in controlling their own learning is by using strategies. Strategies are the thoughts and behaviors that learners use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain information (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Pressley, Forrest-Pressley, Elliott-Faust, and Miller (1985) link strategies to cognitive processes. They define

strategies as “composed of cognitive operations over and above the processes that are a natural consequence of carrying out a task ... Strategies are used to achieve cognitive purposes (e.g memorizing) and are potentially conscious and controllable activities” (p. 4) This definition points out that the active learner consciously chooses to use strategies in order to enhance performance of a task. The goal of this study is that students personalize what they have learned about these strategies. Then, evaluate to see how they are using the strategies, and finally look ways that they can transfer the use of these strategies to other contexts. In other words, this is called metacognition. Memorizing is an aspect from cognitive theory, thus; the strategic instruction in the course was based on several contents that were tested in a short period of time (a month) it is obvious that memorization, retention were implemented by the students in the post-test.

Listening is an important part of the second language learners’ process, and it is defined as an active process during which the listener constructs meaning from oral input (Bentley & Bacon, 1996). In Nagle and Sander’s (1986) model of listening comprehension processing, the listener utilizes both automatic and controlled processes to synthesize meaning from oral input. From Nagle’ and Sander’s opinion it is helpful to make a distinction between two types of cognitive process: controlled processes, which involves a sequence of cognitive activities under active control and to which we must pay attention; and automatic processes, which are a sequence of cognitive activities that occur automatically, without conscious attention. Similarly, in Vandergrifts Interactive –Constructivism model (1999), the listener is actively engaged in constructing meaning from a variety of contexts and input sources.

Strategies and the ability to use them effectively are particularly important in second language listening. Canale and Swain (1980) noted in their model of communicative competence for language learner that one must be strategies competent; that is, the learner must know how and when to use strategies to engage in, carry out, and repair communication. Being communicatively competent in a language must, of course, include the ability to comprehend oral input. Consequently, second language listeners need to actively choose, use and continually evaluate the effectiveness of their listening strategies in order to successfully construct meaning from second language oral input. Learners should monitor their comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected strategies. They also have to evaluate whether they have achieved their listening comprehension goals or whether the combination of listening strategies selective was an effective one. Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute to the comprehension and recall of listening input.

If we consider how the language comprehension system works, it is obvious that a number of different types of knowledge are involved, among them, linguistics knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge. Linguistic knowledge is of different types, the most important are phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics and discourse structure. The non-linguistic knowledge used in comprehension is knowledge about the topic, about the context, and general knowledge about the world and how it works. There has been much debate about how this knowledge is applied to the incoming sound, but the two most important views are the bottom -up view and the top-down view. These terms refer to the order in which the different types of knowledge are applied during comprehension (Assessing listening, Gary Buck p. 1,2) According to Gary Buck in the Assessing Listening book (2001) states that the bottom –up view sees language comprehension as a process of passing through a

number of consecutive stages, or levels , and the output of each stage becomes the input for the next higher level. He also defines the top-down approach as a process in which different types of knowledge do not occur in a fixed sequence, but rather, that different types of processing may occur simultaneously, or any convenient order and they are capable of interacting and influencing each other.

The “good language learner” studies of Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco (1978) and Rubin (1975) demonstrated that successful learner employs strategies while learning and using a second language. Being communicatively competent in a language must, of course include the ability to comprehend oral input. Consequently, second language listeners need to actively choose, use and continually evaluate the effectiveness of their listening strategies in order to successfully construct meaning from second language oral input.

To conclude with this theoretical framework, it is important to say that there has been a lot of progress in our understanding of the strategies that listeners use. Listening comprehension is a process, a very complex process, and it is necessary first, to understand how that process works in order to measure it later.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study took place at the Consejo de Becas y de Investigaciones Científicas de la Universidad de El Salvador (Board of Directors of Scholarship and Scientific Research of the University of El Salvador). The participants were 18 students who had fulfilled all the requirements from level one- to thirteen of the English Language Scholarship Programs carried out by the Board of Directors of Scholarship and Scientific Research of the University of El Salvador (UES). The English course was taught by the researchers interested in finding out the progress of listening comprehension after applying certain strategic instruction. The researchers split the class by teaching some time for the strategic instruction and also for teaching Intermediate English classes based on the textbook called, Elevator 4, units five to eight. The sample was the students from the English Language Program level XIV. For this research, two groups of students (the treatment group and the control group) level XIV served as samples in order to test the effectiveness of the strategy instruction. Parallel to the normal course they were taking, the treatment group had some instruction strategies sessions for a month. Each session lasted 30 minutes. The remainder was taken for covering the units as the program requires. The treatment group received theory and practice about a number of listening strategies; while the control group attended their normal English course without having any listening instruction.

