

Metacognitive Listening Strategies: A Step beyond Traditional Instruction

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Resumen: La comprensión auditiva ha sido reconocida por mucho tiempo como una habilidad lingüística pasiva. El proceso interactivo que sucede en la mente de los receptores ha sido subestimado grandemente. Esta habilidad en el idioma inglés es un proceso dinámico que ejerce muchas demandas el cual requiere que los receptores discriminen sonidos específicos, interpreten el acento, distingan características de los diferentes dialectos a los que ellos están expuestos, etc. Indudablemente, además de enfrentar estos elementos lingüísticos, existen procesos mentales relacionados a las estrategias personales de escucha de los aprendientes que necesitan ser activados. Estas mismas están ligadas a un proceso más amplio llamado meta cognición. Como Cohen indica, muchos investigadores en el campo de la comprensión auditiva de un segundo idioma concuerdan que los estudiantes no manejan a menudo las tareas de escucha en una forma efectiva al utilizar estas estrategias (210). Por lo tanto, este tema concientiza a los profesores para que aborden la enseñanza de la comprensión auditiva de una forma más cuidadosa. La inclusión de estrategias meta cognitivas de escucha en el salón de clases para hacer a los usuarios del idioma inglés más autónomos y responsables debería ser un objetivo primordial en la enseñanza del inglés como idioma extranjero. De este modo, el siguiente estudio provee un análisis de este proceso meta cognitivo y de algunas estrategias para beneficiar la enseñanza de la escucha en el contexto del aprendizaje del inglés como idioma extranjero.

Palabras clave: lingüístico, proceso interactivo, estrategias, meta cognición, enseñanza de la comprensión auditiva, auto aprendizaje.

Abstract: Listening has been regarded as a passive skill for so long. The interactive process going on the recipients' minds has been far neglected. Listening in English is a dynamic process that has numerous demands on the listeners. It requires listeners to deal with diverse complicated tasks such as discriminating specific sounds, interpreting stress, intonation, distinguishing the features of the different dialects they are exposed to and so forth. Undoubtedly, besides struggling with those linguistic elements, there are mental processes that need to be activated to understand spoken English. These processes dealing with EFL learners' personal listening comprehension strategies are enclosed in a broader process called metacognition. As indicated by Cohen, "Many researchers in the field of second and foreign language listening agree on the idea that listeners often do not handle listening tasks in an effective way utilizing these strategies" (210). Therefore, this issue raises awareness on the teachers' part to approach the teaching of listening in a more delicate fashion. The inclusion of

metacognitive listening strategies in the classroom to make learners become more autonomous and accountable users of the English language is currently a must in EFL instruction. Thus, the following study provides a window to the analysis of this metacognitive process and some suggested strategies to favor listening instruction in an EFL context.

Keywords: linguistic, interactive process, strategies, metacognition, listening instruction, self-instruction.

1 Introduction

Raising listeners' metacognitive awareness should be a must in EFL instruction. Undoubtedly, listening comprehension in one's language is a difficult task to undertake and it is even harder when learning a second or foreign language. The strategies related to auditory information processing or listening in oral discourse are distinct from one listener to the other. These strategies can be carried out in diverse ways and are highly dependent on the linguistic context. All this evidences the demands that being a successful listener imposes on the EFL learner's shoulders. Definitely, the appropriate guidance on the route to successful listening comprehension will only be enhanced with the instructors' help and the effective knowledge of the impact of metacognitive listening strategies. On the basis of the previous premises, the following research questions, hypothesis and objectives are drawn to properly support the current work:

1.1 Research Questions

1. Do metacognitive listening strategies contribute to the linguistic development of EFL learners?
2. To which extent have metacognitive listening strategies been implemented in the EFL classroom?
3. What listening activities can be suggested to enhance metacognitive skills?
4. What materials can be recommended to develop metacognitive listening strategies?

1.2 Hypothesis

The use of metacognitive listening strategies contributes to the linguistic development of EFL students.

1.3 General Objective:

To establish the contribution of metacognitive listening strategies to the linguistic development of EFL students of the English teaching major and the Associate's Program in English at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension in Pérez Zeledón.

