



Uso de audiolibros para la comprensión literaria de la lengua inglesa

Use of audiobooks for literary understanding of the English language

Uso de audiolivros para compreensão literária da língua inglesa

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Resumen

En Ecuador, los hábitos de lectura, las prácticas y el consumo muestran una baja capacidad de comprensión y una aversión general a la lectura. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo cuestionar si los audiolibros, como una herramienta tecnológica innovadora, podrían influir y afectar a las habilidades de comprensión lectora de los estudiantes de EFL y a su actitud, motivación y disfrute de la lectura en una clase de lengua extranjera. En el estudio participan 38 estudiantes de tercer nivel de una universidad estatal de Ecuador, la Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo Sede Morona Santiago. Durante seis meses, los participantes se reunieron semanalmente en el laboratorio de informática de la ESPOCH para leer, escuchar, analizar y discutir el audiolibro "El jardín secreto" de Frances Hodgson Burnett. La investigación sigue una encuesta cualitativa y cuantitativa pre y post de la aplicación de la técnica. Los datos recogidos (cuantitativos), las observaciones y una evaluación formativa a través de un portafolio (datos cualitativos) fueron considerados para el análisis de contenido antes y después de aplicar la técnica. Los resultados de las encuestas mostraron esencialmente que los audiolibros tuvieron un impacto positivo en las habilidades de comprensión lectora de los estudiantes, mejorando la escucha, la lectura y la pronunciación. El análisis de los datos cualitativos reveló que los audiolibros habían contribuido a la comprensión auditiva de los participantes, a su pronunciación y, sobre todo, a su motivación para seguir leyendo. Como conclusiones se obtuvo que el uso de audiolibros en el tercer nivel puede tener un impacto positivo en los alumnos y ayudarles a mejorar su competencia lingüística y sus habilidades literarias.

Palabras clave: Audiolibro; habilidades comprensión literaria; EFL

Abstract

In Ecuador, reading habits, practices, and consumption display low- struggling comprehension skills and a general dislike of reading. This paper aims to question whether audiobooks, as an innovative technological tool, could influence and affect EFL Students' literacy comprehension skills and their attitude, motivation, and reading enjoyment in a foreign language classroom. The participants are 38 third-level students at a state university in Ecuador, Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo – Morona Santiago Campus. Over six months, the participants met weekly at the ESPOCH computer lab to read, listen, analyze and discuss the audiobook: "The

Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett. The research follows a pre-post survey oriented to a quantitative and qualitative approach. Data collected (quantitative), observations, and a formative assessment through a portfolio (qualitative data) were considered for content analysis before and after the treatment. The surveys' outcomes essentially showed that audiobooks positively impacted students' literacy comprehension skills, improving listening, reading, and pronunciation. The qualitative data analysis revealed that audiobooks had contributed to participants' listening comprehension, pronunciation, and especially motivation to keep reading. The conclusions indicate that using audiobooks in the third level may positively impact the learners and help students improve their language competence and literary skills.

Key words: Audiobook; literacy comprehension skills; EFL

Resumo

No Equador, os hábitos, práticas e consumo de leitura apresentam baixa capacidade de compreensão e aversão geral à leitura. Este trabalho tem como objetivo questionar se os audiolivros, como uma ferramenta tecnológica inovadora, podem influenciar e afetar as habilidades de compreensão leitora de alunos de EFL e sua atitude, motivação e prazer de leitura em uma aula de língua estrangeira. Participaram do estudo 38 alunos de terceiro nível de uma universidade estadual do Equador, a Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo Sede Morona Santiago. Durante seis meses, os participantes se reuniram semanalmente no laboratório de informática da ESPOCH para ler, ouvir, analisar e discutir o audiolivro "O Jardim Secreto" de Frances Hodgson Burnett. A pesquisa segue um levantamento qualitativo e quantitativo antes e após a aplicação da técnica. Os dados coletados (quantitativos), as observações e uma avaliação formativa por meio de um portfólio (dados qualitativos) foram considerados para a análise de conteúdo antes e após a aplicação da técnica. Os resultados da pesquisa mostraram essencialmente que os audiolivros tiveram um impacto positivo nas habilidades de compreensão de leitura dos alunos, melhorando a compreensão auditiva, a leitura e a pronúncia. A análise qualitativa dos dados revelou que os audiolivros contribuíram para a compreensão auditiva dos participantes, sua pronúncia e, principalmente, sua motivação para continuar lendo. Como conclusões obteve-se que a utilização de audiolivros no terceiro nível pode ter um impacto positivo nos alunos e ajudá-los a melhorar a sua competência linguística e literária.