Procedure

Pre-test

The participants were given a pretest at the beginning of the study. The first pre-test (See annex 1) measured the discrete or bottom-up listening skills such as their ability to

discriminate sounds, syllable numbers, syllable stress, contractions and reductions, word stress, sentence meaning, and thought groups. The students were allowed to take notes to ensure that listening comprehension rather than memorization. The pre-test given to the students was from Clear Speech book: Pronunciation and Listening comprehension in North American English (Judy B. Gilbert, 2005). The test was administered using a CD, and the participants checked their answers to the questions. The test lasted 10 minutes and 20 seconds. This is necessary because Mendelsohn (1991, 1995) and Buck (1995) have pointed out; learners need certain level of linguistic proficiency in order to be competent listeners.

Questionnaire

At the beginning of the course a questionnaire (see annex 2) was administered to students in order to get students's background and general information (such as age, gender, occupation, etc.) which was very important to carry out this research.

Listening strategy instruction

After the pretest, the participants attended 15 sessions of targeted listening strategy instruction conducted by the researcher over a 4 week period. The students attended not only listening comprehension strategies but also some targeted to communication. So the researchers took part of the time for the strategies instruction. Classes 1: 40 minutes long, but the time for the strategy instruction activity took only 30 minutes every single class, because it was mandatory to cover all the units for the students to get in the next level. In this time, the pupils were taught a series of strategies such as rhythm and sounds (syllable length, dropped syllables); selective attention to stress patterns (content words, inferring meaning); listening for specific information (listening to recorded telephone messages); note taking (abbreviations, visual representations, constructing meaning), and others in an

attempt to improve their listening comprehension skill and at the same time their English as a whole. The strategy instruction sessions, their focus and the materials used are listed in table 1.

TABLE 1
Listening Strategy Instruction Sessions

Session	Focus	Specific elements	Sources
1	Rhythm and sounds	Syllable length, dropped syllables	Gilbert (2005)
2	Rhythm and sounds	Stop and syllable length, voicing	Gilbert (2005)
3	Rhythm and sounds	Clear and unclear vowels, and word meaning	Gilbert (2005)
4	Selective attention to stress patterns	Content words and inferring meaning	Gilbert (2005)
5	Selective attention to Pitch	Focus words, inferring meaning	Gilbert (2005)
6	Listening for specific Information	Listening to recorded telephone messages	Kozyrev (2000)
7	Listening for specific Information	Using an advanced organizer , note taking, inferring meaning from interviews	Kozyrev (2000)
8	Note taking	Abbreviations, symbols, visual representation	LeBauer (2000); Tanka & Baker (1996)
9	Note taking	Constructing meaning	LeBauer (2000); Tanka & Baker (1996)

These sessions might overcome the difficulties these students face when they talk with English speakers, especially native speakers, and because of the need of passing standardized tests such as the TOEFL, especially when these students apply for scholarships.

The lessons focused on strategies for developing discrete listening skills as well as effective note taking were taken from several different listening instruction texts in order to find materials of interest for the participants, and also because no single text covered all of the strategies taught during this study. The method of strategy instruction was made explicit by defining the strategy to the students, explaining specifically how it would help them comprehend the oral input, and modeling the use of the strategy by doing a think-aloud while listening to an oral text. Participants had opportunities to practice the strategy on different kinds of oral text and encouraged to try the strategy in their classes.

The listening instruction was based on the Vandergrift's interactive-constructivist model of listening (1999). Vandergrift supports a multidimensional view of listening that involves both bottom-up and top-down processing. None of these two instructions is effective when used alone. He concludes that the two kinds of processing complement each other and there is often overlap between them because the listener uses information from one level of processing to assist processing at the other level. So both bottom-up and top-down listening comprehension instruction were provided in the classes.

Post-test

Following the strategy training sessions, a post-test was administered. The post-test (See annex 1) measured the participant's discrete listening skills. The post-test followed the format and focus of the pre-test and the information in the questions were the same as the pre-test. At the end of the course, the scores that the treatment group and the control group

got in the pre-test were compared with the ones they both got in the post-test. This is what was collected and then analyzed, and based on the findings; some conclusions were drawn whether students got better results after having been taught the strategies above mentioned.

In -depth -interview

At the end of the strategy instruction, each student was interviewed in order to get ideas, opinions and feelings from students toward the course. Moreover, this interview (see annexes 4A and 4B) got their considerations about the progress and achievements they might have gotten throughout the course. All these ideas and opinions about the strategy instruction were put together into a matrix in order to be analyzed and interpreted. Based on these interpretations, a summary was written.