1.4 Specific objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which metacognitive listening strategies have been implemented in the EFL classroom
2. To suggest a set of listening activities to enhance metacognitive skills
3. To recommend EFL instructors and learners suitable material for the development of different metacognitive listening strategies

2 Literature review

2.1 Listening versus hearing

Listening and hearing are two different processes that deserve attention in language learning. Though hearing is limited to the learner's perception and processing of sounds, it is the starting point. Before a student is able to listen, s/he must be able to hear. Listening is a more complex process. It requires people to focus on specific sounds for specific purposes. Listening as a linguistic skill implies a deeper understanding. As Brown explains, "listening is a highly refined skill that requires a learner's attention to a battery of strategies for extracting meaning from contexts (248)". His idea is supported by Saricoban; he claims that listening "involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning" (1). That is why, language instructors must give special attention to this skill. As Hedge states, "teachers need to ensure that learners experience a range of listening purposes" (243). Based on the foundation that listening plays a remarkable role in language learning, a closer look at effective instruction is given.

2.2 Teacher-directed listening versus self-directed listening

Traditional listening instruction is based on the premise that teachers should provide students with the necessary tools and activities to improve their listening ability. Learners' performance is under the teacher's control. To illustrate this idea, Wang describes students' behavior in a traditional classroom. He mentions that students usually have little control of the learning process since they passively do what the teachers tell them what to do (162). In addition to this scenario, teachers are focused on the students' product (giving or finding the correct answer) rather than the process. Testing becomes the main objective while teaching students how to listen effectively is left behind. In contrast with this view, self-directed listening comes into play. It promotes learners' introspective mental control which is a distinctive principle of a broader process called metacognitive instruction. This process is acknowledged by Oxford as "actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process" (136). A key characteristic is that the student is seen as an active agent of performance. Students are encouraged to use listening strategies on their own. As Goh notes, "by actively engaging in thinking and talking about their own listening, learners construct their understanding of what it takes to succeed as a second language listener" (qtd. in Harwood 181). Learners should be given the chance to identify the demands of listening, to monitor their thinking and listening, and to act strategically in order to be in charge of their own listening process. To do this, Morley advises language instructors to promote students' awareness, and guide them to "a focus on self-involvement with an emphasis on self-study and taking responsibility for one's work and pride in one's accomplishments" (qtd. in Celce-Murcia 83). Once students are able to recognize their central role in listening, they will be able to take responsibility and take control over success.

2.3 Metacognitive Listening Strategies

To fulfill this self-directed listening instruction, teachers need to guide students toward a metacognitive dimension of language learning. Students must guide their own listening

process toward self-appraisal and self-regulation strategies. Self-reflection sheds light upon an autonomous range of activities that can support students' language experiences. Some of these activities are: self and peer report of accomplishments, song diaries, video reports and specific sound discrimination.

3 Implementation of Metacognitive Listening

In order to have a clearer view of current practice about the subject, ten professors and students of the English teaching major and the Associate's Program in English at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension answered a questionnaire. Their responses revealed key data.

3.1 Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers play a defining role in language instruction since they delineate what is to be done in the classroom, and they can even set a path for students to follow outside. The information collected indicates which metacognitive listening activities the instructors have suggested learners the most being those the checklists and post-listening activities (Table 1). All the activities have been recommended and used. The least used are motivation charts and listening diaries. Teachers are aware of the activities necessary to optimize listening comprehension in EFL students. Thus, it should be their utmost commitment to facilitate language effectiveness through the implementation of activities like the ones listed or proposed later on.

Metacognitive listening activities suggested by EFL teachers	Use		Percent of cases
	N	Percent	
Process listening	6	15%	60%
Peer-listening tasks	5	12%	50%
Checklists	7	17%	70%
Motivation charts	2	5%	20%
Listening diaries	2	5%	20%
Post-listening activities	7	17%	70%
Process discussion	6	15%	60%
Reflective activities	6	15%	60%
Total	41	100%	410%

Table 1. Metacognitive listening activities used by EFL professors at UNA, BE. Data gathered from questionnaire # 1, June 2011.