Palavras-chave: Audiobook; habilidades de compreensão literária; EFL

Introduction

“Listening is not the same as reading,” representing a common discussion topic about audiobooks versus written books. As a means of passing information, storytellers depicted a valid oral tradition; but history taught us that there is value in written words too. The evolution and a perfect combination of those two skills started being expressed by audiobooks. A multitask activity that helps to develop different skills, especially in an EFL learning process. Another factor, which probably influences second language learners, refers to learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, read/write. Much research has been conducted on learning techniques in students of all types, trying to figure out if a person’s learning style is essential to influence a learner’s comprehension approach to a second language. Whittingham (2013) argues that focusing on learning methodology and effectiveness is preferable in group activities than the outcomes achieved. Hence, audio learning has become just accessible as reading thanks to the use of learning media. The explosion of technology with internet access allows streaming of audio and video, and other services can be downloaded even free from various websites on the internet. Audiobooks have long been recognized as a recording technology text being read and traditionally used with second-language learners and struggling readers. They facilitate the improvement and development of language skills, and in many cases, audiobooks have proven successful in helping students access literature and enjoy books (Whittingham, 2013). Nevertheless, struggling to read as a second language learner is the key and starting point to investigate and understand that reading with a high level of fluency is essential to comprehension. The link between reading, listening, and learning is correlative. Disliking the act of reading in Ecuador is an urgent issue to solve. Students who cannot comprehend their textbooks or other forms of literature in various content areas will not learn the concepts and vocabulary necessary to succeed. Finding pleasure in the reading and listening activity is a critical factor in students success in both their academic and personal lives.

This research aims to underline the audiobook impact on English language teaching in a specified EFL classroom and find out which skill is better developed using mentioned strategy and tool.

For instance, the implementation of audiobooks can be found in many research illustrating practices which have applied them in different ways: reading-while-listening practice (Rasinski, 1990), audio-assisted reading (Shany & Biemiller, 1995), reading along with audiobooks (Beers, 1998), and listening to books read aloud by a teacher (Gold & Gibson, 2001). In this study specifically, Audiobooks refer to a book supplemented with audio of the respective text. The use of it refers to a single, simultaneous reading of and listening to the audiobook.

Audiobook: origins and definition

History is rich in the storytelling tradition, the ancient and primordial form of broadcast information and stories to anyone who wanted to listen to, from generation to generation.

Audiobooks were originally called “talking books” as they were first presented around the 1931s in an American government project to assist blind people reading a book to enjoy and understand it (Ayunda, 2015). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the term “books on tape” was used, meanwhile the increasing demand for audiocassettes (Rubery, 2011). Finally, in 1986, the Audio Publisher Association (APA) formally adopted “audiobook” as the accepted term for recorded books.

Audiobooks have become a collection of libraries and bookstores. They were considered the spoken narrative version of the original and printed book, audio-taped professionally in full-length. The experience would have been different in thrills by listening to it (Holum & Gahala, 2001).

However, audiobooks went through several developments in recent years. At first, companies started selling recordings of poems; and had success and acceptance within libraries and schools by distributing children’s spoken recordings. Cassette tapes were followed and replaced by CDs. Then, with the advent of new technological innovations with an internet connection, audiobooks evolved rapidly and facilitate the audiobooks download at any time or place (Rubery, 2011).

Hence, Whittingham (2013) observed the innovations and increased offerings of electronic media of literacy, including audiobooks. They have been transformed into the perfect and easiest way to enjoy stories while doing homework, participating in exercises, taking a trip, and undertaking anything that doesn’t need total concentration. (Shokoff, 2001).

Audiobook users have been steadily growing in any area, mainly as they help learners understand books in every condition and limited time.

We can find extensive research in L1 contexts, but the use of audiobooks has not been investigated to any great extent in L2 contexts. Audiobooks are recently considered a dominant literacy resource, especially in the L1 learning process, because they might help construct language skills among learners (Serafini, 2004).

Audiobooks are used to engage learners, and a relatively small number of available studies in the L2 context observed some benefits of using them, regarding vocabulary (Mestres, et al., 2019), listening fluency (Mohamed, 2018), reading comprehension (Chang & Millet, 2015), and reading motivation especially in English (Tragant & Vallbona, 2018). But none of the mentioned studies tried to find out which skill is better developed from the students' perception.