Scopes and limitations of the study

The course was designed for an intermediate level to be developed in a time of four weeks. This project took place at Consejo de Becas e Investigaciones Cientificas at UES with the purpose of teaching and testing the effectiveness of a set of listening strategies in order to help students improve their listening comprehension in further English courses. The sample was the population itself.

Among the scopes of this study, it is important to state that these listening strategies aimed at improving the comprehension are fundamental for foreign language students, especially the ones who do not have the opportunity to hear the English language frequently. This study is an attempt to raise awareness to all teachers at the FLD, the scholarship program, etc. that these kinds of strategy instruction are excellent in the Foreign Language classrooms.

Hence, English language learners need strong oral comprehension skills for access to well-paid job in El Salvador. Unfortunately, these kinds of instruction are not always part of

English programs in some English academies. This study reveals that targeted listening strategy instruction in students of level XIV at the scholarship program resulted in improved listening comprehension so that is why this study suggests that these kinds of strategy instruction should be implemented in academies, universities, etc.

There are aspects of this study that limit its generalization, but they also provide focus for future research needs. In regard to the sample, the participants were randomly selected so they might have been more motivated to do well if they would have been volunteers, as a result the attendance was not the one expected. Some of them missed the half of the listening instruction.

The main problem to carry out this investigation was to negotiate the access to the place where to apply the instruction since places like CENIUES and the FLD were visited in order to implement this study but the access was denied because the normal English classes could not be interrupted in their syllabus. The only place where the project was accepted was in the Scholarship Program; however the time assigned for the study was limited to one month because all groups of students had a teacher assigned. Those teachers were doing their community service and they did not want to wait for so long. Finally, the negotiation was made with one of the teachers in this program in order to get a group of the intermediate level to apply the techniques.

In addition, the sample was very small, as it sometimes occurs in intermediate levels in this country where it is difficult to find large populations of students willing to participate in research studies. Nevertheless, larger and cumulative groups of students are needed, especially those from different backgrounds, so that findings are more robust.

The schedule was a difficult challenge to deal with because the students seemed to be bored and tired as a result of the time in which the course was developed. Some students were

working and studying the whole morning and at the time of the class they were more prone to fall asleep.

The class was scheduled from 12:10 to 1:40 and nearly all of the participants came late to class and this was hard to manage because some of them finished with their responsibilities at 12:00. Therefore the class often started about 12: 20 and this time was an obstacle in the development of the course. The researchers were forced to leave the strategy instruction activities at the middle of the class in order that most of them were in class so that they could attend the listening instruction.

The attendance was another factor that really affected on a large –scale the development of this study since the average of 78.6% was insufficient to achieve better results. For some students being in the classroom every day was impossible because sometimes they had meetings, tasks in their majors or jobs and this class schedule is usually the one that best fits the university students and workers. The most students missed classes, and for every single class they also missed one listening strategy which was reflected in the performance at the end of the course.

Research designs need to include opportunities to observe participants as they attempt to use listening strategies on authentic listening task in their classroom. Finally, this study showed an improvement in the participant’s ability to listen and extract important facts, but this ability cannot be generalized to all listening in the classroom.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researchers analyzed the pre-test and post-test data. The sample of 18 students was separated into two groups: the treatment group (9 students) and an independent control group (9 students).

First, the student's background was analyzed through a questionnaire administered to the participants. Second, the test were read and graded individually. Third, an analysis of how the students' attendance influenced in the results was carried out. Finally, an analysis of an in depth- interview is presented in order to draw conclusions about the study.

In the treatment group, five of the participants were men and four women. Their ages rank between 20- 24 years old. However, there were three of them who were between 40 to 51 years old. Their age was not an obstacle for learning these strategies since all the two of the oldest participant improved in their score in about 10 points with an 88% of attendance, they missed just two instructions. Only one of the oldest students improved her score just in 3 points but she missed the 50% of the instruction. This reveals that missing classes in this kind of courses affects students' progress.

Six of the participants have a job. None of them has ever lived in an English spoken country and they just speak Spanish and are currently studying English. Most of them have studied English for 1 to 3 years in the University of El Salvador. Only three of them have attended English courses at private academies from 1 month to 1 year but this time was not enough to acquire a high listening comprehension skill. The tests showed that these students who have studied in other academies kept on the same comprehension level as those have studied only at the Scholarship Program.

The participants improved their listening comprehension as well as their pronunciation in different scales through the strategy instruction. Some participants improved a lot and some

other just a little. To notice the difference between the pretest and posttest in both groups, take a look at tables 2 and 3 for individual scores.

