



DEVELOPMENT OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN 8TH GRADERS OF THE BILINGUAL EXPERIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL IN SANTA CRUZ BY THE PROMOTION OF LOCAL BELONGING DURING ONLINE LEARNING

ESTUDIANTE

Andrea Mojica Barquero

APROBADO POR

Firmado por JUAN PABLO ZUÑIGA VARGAS (FIRMA) PERSONA FISICA, OPF-04-0182-0569. Fecha declarada: 25/09/2021 01:26 p. m.

Tutor del TFG M.Ed. Juan Pablo Vargas Zúñiga

RITA MARIA ARGUEDAS VIQUEZ (FIRMA)

M.Ed. Rita Arguedas Víquez Coordinadora Maestría en Educación, CIDE

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Development of Listening Comprehension Skills in 8th Graders of the Bilingual Experimental High School in Santa Cruz by the Promotion of Local Belonging during Online Learning

Andrea Mojica Barquero¹

Universidad Nacional

Costa Rica

amoba15@gmail.com

Abstract

This essay explores and analyses the implementation of an original website that collects material and learning activities which help students comprehend, and eventually produce the language prompted by input and insights that correspond to Costa Rican (Santa Cruz's) interests, people, places, culture, identity, and traditions. Such a resource can also provide students with other means for language comprehension development, through different forms of representation and related-content. Due to the current inability of repeating, inferring, interpreting, and comprehending spoken language in a common physical room, there should be a virtual space in which resources can be organized according to each linguistic objective proposed in MEP's language program.

Keywords: listening activities, spoken comprehension, online education, combined modalities, cultural belonging

¹ English Teacher at *Liceo Experimental Bilingue de Santa Cruz*, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Graduate of the English Teaching major at Universidad Nacional, Heredia. Also holder of a Licenciate Teaching Degree from Universidad Castro Carazo, San Jose, Costa Rica.

Introduction

The new modality of learning adopted by the Ministry of Public Education (MEP, for its acronym in Spanish) in Costa Rica has brought different challenges to our educational system as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. This sanitary emergency brought to our attention the gaps that remain regarding organization and delivery of virtual classes; distance learning is taking over without an efficient implementation. Currently, students from public high schools are forced to learn and comply with the program's objectives regardless of the limitations of the modalities of learning in each region: distance, virtual, face to face; or combined, such the case of our educational system.

In the case of Guanacaste (the fifth province of Costa Rica), at *Liceo Experimental Bilingue de Santa Cruz* (LEB²), students are required to follow a program that corresponds to three different subjects for English learning: Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing, and English Literature. Moreover, students have face-to-face interaction, in each subject, with the teacher and classmates once every two weeks since it was suggested to subdivide groups into two subgroups: A and B. This means that the time of direct interaction inside a classroom is reduced, and more self-guided learning should be promoted to enhance students' continuous practice.

The exposure to the language is limited to one hour a week, every two weeks. As a consequence of the shortness of time, student's comprehension of ideas and details has been weakened; in fact, students are less likely to understand the main and secondary ideas of spoken language due to the lack of practice and the reduced language interactions. In addition, online teaching has pushed teachers to use and develop different learning technologies so that distance learning can be supported and delivered with quality resources that can fit the students' uniqueness as a community and as a specific learning population.

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² Bilingual Experimental Highschool for its acronym in Spanish

The adaptation of resources that can be useful for the achievement of MEP's listening objectives is definitely a challenge. Though the target learning population has enough technological literacy to manage and interact on different online platforms and websites, the gathering and adaptation of material to a virtual space that can be accessed remotely and can expose students to the language is necessary for the effective implementation of the program's objectives in the current teaching conditions. Therefore, this essay explores and analyses the implementation of an original website that collects material and learning activities which help students comprehend and produce the language prompted by input and insights that correspond to Costa Rican (Santa Cruz's) interests, people, places, culture, identity, and traditions. Such a resource can also provide students with other means for language comprehension development. Due to the current inability of repeating, inferring, interpreting, and comprehending spoken language in a common physical room, there should be a virtual space in which resources can be organized according to each linguistic objective proposed in the language program.