Learning English is absolutely a hard endeavor. Incorporating the teaching of the four skills to EFL instruction requires a great load of effort on the teachers' and the students' part. The mechanisms used by students to learn every skill on their own are very complicated. This trial may lead learners to confusion and overwhelm without the proper guidance. The majority of instructors questioned partially agree on the fact that metacognitive listening strategies are easy to accomplish (Figure 1). Listening comprehension is a thorough process. It requires care, time and effort. Therefore, learners should be put on the alert for the risks that neglecting this process can bring about.

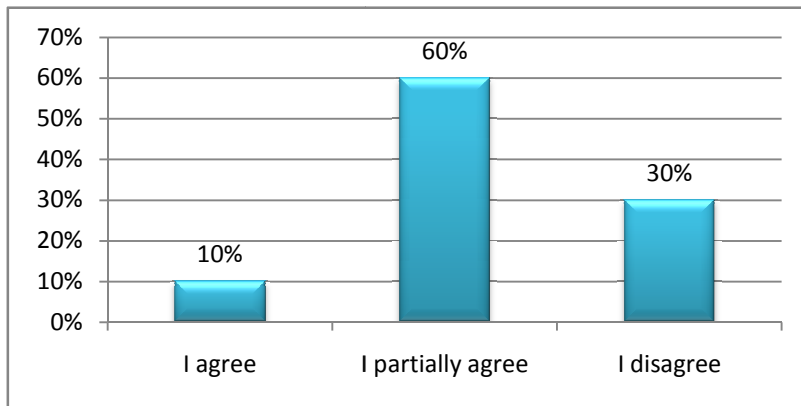


Figure 1. Metacognitive Listening Strategies are easy to accomplish. Source: questionnaire # 1, June 2011.

Metacognitive listening strategies seem not to be part of conventional teaching (Figure 2). However, their role on learners' linguistic development is highly significant. Learners will only make this listening process effective by practicing and devising strategies on their own. All the instructors concur that metacognitive listening strategies are required to ensure learners' linguistic development appropriately.

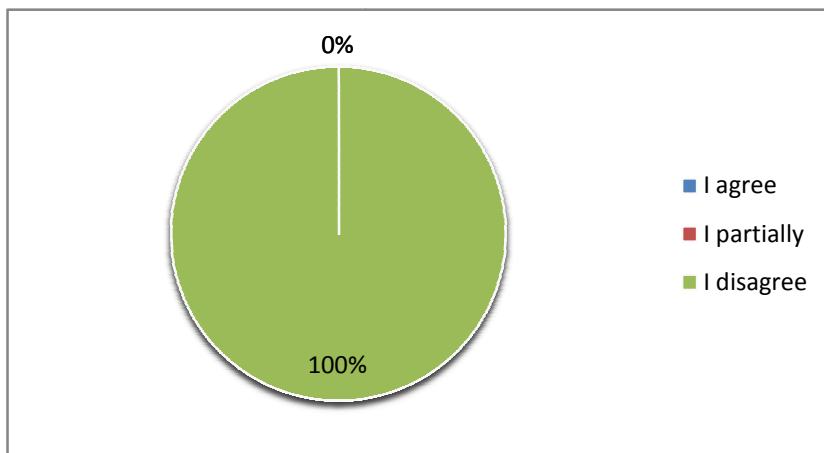


Figure 2. Metacognitive Listening Strategies are necessary for effective linguistic development. Source: questionnaire # 1, June 2011.

3.2 Learners' Awareness and Use

In current practice, students are said to be responsible for their own learning. Learner-centered instruction has led students to become more independent and able to make significant decisions in their learning process. The information obtained from actual EFL students about their use of metacognitive strategies reveals that process listening is the activity used the most (Table 2). Motivation charts and listening diaries are the least used. However, their answers demonstrate that they do not use many of these activities since every student questioned uses at least two techniques on an average range.

Metacognitive listening activities used by students	Use		Percent of cases
	N	Percent	
Process listening	5	25%	71%
Peer-listening tasks	4	19%	57%
Checklists	4	19%	57%
Motivation charts	1	5%	14%
Listening diaries	1	5%	14%
Post-listening activities	2	9%	28%
Process discussion	2	9%	28%
Reflective activities	2	9%	28%
Total	21	100%	297%

Table 2. Metacognitive listening activities used by EFL students at UNA, BE. Data gathered from questionnaire # 2, June 2011.