Table 2
Discrete Listening Pretest and Posttest scores, n = 9

1. Treatment Group

	Pretest score	Posttest score	Improvement
Participant			
Student 1	28	37	9
Student 2	25	36	11
Student 3	28	41	13
Student 4	34	38	4
Student 5	27	38	11
Student 6	36	44	8
Student 7	28	38	10
Student 8	39	42	3
Student 9	22	32	10

Table 3
Discrete Listening Pretest and Posttest scores, n = 9

2. Control Group

	Pretest score	Posttest score	Improvement
Participant			
Student 1	32	33	1
Student 2	32	31	-1
Student 3	32	36	4
Student 4	36	30	-6
Student 5	42	42	0
Student 6	30	29	-1
student 7	30	30	0
Student 8	28	25	-3
Student 9	28	25	-3

Table 2 shows that all students improved their English Listening skill through being exposed to the strategy instruction process for a month. The main reason why the scores were not so outstanding for some students is because of the lack of attendance. The students, who missed the most, were the ones whose improvement was the poorest. In order to appreciate this in a better way, table 4 presents students' attendance in the treatment group as well as their improvement throughout the course.

Table 4

Students' attendance of treatment group

Participant	Pretest	Posttest	Improvement	Attendance (0/16 days)	Attendance (%)
Student 1	28/60	37/60	9	12	75
Student 2	25/60	36/60	11	12	75
Student 3	28/60	41/60	13	13	81
Student 4	34/60	38/60	4	10	63
Student 5	27/60	38/60	11	16	100
Student 6	36/60	44/60	8	14	88
Student 7	28/60	38/60	10	14	88
Student 8	39/60	42/60	3	8	50
Student 9	22/60	32/60	10	14	88
	29.7/ 60	38.4/60	8.8	12.5	78.6

According to what is shown in table 4 above, it can be seen that the “treatment group” had an average attendance of 78.6 % in the listening comprehension course. This 21.4 % missing attendance is a very considerable negative factor for students to do well in just one course on listening comprehension strategies. Even when these students were very interested in taking this course and came to class everyday, it was difficult for them (students, professors and administrative workers at UES) to attend classes due to their multiple duties. During this period of time, the participants really failed to assimilate key

aspects that must be taken into consideration when listening to English. In other words, and citing an example, it can be said that this 21.4 % that they missed represents about four days in which students missed their classes and indeed, they couldn't receive the whole contents of the course which were included in the test. Students who have a higher percentage in their attendance got higher levels of improvement in their listening skill even when they were affected by some missed classes as well. This was just to emphasize the crucial role that the attendance plays in every day English classes and specially in these kinds of courses. (Strategy Instruction.)

After analyzing the scores in the control group it is worrying that the results went down instead of going up. What it is clear in these scores is that just five students experienced a slight decrease, two of them kept their score, and just two increased their scores. But the increase as well as the decrease in their scores was not significant due to their poor knowledge about these listening techniques and this leads them to miscomprehension of the target language. This results leads to the conclusion that they need to be taught some listening strategy instruction in order for them to keep a more regular listening comprehension.

This data also reveals that the students in the control group had a better level at the departure point. On the other hand, the results in the posttest were different because the treatment group improved more than the control group due to the received listening strategy instruction.

As seen in the chart above, there is a considerable increase in the treatment group score in relation with the control group. It is noticeable that the control group scores kept almost in the same level as in the pretest whereas the students in the treatment group got better results

than in the pretest therefore their listening comprehension level was higher after the process of listening instruction.

Keeping in mind the participants' views about the strategy instruction; the researchers interviewed the participants in order to get their opinions, feelings, and thoughts. The in-depth- interview reveals the following information.

After analyzing the interview, the results of this study showed that explicit listening strategy helped this group of students improve their discrete listening ability and note taking ability. Everyone agrees on the importance of the listening strategies. These listening strategies targeted to improve their English listening comprehension helped them improve their English language as well as their pronunciation. The participants have realized that this kind of strategy instruction is really important and useful to communicate since output is created according to the input received in an oral interchange and it is more important for those students who have major problems in this area.

The participants consider that English programs must have this kind of instruction in order to reach a good level of English comprehension. According to their point of views, the implementation of these listening strategies should be at the beginning or intermediate levels because strategy instructions as well as the regular classes are complementary. Sometimes, teachers ignore the importance of these kinds of instructions. These kinds of instructions can be helpful for the FLD or any English academy in order for students to build a strong basis.

Some students think that 30 minutes session per day was good in order to avoid that students feel bored and exhausted. Even though, there are three participants who do not share the same opinion, they think that more than 30 minutes per session would be better. Nearly all students hold that the course was short and they needed more time to practice.