Such a resource is a product of the analysis of the current learning conditions which point out to a detriment of spoken production and comprehension as a consequence of distance learning and lack of language exposure. Besides that, the type of resources used in online teaching do not always comply with the learner's cultural background and individual interests, which leads to lack of motivation towards the acquisition and practice of the language. Therefore, the implementation of this resource within the language lesson can work as an alternative to continue education in times of distance learning.

Population of Study

For the purpose of this essay, the population of study corresponds to 8th graders from *Liceo* Experimental Bilingue de Santa Cruz (LEB), Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Such students come from

different parts of the region to this institution with the purpose of developing high quality. English Language skills through five high school years. In fact, in LEB's *Plan Anual de Trabajo* [Yearly Action Plan] (2021) states that the institution's mission is offering academic education of excellence, enriched by the efficient proficiency of English as a second language, with the purpose of preparing and interacting successfully to the country's workforce and face the new millennium based on human principles and values³. The importance of the institution within the community is undeniable. In Santa Cruz, the institution represents a route of working and laboring success after graduation through the learning of English. Due to the proximity to the most visited places of the area and the influence of local tourism, its attractions and related businesses in the zone, the independent proficiency of a foreign language turns out to be a decisive point among recruiters and talent seekers.

As stated before, in the academic offer of Bilingual High schools in Costa Rica, English is taught through three different English subjects: Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing and English Literature. The design of the website is based on the learning objectives for listening and speaking classes and goals, and it is directed specifically to 8th graders from the community of Santa Cruz, Guanacaste, who attend the Bilingual Experimental High School. The selected group of students correspond to teenagers from 13 to 15 years old, who were born in Santa Cruz or its surroundings and whose English proficiency exit level for this school year should be above B1 as specified by MEP in the English program (MEP, 2017).

English Program For 8th Graders from LEB

The Ministry of Education in Costa Rica (MEP) has launched a differentiated program for Bilingual modalities of secondary education (MEP, 2017). According to the program, the mediation activities and learning objectives are scaffolded in a sequential logical way that matches the proficiency levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This means that, as

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³ Translation into English from the original version.

set in the organization of goals and objectives, students are expected to have a proficiency level of B1 according to the CEFR by the end of 8th grade (MEP, 2017). Such proficiency involves the achievement of the following competencies from the CEFR- B1 in reference to the band:

- Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.
- 2. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken.
- 3. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest.
- 4. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (MEP, 2017, p. 30)

Besides setting the expectation for the exit proficiency level of students, the program describes the approach that is best adopted for the whole national educational community, which is the Action-Oriented Approach:

This curriculum adopts the Action-Oriented Approach, within the communicative language methodologies, which places emphasis on what learners know and do to communicate successfully by completing tasks, using general and specific competences in meaningful context and real-life scenarios. There is a progressive shift from the Communicative Approach to the Action-Oriented Approach. The curriculum maintains an eclectic view, but favors the Action-Oriented Approach among the other pedagogical views. (MEP, 2017, p. 31)

As presented in the document, the approach used in the program promotes the active use of the language in situations and events that correspond to real scenarios. In addition, it encourages the use of the language in problem solving and conversational situations. "Within this approach to English language learning, learners develop communicative competence, gain knowledge of various English cultures, and develop their full potential as national and global citizens" (MEP, 2017, p. 31).

Distance Learning Challenges and Problematization of Current's Learning Conditions

According to the English program, "the Action-Oriented Approach sees learners as active agents responsible for their own progress in learning and sees communication as a social activity designed to accomplish specific tasks" (MEP, 2017, p. 31). However, that principle of the approach is unfairly represented in the current conditions of MEP's online learning. There are several challenges that have to be faced when trying to implement online learning in the country. Though there is an urgent need of maintaining educational continuity, as explained by Quesada (2009), who highlighted the importance of virtual scenarios for the delivery of academic content; there are more setbacks that have to be addressed.