Data gathered from learners brought to light the lack of implementation of strategies that go beyond the cognitive domain (Figure 3). Strategies such as setting goals, planning and seeking for practice opportunities are left behind. Most of the informants answered that they do not use them. They are not conscious about the effective role of these strategies to succeed in language learning.

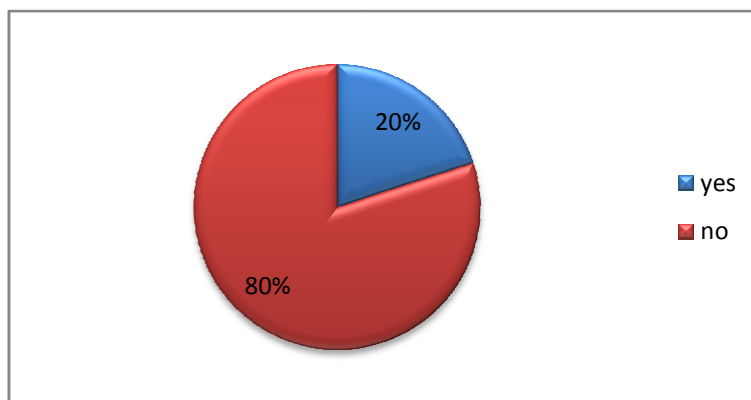


Figure 3. Implementation of self-instructed listening activities Source: questionnaire # 2, June 2011.

3.3 Metacognitive Listening Activities

Metacognitive listening strategies accelerate listening comprehension; teachers should guide learners through their use to generate gradual improvement to optimize linguistic development. On this account, five different activities that engage with the process of metacognitive listening are presented here. They intend to develop students' ability to improve their linguistic development by their own. Grounded in the premise that learners' need to take control over their learning, these activities and their corresponding material activate students' self-awareness and skills outside the classroom.

3.3.1 Song Diary²³:

This technique can be used to guide learners to develop listening skills from authentic material. It integrates awareness-raising steps that students can perform outside the class. It follows five steps:

1. Planning (selecting a song, setting a goal)
2. Predicting (predicting possible obstacles and linguistic input they may encounter)
3. Monitoring (verifying predictions, setting new input)
4. Evaluating (establishing strategic technique to get new linguistic input, assessing the lyrics)
5. Reflecting (noting down insights on the experience)

3.3.2 Video Report Mind Map²⁴:

This activity encourages learners to carry out a personalized listening report. Students improve their metacognitive skills and listening comprehension. The idea is to promote extra-class practice by choosing a video (TV show, movie, news report, short films) of their choice and go through four main stages which are:

1. Preparing for listening: students select a video and make predictions
2. Watching the video
3. Evaluating my listening: students answer a checklist to evaluate their comprehension
4. Action Plan: students note down an action plan to overcome the linguistic difficulties they faced.

3.3.3 Spot the sounds²⁵:

Students look for an audio conversation or lecture (see list of web pages) and listen to it. They focus on a word or phrase they are not familiar with. They make guesses about spelling and meaning. As a final step, learners play a strategy to verify their guesses.

3.3.4 Peer -recording exchange²⁶:

This activity provides students with an opportunity to build metacognitive skills together with a classmate. It increases learners' ability to raise awareness of their linguistic weaknesses and factors that may hinder their learning process. To do this, students follow the next steps:

1. planning: schedule time, set objective, select material to be used
2. Recording: students record themselves (a spontaneous/prepared conversation, reading aloud, monologues, singing a song, reciting a poem, narrating a story)
3. Monitoring: each student listens to the track and makes notes on mistakes
4. Reflecting: self-reflection, peer reflection session, remedial plan to overcome weaknesses

²³ See annex 1

²⁴ See annex 2.

²⁵ See annex 3.

²⁶ See annex 4.

3.4 Curricular Language Contents Embedded

3.4.1 Functional Content

This component considers not only forms of the language but also the communicative purpose implied. It encompasses the ability to be competent in the language by functioning in society appropriately. How is this possible? The art of expressing oneself in a target language requires learners to be knowledgeable about forms and functions of the language. By ensuring effective listening through metacognitive strategies, learners gradually become more accountable and competent language users. This enlightened vision of how listening should be approached is an attempt at helping recipients be more successful negotiators by understanding and using language functions in different contexts.