They think that the course should last two months or more because one month was only the necessary time to carry out the strategy instruction. Taking 30-45 minutes of strategy instruction in the FLD to improve the listening comprehension would be great in that way students can have chances to hear English at basic levels before they take the pronunciation course.

According to the students, the methodology was very good because students had practice and theory at the same time. They consider that the use of a laptop, beamer, internet (websites) were motivating for students to practice the listening comprehension exercises. The classes were dynamic and interesting for the participants. They enjoyed all the activities especially choral repetition which allowed them to get more familiar with the sounds and practice their pronunciation. Another relevant aspect of the methodology, according to students was the combination of theory along with practice because instructors usually do not reinforce the theory with the practice. More creative activities and full colour copies were requested by students for a greater motivation.

The participants improved their listening comprehension as well as their pronunciation in different scales through the strategy instruction. Some participants improved a lot and some other just a little. Especially, they have gotten major progress in intonation, stress, syllable length, pronunciation, and similar sounds and get the main idea.

According to students' opinions, textbooks are not communicative. They focus on grammar and reading but they do not have many listening and speaking activities. They do not have the chance to hear the book listening activities at home because the student's audio CD does not have the listening activities. Textbooks are complex because they do not have a clear explanation about the contents. This kinds of listening strategies are not included in the textbook, according to the students, but in fact they are included; however many

teachers are not able to teach them or they just ignore them because they do not want to look for extra material to teach and practice these strategies.

To acquire a good level of pronunciation and comprehension, the students at home are exposed to movies subtitled in English. They also listen to music along with the lyrics. The ones who have access to internet at home, practice in different websites

For them, it is vital and motivating to practice the English language in that way. The researchers have encouraged the participants for using these listening strategies in different contexts where English is uttered. Only a few of the students have access to cable TV and they enjoy watching different kinds of TV shows like the news, sport shows on different channels in English.

Students evaluated the strategy instruction process as very good. The methodology was different than regular classes because they had many innovative and interesting activities. They enjoyed the listening activities and the resources used to practice in the classroom. Even though, they complained about the time for practicing, they also recommended some other things to take into account in a further course. These recommendations are presented as follows:

- To use an English lab.
- To improve our resources(photocopies)
- To play more audio and video practice
- To assign more homework on internet
- To have more practice at the classroom.
- To practice by listening to music.

This qualitative- quantitative study suggests a promising direction for research on the potential for explicit listening instruction to help the students improve their listening ability.

Closely linked to participants' success in improving their discrete listening ability was their improvement in taking notes and constructing meaning from those notes. Effective note taking can help students guess at meaning in a post-listening review of notes, especially when comprehension is limited during the listening event. An illustrative example of how note-taking strategy instruction benefits students is that it helps them to develop their own abbreviations and symbols for faster note taking and to realize that meaning can be constructed from key word notes rather than entire sentences. Having more confidence in their ability to construct meaning from their notes made it easier for the participant in this study to selectively listen for the information needed to answer the advance organizer questions.

FINDINGS

The results of this study reveal that targeted listening strategy instruction in discrete listening and note taking can improve student's listening comprehension of oral contexts. Students learning English as a foreign language at the Consejo de Becas of the University of El Salvador need to have strong listening skills and strategies to access that information and this become more important when the students' background in English is limited because of their lack of vocabulary and their deficiency in understanding spoken language since they have little experience and this can be wrong because they do not hear English from other sources than can be helpful to reach a good level of oral comprehension.

Carrying out this study was a nice experience because we learned a lot of things such as new methodologies in teaching listening, new listening materials from different authors, new websites that provides a good help for students to hear English fluently. This information is essential for learning a foreign language because it gives the chance for the learners to expands their horizons and be more competent in listening tests. This study is useful to become proficient in the teaching of listening skill which is not developed at all in this scholarship program and even in the Foreign Language Department at UES. Moreover, the result of this study serve as a starting point for research into the kinds of listening students do in different contents, and strategies that they need to be effective listeners. Continuing research in this area will help teachers more appropriately prepare their students for high achievement because new studies can be designed in order to find out new listening strategies that help students to improve listening comprehension. In Fact, the strategies applied in this research are not the only ones targeted to improve listening comprehension. Conclusively, it can be said that if the participants are more exposed to the

listening instruction the results will be better as long as they attend at least 95% of the instruction.

For that reason, the role of the teachers is fundamental because they are the ones who decide and plan their classes based on the students' needs on listening comprehension. The teachers should be facilitators since they have to help students in the listening activities and support them with extra and authentic material in order to make the process of listening strategy instruction successful. Teachers should bring new and interested material to motivate their pupils as much as possible. The level of difficulty in the material must be according to their knowledge of English in that way the students can not feel frustrated in the listening activities. Teachers usually turn to listening practice just from the textbooks which do not provide the kind of instructions or contexts that students need. Also, these textbooks sometimes do not provide some practical language tools as syllable length, contractions, reductions, linking, thought groups, inferring meaning, stress pattern, etc. These contents are really useful and necessary to comprehend spoken English especially when it is uttered by a native speaker. Teachers need to provide listening strategy training on a regular and repeated basis, if students are to develop proficiency in the use and the transfer of these strategies beyond new tasks at the EFL classroom.