The use of audiobooks has spread since they were implemented in classrooms to develop reading comprehension among kids and struggling readers (Stone-Harris, 2008). They have been widely used in all stages of education (Wolfson, 2008). Previous studies on using audiobooks with university students primarily focused on their effects on reading comprehension and vocabulary learning (Thooft, 2011). An audiobook is a recording of a text being read by a narrator. Audiobooks are a great tool for acquiring language and understand it as it is spoken, so it is a new way to learn new vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, audiobooks are essential material for developing literacy. Serafini (2004) stated that "Students enjoy listening to library selections because they provide a voice for the novel they are reading in class and listening to dialects, a powerful tool by connecting the reader to the region itself. They are invaluable to our students with special needs as well as reluctant readers who may need assistance to become actively involved in a story".

In other words, audiobooks provide an easy way to understand a different kind of text, and it allows students to comprehend and analyze literature in L1 and L2 learning processes.

Printed or Audio books? The Benefits in English learning process

Reading a printed book and listening to a recorded one are two different experiences similar in content but different in thrills. They are not incompatible but complement and enrich each other. Each practice creates a different experience and learning, primarily referred to as a second language process. Audiobooks have traditionally been used with second-language learners,

learning-disabled students, and struggling readers or nonreaders. In many cases, they have been proven successful in helping these students to access literature and enjoy books.

There are pros and cons to both kinds of reading. Specifically, this study aims to understand and comprehend the benefits of audiobooks and which specific skills help develop English as a second language at a university level.

Audiobooks are considered the perfect tool which can benefit from the combination of listening and reading tasks and represent an innovative way to promote literary texts and encourage reading (Aaron, 1992).

Students who start listening to the audio while reading the print or digital book acquire many benefits that many authors have highlighted.

Wilde and Larson (2007:24) explain that readers make connections “between the words they hear and the written words,” and the exposure to various speech patterns increases their oral fluency.

Audiobooks have several advantages. According to (Serafini, 2004) claimed that:

- a. Expose readers to new vocabulary is like children listening to stories and learning oral and written vocabularies.
- b. Provide appropriate intonation and fluent reading in a specific language.
- c. Support readers at any level by combining oral language sounds of written counterparts and expanding access to materials.
- d. Provide the opportunity for classes to discuss literature and share stories.

Further, real benefits from audiobooks are provided as Hett (2012) found that audiobooks offer more time for adolescents to read, model verbal fluency, and motivate reluctant readers.

Hence, audiobooks can be used to:

- Introduce students to books above their reading level
- Model good interpretative reading
- Teach critical listening
- Highlight the humor in books
- Introduce new genres that students might not otherwise consider
- Introduce new vocabulary or difficult proper names
- Sidestep unfamiliar dialects or accents

Teachers who do not consider the benefits of audiobooks are ignoring an effective strategy for struggling and proficient readers alike (Serafini, 2004).

Use audiobooks to teach and develop language skills

According to Ravem (1974), the learner is not usually "... exposed to "primary linguistic data" in the sense that an L1 learner is, but to carefully graded linguistic items presented in small doses for a few hours a week" (ibid.: 132). therefore, many English language learners have difficulty mastering the language. The limited amount of exposure time to the L2 and how the time is spent does matter (Kennedy, 1973).

This study aims to reveal whether audiobooks could improve English comprehension skills among EFL students. The engineering curriculum in higher education is very scarce, and in Ecuador, the percentage of readers is deficient. The audiobook would be an innovative, complete, and fun activity to perform in class throughout the semester to develop the different skills of L2 students.

Brown (2002) stated: "How could you speak a language without also listening?". Teaching a foreign language determines an effective method that considers reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Skills are essentials in EFL education as its target is teaching learners to understand the foreign language effectively. Audiobooks have been considered a valid strategy to teach foreign language skills, and experimental studies observed that listening to audiobooks improves listening and reading comprehension (Turker, 2010). Broughton, Brumfit, Flevell, Hill, and Pincas (1978) stated that many courses are available today to learn English. The classes have recorded materials that support the written text, especially for the non-native speaker teacher to rely on. Audiobooks are considered an excellent strategy to develop essential skills in L2 learning processes, such as fluency, listening, comprehension, and critical thinking. Therefore, they are proper support and an easy way to listen to the accurate pronunciation, which is very important in EFL classes. Some research findings confirmed that audiobooks positively affect the pronunciation of EFL learners (Saka, 2015). Demirezen (2005), states that "the method of pronunciation healing is scarce in the field of teacher training that handles a fossilized pronunciation error, using special techniques within a class hour."