3.4.2 Cultural Content

Language and culture go hand in hand to assist learners in the socializing process. This process entails social meaning that goes beyond the mere act of understanding words and phrases. Language in society conveys diverse cultural features such as values, attitudes, behavior, patterns, points of view, ways of thinking, appreciation, etc.

Through this approach learners are directly exposed to the cultural component when being focused on songs, conversations and videos featuring native speakers' lifestyle and mindset.

3.4.3 Linguistic Content

Language is a system entailing several skills which are the ways or methods how people communicate. This approach highlights the use of all of them: listening, speaking, writing and reading.

Speaking, reading and writing are used throughout the steps of the activities planned to enhance self-instructed listening. Learners are required to listen to songs, videos and conversations and keep track of their listening comprehension skill by writing, reading and using the language orally. Above all, listening is boosted thoroughly by the constant exposure to strategies in order to aide language learners to tackle up a better linguistic performance. This approach covers just a sample of the multiple metacognitive listening strategies learners may devise by themselves.

3.4.4 Procedural Content

Acquiring a language should be mostly acknowledged as a process rather than a product. It is worth noting that this approach views listening enhancement as a gradual process. Learners are instructed to follow a set of steps to achieve the ultimate goal of each activity planned. They follow the procedures which are segmented in stages to help students build a more integral and thorough communicative development. These procedures are the stepping stones learners require to attain effective aural comprehension.

4 Conclusions

Listening comprehension is not a fixed and terminated process merely reduced to the activities done in the language classroom but a never-ending process that is polished by

the same learners' effort after EFL instruction has taken place. This effort raises self-awareness called metacognition as explained before. The pedagogical activities suggested for this study derive from the need of teaching and learning listening comprehension strategies to gain full understanding of English as a foreign language. Therefore, this study and analysis of metacognitive listening strategies

1. generates enhancing habits that guarantee gradual improvement in listening comprehension.
2. optimizes the use of strategies language teachers can suggest learners to support the development of this skill.
3. facilitates and accelerates listening comprehension regardless of learners' level of aural comprehension.
4. assures self-appraisal and self-regulation favoring the language learner with the optimization of their own learning process.

Given the fact that less successful language learners do not have the metacognitive knowledge needed to select appropriate strategies (Chamot 113), language instructors must orient and direct this process in every lesson where listening reveals itself to be one of the learners' weaknesses. From Yang's perspective "one of the distinct features differentiating successful listeners from unsuccessful ones is their use of metacognitive strategies" and he supports the idea that "teaching the role of metacognition in L2 listening helps listeners to approach the listening task more effectively" (134). Undoubtedly, this enlightened approach to the teaching and learning of the listening skill in a second language classroom ensures learners' foreign language success.

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Lenna Barrantes Elizondo holds a bachelor's degree in English teaching and a licentiate's degree in Applied Linguistics in English from Universidad Nacional in Costa Rica. She is currently enrolled in the Second Languages and Culture Master's Program at the same university. During her eleven years of teaching experience, she has taught in different areas. She has taught for the Ministry of Public Education as a primary school teacher and a teachers' trainer for in-service teachers. She is currently a professor at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension in the English teaching major and the Associate's Program in English. She has also worked for other private and public institutions.

Cintha Olivares Garita holds a licentiate's degree in Applied Linguistics in English and a Master's degree in Second Languages and Culture with emphasis in English from Universidad Nacional in Costa Rica. She is currently working at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension in the English teaching major and the Associate's program in English. She has worked for twelve years teaching students of all levels: primary, secondary and university. She has also taught courses at other private and public institutions, participated in national conferences for teachers of English and been a trainer of several courses for in-service MEP teachers.