The following books are guidelines that teachers can use to construct an appropriate and effective listening that is relevant to their student's needs. For example, Vandergrift (1997a) presents an extensive list of listening strategy groups, their definitions, and examples of how they are utilized by the learner in actual situations. Peterson (1991) gives examples of listening exercises for students at different proficiency levels that include bottom-up, top-down, an interactive processing. Gilbert (2005) provides lessons and exercises for developing discrete listening skills in sound discrimination and English stress

patterns. LeBauer (2000) offers an excellent text on academic listening and note taking, covering symbols, abbreviations, discourse markers, paraphrase and redundancies, cues that signal topic shifts, prediction strategies, and many more of the kinds of listening strategies that students use in academic settings. These materials provide a good balance of bottom-up and top-down listening strategies and are flexible for teachers to use as frameworks for designing listening instruction that can be relevant for the different contexts of listening that students face.

Hence, strategy instruction needs to be explicit (Chamot & O'Malley, (1994). In many cases, teachers guide their students through the use of strategies but fail to name them, define them, or provide opportunities for students to practice or analyze them. Chamot and Omalley (1994) recommend that strategy instruction should include preparation (raising participant's awareness of listening strategies and their usefulness in comprehending oral text), presentation (explicit teaching of the strategy), practice (opportunities to practice the strategies in different contexts), evaluation (encouraging participants to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategy), and expansion (encouraging participants to apply the strategies in their other circumstances). Following either of these instructional models allows students to understand the strategy and how it is used, and provides opportunities to try out strategies in practice situation before using them on authentic tasks. This study suggests that targeted listening strategy instruction should be part of the EFL classrooms.

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ANNEXES

(ANEEX 1)

UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
CONSEJO DE BECAS Y DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS DE LA
UNIVERSIDAD DE EL SALVADOR
ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Name: _____ Level _____

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Listening Test

Part 1. (Sounds) (20 %)

Directions: The following pairs of sentences are exactly the same except for one word. You will hear either sentence A or B. Circle the letter of the sentence you hear.

*Example: a. Do you want everything?
b. Do you wash everything?*

1. *a. They saved old bottles
 b. They save old bottles*

2. *a. She loves each child
 b. She loved each child.*

3. *a. Was a bath all he wanted?
 b. Was a bat all he wanted?*

4. *a. He always spills everything.
 b. He always spilled everything.*

5. *a. Did she bring her card every day?
 b. Did she bring her car every day?*

6. *a. Which cup do you like?
 b. Which cap do you like?*

7. *a. They've already gone.
 b. They'd already gone.*

8. *a. We can't often see the mountains.
 b. We can often see the mountains.*

9. *a. Who'll ask you?
 b. Who'd ask you?*

10. a. We watch all of them.
b. We watch all of it.

Part 2. (Syllable number) (10 %)

Directions: How many syllables do you hear? Write the numbers.

Example: a) Ease 1 b) easy 2 c) easily 3

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. closet _____ | 5. frightened _____ | 9. committee _____ |
| 2. sport _____ | 6. opened _____ | 10. arrangement _____ |
| 3. close _____ | 7. first _____ | |
| 4. simplify _____ | 8. caused _____ | |

Part 3. (Word stress) (10%)

Directions: Draw a line under the syllable with the most stress, the strongest syllable.
Mark only one syllable for each word.

Example:

delay

broken

education

1. Participating

2. Photograph

3. Photography

4. Canadian

5. Geography

6. Europe

7. Information

8. Economy

9. Economic

10. Political

Part 4. (Contractions/ Reductions) (20%)

Directions: You will hear a sentence. It will be read twice. Write the missing words.

Example:

Do you think she is in her room?

1. _____ you ask?
2. _____ work good?
3. Where _____ you go?
4. Please _____ the information.
5. _____ everything.
6. _____ busy now?
7. Have long _____ been here?
8. Why _____ come so late to the office?
9. _____ she done lately?
10. He _____ study this morning.

Part 5. (Focus/ identification) (10%)

Directions: You will hear a dialogue with ten sentences. In each sentence, underline the word with the most emphasis, the strongest word.

Example: That's a great idea.