Though the current learning conditions have come as an alternative to provide a chance for practice and achievement of the set objectives, the problems triggered by the sanitary emergency are only adding up to the old gaps and decline of the quality of learning. Within the scope of education, there have been challenges in terms of resources, access, expertise, commitment, time and tasks management, among others. Clearly, there has been a great change to the use of resources in the classroom. Body language and expressions are barely interpreted in virtual scenarios and learners do not yet know how to act and participate in synchronous meetings. One of the most important tools, which is exposure to the language, is sometimes none for students who do not have a device to connect or proper connection to establish a virtual meeting. Written practices are set to be the remedy to the lack of connection and resources, but it will not be effective in the understanding of spoken language.

On the other hand, both teachers and students require more training in the teaching and learning of virtual and distance scenarios. As to this pandemic, it was urgent for teachers to have taken over online environments and virtual education, most of them without prior experience in online teaching and not even enough resources or connection in some locations of the country. Teachers have shown and expressed how mentally exhausting this transition has been.

Many teachers and students of the zone have reported how they have felt that the academic burden has affected their health and state of mind (Kikut, 2020). Time management techniques were required for the correct implementation of distance learning so that both teachers and students could deal with their roles effectively within real and reachable timetables. By accepting that not being in school does not mean that learning is stopped, there is a need to promote commitment within the school community.

Finally, the pandemic's limitations have modified the curricula. As of now, there is clearly more knowledge and competences that need to be acquired and the administrative limitations also include time and how it is distributed among the different groups and levels. As explained in the COVID-19 report form ECLAC- UNESCO (2020),

A number of decisions need to be taken and resources made available that present a challenge for school systems, educational establishments and teachers. This is true of curricular adjustments and prioritization and the contextualization needed to ensure that the contents are relevant to the current emergency situation, based on consensus among all relevant stakeholders. (p. 4)

According to this report, countries should adapt and be flexible when addressing such changes, not only because of the prioritization of contents and objectives, but also to innovate in means of learning and cooperate in the different learning- virtual environments (ECLAC- UNESCO, 2020).

Listening Skills Principles

This essay describes the implementation of a website in which the development of listening and spoken comprehension is enhanced by the promotion of local belonging during online learning.

According to Wang (2018), one of the most important principles for the development of spoken

comprehension is the selection of appropriate resources, content and material, which vary according to their levels and needs.

Therefore, he has defended that designing task-oriented approaches centered on tasks related to the students' interest helps them learn listening skills. "Listening exercises are most effective if they are constructed around a task. That is to say, the students are required to do something in response to what they hear that will demonstrate their understanding" (Wang, 2018, p. 2). When tasks require students to inform, describe, react, analyze or construct something after having spoken input, the process turns out to be more convenient and insightful. Also, Wang (2018) has insisted on the fact that representing real life scenarios in such tasks will provide learners with a chance to live and comment on real experiences, which can as well work regardless of the experiences each lives.

Pertinence and Importance of Content Used on the Website (Cultural Background and Local Belonging) for the Development of Listening Skills

This essay seeks to promote a website to gather insightful material that can be accessed remotely and can support the public system's specific English program by providing a space of exposure to the language tailored to their local features and cultural background. The use and importance of this site not only meets the objectives set in the curricula, but it promotes local belonging and the exposure to spoken language. In the development of the website, there are videos, audios and readings related to the people, traditions and places from Guanacaste, which means that the content used relates directly to daily life situations that they experience in the learner's own communities and households.

Wang (2018) also explained that effective distance learning is only possible when authentic learning experiences are approached. Also, Walker (2014) said that "Sociolinguistic elements of listening, such as the student's cultural background and the student's knowledge of the cultural

background of the foreign language can also play a significant part in the student's comprehension of the verbal discourse" (p. 168). She pointed out that when there is use of prior knowledge for the completion of learning tasks, that has shown to be more engaging and significant in the understanding and acquisition of listening skills. Therefore, the website and content material focus on the description of local traditions, people, and places to which the student can easily relate.