Appendix 1

Spot the Sounds

Topic: _____
Title: _____
Webpage/source: _____

Words/phrases	Posible spelling	Posible meaning

Strategies to verify guesses:

Appendix 2

Sound Diary

Stage 1: PLANNING
DATE: _____
TIME: _____
OBJECTIVE: _____
LISTENING MATERIAL: _____
Stage 2: PREDICTING
TITLE OF THE SONG: _____
THIS SONG MAY BE ABOUT: _____
SOME WORDS I MAY HEAR ARE: _____
SOME DIFFICULTIES I MAY ENCOUNTER ARE: _____
Stage 3: MONITORING
1. Listen to the song and circle the correct guesses from
2. Listen to the song again and write down new information: _____
3. Take notes on parts that caused confusion: _____
Stage 4: EVALUATING
1. Read the lyrics and listen to the song.
2. Identify in the lyrics the expressions that caused confusion.
3. Set a strategic plan to get the meaning and work on pronunciation.
Stage 5: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Appendix 3

Peer-recording exchange

Step 1: PLANNING	
DATE: _____ peer's name: _____	
TIME: _____	
OBJECTIVE: _____	
MATERIAL TO BE USED: _____	
Step 2: RECORDING	
DURATION : _____	
STEP 3: MONITORING	
my performance	My peer
Date and time for reflection session:	
Step 4: REFLECTING	
Main strengthens	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">ME</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">My</div> </div>
Main weaknesses	
Remedial plan	

VIDEO REPORT MIND MAP

PREPARING TO LISTEN

Video: _____

Duration: _____

Possible events:

Problems I may encounter:

EVALUATING

	YES	NO
1. Did I get the main idea?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What is it? _____		
2. Did I feel lost during the video?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Am I satisfied with what I understood?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. How much I understood?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	20%	50%
	70%	100%

ACTION PLAN

1. What difficulties did I face?
2. Which strategies can I use to overcome them next time?

Appendix 4

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL
SEDE REGIONAL BRUNCA**

RESEARCH: Metacognitive Listening Strategies: A Step beyond Traditional Instruction

RESEARCHERS: M.A. Cinthya Olivares Garita

Licda. Lenna Barrantes Elizondo

Instrument #1: Questionnaire for EFL Teachers

The following questionnaire is part of a study being conducted by two professors of the English Department at Universidad Nacional. It is aimed at gathering data to identify the use of metacognitive listening strategies in the EFL classroom. Any information you provide will be used for academic purposes only. Thank you for your cooperation.

Part I: Personal information

- 1. Gender: Male----- 1 Female ----- 2
- 2. Year of birth: 19__ __
- 3. Degree : _____
- 4. Teaching experience: _____ years / _____ months

Part II: Questions:

- 1. What do you understand by metacognition?

- 2. How do you define metacognitive listening instruction?

- 3. Which activities have you ever suggested or practiced with your students?

_____ listening process	_____ listening diaries
_____ peer listening tasks	_____ post listening activities
_____ checklists	_____ process discussion
_____ motivation charts	_____ reflective activities

Part III. For each of the statements below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by placing a tick on the appropriate number.

a. Metacognitive listening strategies are easy to accomplish.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
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b. Students cannot use metacognitive listening strategies by themselves.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
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c. Metacognitive listening strategies are necessary for effective linguistic development.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
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Appendix 5

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL

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RESEARCH: Metacognitive Listening Strategies: A Step beyond Traditional Instruction

RESEARCHERS: M.A. Cinthya Olivares Garita

Licda. Lenna Barrantes Elizondo

Instrument #2: Questionnaire for EFL Students

The following questionnaire is part of a study being conducted by two professors of the English Department at Universidad Nacional. It is aimed at gathering data to identify the use of metacognitive listening strategies in the EFL classroom. Any information you provide will be used for academic purposes only. Thank you for your cooperation.

Part I: Personal information

1. Gender: Male----- 1 Female ----- 2
2. Year of birth: 19__ __
3. Years of English instruction: _____

Part II: Answer the following questions

1. Have any of your teachers ever suggested self-instructed listening activities to improve your listening skills?

YES NO

2. Have you ever implemented self- instructed listening activities by your own?

YES NO

3. Which activities have you ever practiced?

____ listening process	____ listening diaries
____ peer listening tasks	____ post listening activities
____ checklists	____ process discussion
____ motivation charts	____ reflective activities
____ none	

4. Please describe any other listening activity you have ever done to improve your listening skills.