- A. Do you think food in this country is expensive?
 B. Not really.
 A. I think it's expensive.
 B. That's because you eat in restaurants.
 A. Where do you eat?
 B. At home.
 A. Can you cook?
 B. Well, actually I can't cook.
 A. I just eat cheese.
 B. That's awful.

Part 6. (Focus/ meaning) (10%)

Directions: The following pairs of sentences are exactly the same, except a different word is stressed, stronger in each sentence. You will hear sentence A or B twice. Circle the correct response.

Example. a. They bought two bottles.
 b. They bought two battles

1. a. We wanna buy a lot of apples
 b. We wanna try a lot of apples.
2. a. I think that animal is a wolf
 b. I think the animal hit a wolf.
3. a. Frank wanted to go early
 b. Frank wanted to go earlier
4. a. Sally writes the report

b. Sally writes the reports.

5. *a. Does she speak French?*
b. Did she speak French?

Part 7. (Thought groups) (20%)

Directions: You will hear sentence A or B twice. Answer the question that follows the sentence you hear.

Example: *a. John said, "My father is here"*
b. "John," said my father, "is here"

Question: Who was speaking?

My father

1. *a. He sold his houseboat and car.*
b. He sold his house, boat, and car

Question: How many things did he sell?

2. *a. She likes pie and apples.*
b. She likes pineapples.

Question: What does she want?

3. *a. Would you like some super salad?*
b. Would you like some soup or salad?

Question: What were you offered?

4. *a. The president said, "That the reporter is lying!"*
b. "The president, said that the reporter, "is lying!"

Question: Who said?

5. *a. Wood and matches are used to start fire.*
b. Wooden matches are used to start fire.

Question: What was used to start the fire?

HAVE A GREAT DAY!

(ANNEX 2)

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is getting your background. So we **need your help**. We would be very grateful if you could answer the following questions by checking the appropriate spaces or writing the information requested.

There is no need for you to put your name on the questionnaire.

1. What is your gender? Female Male

2. What is your age? []

3. Are you employed? Yes No

If yes, how many hours per week [] hrs

4. Have you ever lived in a country where English is spoken?

Yes No

If yes, please write the following information:

*From: (Date)

*To: (Date)

*Where:

*Explanation:

5. Do you speak a language other than English and Spanish? Yes No

If yes, which one/ones: _____

6. How long have you attended English classes?

Less than a year From 1 year to 3 years

From 2 years to 3 years 4 years and more

7. Where have you attended English courses?

Centro Cultural Salvadoreño

Escuela Americana

Prolingua

ITCA

Other, please specify:

(ANNEX 3)

UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SCHOLARSHIP AND SCIENTIFIC
RESEARCH OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
LISTENING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES SYLLABUS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Place:	At the English language Program from the Board of Directors of Scholarship and Scientific Research of the University of El Salvador
Course:	Level XIV.
In charge:	Students from the Foreign Languages Department in the research project
Course length:	4 weeks
Date:	March 25 Through April 15, 2008
Schedule:	Monday through Friday, 12:10 p.m - 1:40 p.m
Teachers:	Núñez Rafael, Rubio Hugo, Torres Catarino

Course Description:

This course is intended to help students improve their Listening Comprehension as spoken by native speaker. As well as their pronunciation and accent. This course concentrates on the teaching of some features of American English in particular- stress, rhythm, and intonation- as the framework which will permit the students to understand how speech flows from speaker to listener and how the meaning is built. Practice is included as part of every topic development.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

- To provide listening strategies in order to improve students' listening comprehension.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

- To implement a series of strategies aimed at the improvement of the listening comprehension skill in the students of level XIV of the Scholarship Program.

- To prepare the students to internalize and decode listening comprehension tasks in order to get better grades in oral texts.
- To make students aware of the supra-segmental aspects of English in the production and comprehension of their target language.
- To train the students on how to use the sounds of American English appropriately in the context of speech.
- To help students produce the English sounds by practicing in real contexts.

CONTENTS

1. RHYTHM: Number of Syllables (Week 1)

Objectives: to make students aware of the aspect of rhythm in English in the production and comprehension of their target language.

2. STOPS AND CONTINUANTS (WEEK 1)

Objectives: To help students produce the stops and continuants appropriately in the context on speech.

3. VOICING (WEEK 1)

Objective: To help students produce the voiced English sounds.

4. WORD STRESS (WEEK 2)

Objective: To help students produce different vowel lengths. English sounds that are absent from the Spanish language.

5. WORD STRESS PATTERNS (WEEK 2)

Objective: To make students aware of the supra –segmental aspect of word stress in English in the production and comprehension of their target language.

6. CONTENTS WORD (WEEK 2)

Objective: to make students aware of the use of content words in English in the production and comprehension of their target language.