Website's Name and URL:

MASTERING THE BEAST!

https://8thgradelisteningandspeakingleb.weebly.com

The name of the website relates to the local tradition of bull riding and how culturally relevant it is for citizens and teenagers around the province and especially for people in Santa Cruz. In addition, it represents a metaphor which compares both bull riding and the understanding of spoken English. As in learning spoken comprehension, bull riding requires practice and risk taking. Students, like bull riders, need to work on methodologies that can help them "hold on the language" as much time as possible, and the ultimate understanding of the message is the rewarding experience that motivates learners, as much as mastering the beast encourages *Guanacastecos*.

In addition, this website focuses on the task- oriented approach and translation approach. It prompts students into completing different tasks after listening to the language. Also, students are required to locate meanings and translations in dictionaries and formulate solutions to different problems described in various activities.

Activities that Involve Language Comprehension within the Website

According to Khan (2014), there should be an objective after listening which is an implied outcome objective. Based on this outcome, a series of activities and strategies can be used to achieve the listening objective, according to Morley (2001) as follows.

Table 1

Listening Activities according to specific outcome

Outcome of Listening tasks	Examples of activities within the	Mediation activities and extra	
	website	resources	
Listening and performing Actions	Listening Activity 1- Traditions in	Such texts can also be read	
and Operations:	Guanacaste: Students are required	aloud so that reading skills can	
	to listen and order a series of	be practiced. Creating content	
Students perform specific actions	words	and listening for sharing their	
by the delivery of commands and		experiences through	
instructions that should be followed	Vocabulary_ Traditions in	audiovisuals is a good way to	
within the recording.	Guanacaste: Students can listen	help them practice their oral	
	and draw a picture, figure, locating	skills.	
	routes of specific points or images		
Listening and transferring	Listening Activity 2- Traditions in	Dictations are suitable activities	
information:	Guanacaste: Students are	in this category. Creating digital	
	required to fill out a text with the	content with self made visuals	
The function in this activity should	information they hear	and local settings will motivate	

be focused on ideas and details		the use of language. Listening to	
	Listening Activity 1- Traditions in	Speak and Listening to Write	
	Guanacaste: Students use such	activities are suggested.	
	recording as a dictation exercise.		
Listening and solving Problems:	After listening 1: People in	Listening to Speak and Listening	
Requires students to expose to	Guanacaste: In this activity	to Write activities that can follow	
problem solving methodologies that	students can be asked to interpret	a recording or a video which	
can help them cope with meaning	the information and compare it to	presents a problem and guides	
and interpretations	today's reality. They would analyze	students into proposing	
	how much lifestyles have changed.	solutions.	
Listening, Evaluating, and	Listening Activity 1- Amazing	Listening to make predictions	
Manipulating Information:	Places in Guanacaste: In this	and assumptions activities are	
	section, students are required to	helpful when developing	
This activities demand student's	watch a video and answer some	reasoning and interpretational	
reasoning and interpretation, so	questions.	skills. Blogs after videos, or	
that there can be a different		digital portfolios can also help	
outcome to the one that was first		them gather reactions based on	
presented		recordings.	
Interactive Listening-and-Speaking:	The Content Producer section of	A student can give a	
	the website proposes a means for	presentation or share anything	
Message or orders taking,	students' participation and	else of interest to the students	
dictations are suitable activities in	engagement. Students are	through a video or an image.	
this category. Negotiating Meaning	required to create images, videos,	Either during or soon after the	

through Questioning/Answering	presentations, flyers, in each	presentation is over, each
Routines: The focus of the outcome	section of the website. Dialogues	listener is supposed to ask and
is both to transmit the information	and Role Plays are widely	answer questions, as both the
as well as negotiate meaning in	suggested.	speaker and listener
interactive listener/speaker		
exchanges		

Note. Adapted from Khan (2014)