7. PITCH PATTERNS USED FOR EMPHASIS (WEEK 3)

Objective: To make students aware of the supra-segmental aspects of pitch pattern for emphasis on the production and comprehension of English.

8. NOTE TAKING (WEEK 4)

Objective: To train the students to take notes in English in the production and comprehension of their target language.

COURSE METHODOLOGY

In order to fulfil the objectives of this course, an initial diagnosis test is administered in order to identify areas that need to be emphasized during the course and determine the activities that need more attention and time to minimize the student's weak pronunciation areas. This teaching – learning methodology includes an intensive exposure to the English language where the students get involved actively. In order to make sure that a meaningful amount of input is provided, students are given real listening comprehension practice in the classroom and are also assigned activities at home from the internet. Finally, to test the strategies a test will be administered at the end of the course.

EVALUATION

First quiz	20%
Second quiz	20%
Third quiz	25% %
Final exam	25%
Attendance	10%

(ANNEX 4-A)

Entrevista

Guía de entrevista sobre estrategias para mejorar la comprensión oral del idioma inglés en los estudiantes de nivel XIV del programa de becas de la Universidad de El Salvador.

Objetivo: Recolectar información respecto a la importancia que las estrategias de comprensión oral tienen en los estudiantes del nivel XIV del programa de becas de la Universidad de El Salvador.

La información será estrictamente confidencial.

Datos Generales:

Edad: _____ Carrera: _____
Sexo: _____ Ciclo: _____
Solo estudia: Si ____ No ____ Número de Materias que estas cursando _____
Trabajas y Estudias: Si ____ No ____ Has estudiado inglés antes: Si ____ No ____
Título: _____ Por cuanto tiempo _____
Lugar _____

1. Pregunta de introducción. Ya que hemos finalizado el curso acerca de estrategias de comprensión oral, me gustaría que compartieras tus opiniones sobre el mismo.
2. Según tu opinión, ¿estas estrategias desarrolladas durante el curso son importantes para mejorar la comprensión oral?
3. ¿Consideras que se debería implementar este tipo de estrategias en los cursos de inglés?
4. ¿Crees que fue suficiente el tiempo empleado de 30 minutos por sesión durante un mes?
5. ¿Que le pareció la metodología empleada por los tutores?
6. ¿Crees que tus habilidades de comprensión oral mejoraron con la instrucción impartida durante el curso?
7. ¿Crees que los libros de texto utilizados en este programa son suficientes para alcanzar un óptimo nivel de comprensión oral?
8. ¿Que haces para mejorar tu comprensión oral en inglés?
9. ¿Cómo evaluarías el curso sobre estrategias de comprensión oral?
10. ¿Que se podría mejorar en un próximo curso de instrucción sobre estrategias de comprensión oral?

Ejemplo de desarrollo de la entrevista*(ANNEX 4-B)*

Questions	Student 1
1. Según tu opinión, ¿estas estrategias desarrolladas durante el curso son importantes para mejorar la comprensión oral?	Sí. Son muy importantes porque nos ayudan a entender mejor y a la misma vez mejoramos nuestra pronunciación.
2. ¿Consideras que se debería implementar este tipo de estrategias en los cursos de inglés?	Sí se deberían de implementar desde los niveles básicos y de manera mas frecuente en niveles intermedios
3. ¿Crees que fue suficiente el tiempo empleado de 30 minutos por sesión durante un mes?	Sí, el tiempo fue suficiente para desarrollar cada tema por día, pero se le debería dar más seguimiento y debe ser mixto con la clase de inglés
4. ¿Qué le pareció la metodología empleada por los tutores?	La metodología fue muy buena. Usamos bastante el audio para mejorar la comprensión además la repetición de los ejercicios fue buena. En general, la metodología fue bien empleada
5. ¿Crees que tus habilidades de comprensión oral mejoraron con la instrucción impartida durante el curso?	Si. Escucho más y lo entiendo mejor.
6. ¿Crees que los libros de texto utilizados en este programa son suficientes para alcanzar un óptimo nivel de comprensión oral?	No. A los libros de texto le falta mucho. Están muy deficientes en las áreas de hablar y escuchar. Tienen mucho énfasis en gramática y lectura
7. ¿Qué haces para mejorar tu comprensión oral en inglés?	Veo películas subtituladas en inglés, consigo las letras de las canciones y las escucho en audio.
8. ¿Cómo evaluarías el curso sobre estrategias de comprensión oral?	Muy bueno la fonética es importante para comprender mejor
9. ¿Qué se podría mejorar en un próximo curso de instrucción sobre estrategias de comprensión oral?	Más seguimiento en estos cursos y se le debería dar más tiempo para tener más práctica.