Suggested Implementation of the Website Within The Language Lesson

According to MEP's (2020) guidelines for the delivery of lessons during this sanitary emergency, the different moments of interaction, virtual or face to face, should be clarified and exemplified in the monthly plan. These moments are: Connection, Clarification, Collaboration and Construction (MEP, 2020). According to such guidelines, the Connection stage is set for pre-teaching activities, in which vocabulary and topics are mainly introduced. If this stage is delivered synchronically, it is a good suggestion to reinforce oral production by repeating and emphasizing sounds. The second stage corresponds to the clarification of topics after the introduction of some insights. This stage is part of the mediation activities during the whole lesson plan and it provides the chance of clarification and representation of data through different stages or means during the four stages. After the first clarification stage takes over, MEP (2020) requires teachers to plan and work in activities in which students can cooperate actively with their peers and within the school community. For this stage, asynchronous projects that involve contact with classmates will require students to develop some basic technological literacy to contribute to the different learning platforms, such as Google Docs, video makers, photo editing apps, video meeting rooms, and so on.

The following stage will lead students to the construction of knowledge through the design and implementation of any artifact that can help teachers prove students' learning. This evidence includes recording, videos, presentations or any kind of activities that proves students' understanding of the topic. All these stages are proposed by MEP with the purpose of providing a sequential and logical structure to the planning of activities and mediation strategies in times of synchronous, asynchronous or face to face classes. These sessions are developed through *Microsoft Teams*, which is the online virtual learning platform adopted by MEP. In such a platform, students should work on the uploaded documents and material, and also should be able to join the different meetings and synchronous sessions. All the students from the assigned group of study have access to such a tool and are required to deliver their assignments through this official means.

Table 2

English Monthly Plan that Includes Some Sections of the Website

Section of website:	Mediation activities	Further	Evaluation
Mastering the Beast!		resources	
1- Vocabulary_ Amazing	Conection: Students are required to	Notebook,	Listening activities to
Places	create a list of new vocabulary	Translators,	draw or represent
	gathered from each section. A picture,	Voice	vocabulary.
2. Vocabulary_ Traditions	drawing or sentence can represent	Recordings,	
in Guanacaste	each term. Handwriting is encouraged	video and	Spelling quizzes or
	through the use of notebooks. Voice	audio	tests in synchronous
3. Listening 1_ People in	recordings with students' own voices	players, video	sessions.
Guanacaste	repeating words is also important in	conferencing	
	this stage.	apps, Google	Word matching

		Drive, Google	exercises.
Listening 1_ Traditions in Guanacaste Listening 2_ Traditions in Guanacaste	Clarification: Recordings should be analyzed in different stages of the task, therefore, re- playing the recording as many times as necessary will provide students with multiple opportunities of coding and understanding the heard insights. They are required to listen to the recording for one purpose in the first instance and for another purpose the second time. This is to be completed in both synchronous or asynchronous moments.	Docs, video editors, Canva, Youtube, Blogs, Google Sites, Microsoft Teams	Voice Recordings and drilling Word- meaning matching exercises
Listening Activity_ People in Guanacaste Listening Activity_ Amazing Places	Collaboration: Students are required to collaborate in an oral presentation project. Students are required to do research in any of the topics of the website, and provide a solution to any problem encountered in the province that can relate to people, places or traditions of Guanacaste. Construction: They are required to		Cooperation in different sharing apps, with real time participation. Peer- Feedback Understanding of
Listening Activity_ People	create a digital poster and share the		technological

in Guanacaste	information and proposed solutions to	platforms through the
	the rest of the class in either a video or	constant supervision
Listening Activity_	a synchronous meeting.	of its use.
Amazing Places		
		Self, peer
		assessment.

Note. Adapted from MEP (2020)

Conclusions and Overall Reflections

The process of choosing the target population and skills was rapid and clear because of the decreasing spoken comprehension among the school population. Language exposure and practice were limited to written practices, and oral skills were left aside. As a result, students have a hard time understanding main ideas and details in videos and recordings regardless of its length. Therefore, the use of a website that can gather recordings and videos helped them practice in times of little language exposure. Once the population and language skills were chosen, the objective of the website was clear in complementing MEP's curriculum and providing a virtual space that could gather recordings and spoken language in various forms with the purpose of practicing and exposing learners to the language permanently. However, it was necessary to provide a means of action, how can it be possible to motivate students into participating and practicing on the website?

Guanacaste is a culturally rich region that is proud of its roots, traditions, and beautiful landscapes. Such cultural and local love and belonging could be the means that encourages students into sharing, learning, participating, and using the language in different contexts. In other words, the comprehension of details and main ideas in short and more complex recordings will be triggered and guided by information that corresponds to their real world, town or habits. Later on, it can lead to the

development of tourism- related language that can comply with the work force and local economy, as an indirect benefit of such design.

In terms of the construction of the webpage, selecting the activities, designing the page, and creating its content was quite challenging. First, the understanding of basic graphic design principles was very overwhelming. Understanding about images and layouts was essential for the initial design of the webpage. Keeping consistency in layouts, fonts and colors within the different pages was difficult to follow, as well. The use of apps for the edition or production of videos and pictures was indeed learned throughout the process, which points to improvements that should be implemented to attract learners to its use.

Further Improvements and Recommendations of the Resource

The implementation of the website in the language lesson requires students to understand and work in secondary online platforms that will help them produce such artifacts that will evidence their learning. The newest generations are very acquainted with such sites; however, some teachers and even students are not yet familiar with these apps. A change in the understanding of online information and tools should also be part of these flexibilities that Costa Rican education requires.

Understanding and proposing the most suitable ways of handling data, discriminating information, using basic search engines, summarizing and synthesizing information, creating audiovisuals, doing basic picture edition, sharing and collaborating simultaneously in word documents, working on virtual identity and affectivity and addressing situations appropriately to overcome gaps is necessary to achieve enough online technological literacy.

As to the implementation of the website, the lesson plan proposes some activities that can be changed according to the needs and limitations of each group. It is important to highlight that the

website does not yet include a section in which the comprehension can be achieved from dialogues or language interactions. Therefore, teachers are to create spaces of language interaction among the different participants using the different meeting room technologies. In the case of *Microsoft Teams*, there is a specific chat section that can be used for this purpose. Such moments of language negotiation should be mediated by the teacher; however, spaces for self and peer feedback should be allowed for the improvement of the interaction.

Moreover, the designed resource is intrinsically promoting local and cultural belonging by focusing content to a specific geographical place. In fact, students' participation is always encouraged in the *Content Producer's* section with the purpose of bringing to our eyes the different aspects of Guanacaste's culture that are worth sharing. Through the visualization of the province, its identity, and people; the language functions developed in the learners will be related to Guanacaste's uniqueness. Again, the basic understanding of online tools that can help students achieve such goals is necessary. Also, risks of discomfort or cyber violence should be mitigated by communicating the expectations and consequences since the beginning of its use.

Finally, it can be suggested to include and update more information as videos and audiovisuals are shared by students. Listening activities that include information gathered and shared directly by students can turn it into a very meaningful learning experience. Also, the implementation of more learning objectives and its development within the site can include the addition of more grades and levels, so that the resource can be widely used among the same educational community.

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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Andrea Mojica Barquero, cédula de identidad 1-1519-0382, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de la responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado Development of Listening Comprehnsion Skills in 8th graders of the Billingual Experimental Highschool in Santa Cruz by the Promotion of Local Belonging during Online Learning, para optar por el grado de Maestria en Educación con énfasis en Aprendizaje del Inglés.

andrea monica B 1-1519-0362

Heredia, a los 18 días del mes de setiembre del año 2021.

Refrendo

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación de la estudiante Andrea

Mojica Barquero, cédula 1 1519 0362, que lleva como título Development of

Listening Comprehension Skills in 8th Graders of the Bilingual Experimental

High School in Santa Cruz by the Promotion of Local Belonging during

Online Learning, dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad

académica requerida por el posgrado.

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M.Ed. Juan Pablo Zúñiga Vargas

Tutor

Maestría en Educación con énfasis en Aprendizaje del Inglés

RITA MARIA ARGUEDAS Firmado digitalmente por RITA MARIA ARGUEDAS VIQUEZ (FIRMA)

VIQUEZ (FIRMA) Fecha: 2021.09.15

M. Ed Rita Arguedas Víquez Coordinadora Maestría en Educación