By audiobooks, students will be able to listen to the pronunciation of native speakers and correct fossilized errors.

Therefore, audiobooks allow L2 learners to listen to the audio repeatedly and improve their fluency, vocabulary, and reading. On the other hand, they can reinforce comprehension, by retelling the story, to those students who do not like to read.

Beers' words confirm this, "the use of audiobooks with struggling, reluctant, or second language learners is powerful, as they act as a scaffold that allows learners to read above their actual reading level" (Beers 1998: 33).

Apart from learners who struggle in the L2 learning process, who might find extra motivation, some don't and can improve listening and speaking competencies as per the European Framework of Reference for Language Learning standards (Baskin & Harris, 1995). That kind of learner can grasp better the tone, dialects, rhythm, and pauses and therefore appreciate better the meaning and sense of the book. Moreover, earphones allow students to isolate themselves from external noises and control the playback speed (Bergman, 1999).

Method

This study considers audiobooks as an innovative and technological technique to motivate L2 learners to read in English and improve their skills. Audiobooks will help students improve the English learning process by understanding which craft and in which aspect they improve and analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of the audiobook strategy.

A qualitative approach was held by analyzing and collecting data, which helped better understand the technique applied in class to third-level students at ESPOCH Morona Santiago.

Nevertheless, information was also reported quantitatively, which determined the impact on students regarding the implementation of audiobooks in their English learning process.

This study is considered almost experimental as the population composed of 38 individuals was not selected randomly. The subjects were 17 to 25 years old, male and female, all of whom were L2 learners of English enrolled in different careers at ESPOCH Morona Santiago (Accounting & Auditing, Environmental Engineering, Zootechnics, and Mining Engineering). They have been studying English for two semesters at ESPOCH with their heterogeneous elementary/intermediate levels. All reported a medium level of motivation for learning a second language as their primary purposes are the subjects of their specific curriculum.

There were just third levels of English, and English teachers worked with them directly, guiding them in the process. They first employed a presurvey and then a post-survey design.

First, teachers had students answer the pre-survey and then explained the audiobook technique and introduced the one chosen, “The Secret Garden”. The activity was adopted all along the semester, once a week in the computer laboratory of the University Campus. Each student used a computer, earphones, and internet connection to access the audios and the activities of each chapter. Each session, students had to read and listen to one branch of the audiobook individually and then do the proposed actions to check comprehension of it. Students identified and clarified the complex vocabularies with the teacher or using an essential glossary presented in the book. At the end of the book, an easy test was conducted but was irrelevant to this study.

What was significant for this study was the survey applied at the end of the activity to determine the knowledge acquired. The results were compared with the previous survey to record the knowledge gained by the students.

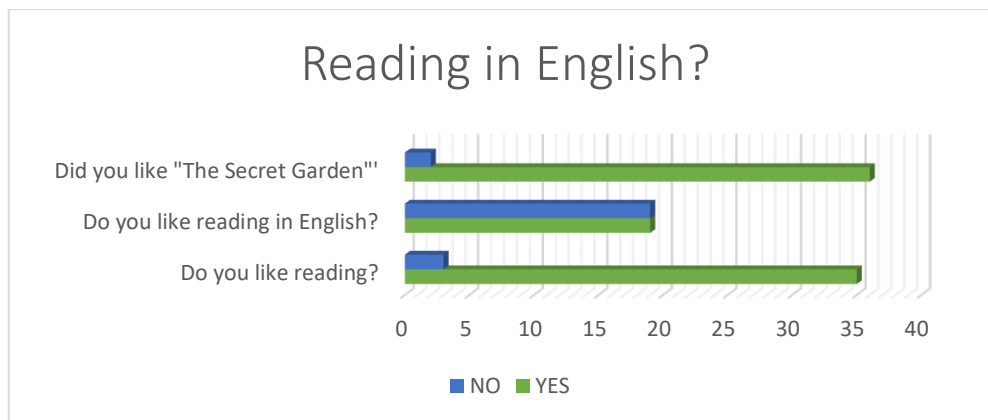
Results

1. Do you prefer reading in Spanish or in English?

Through the tabulation and schematization of the data collected from the survey, it was possible to know that 35 out of 38 students who had access to the audiobook practice answered that like reading, but just 19 like reading in English as a second language. As a result, 36 students affirmed that they like reading and listening to the audiobook “The Secret Garden” in English, just 2 of them didn’t.

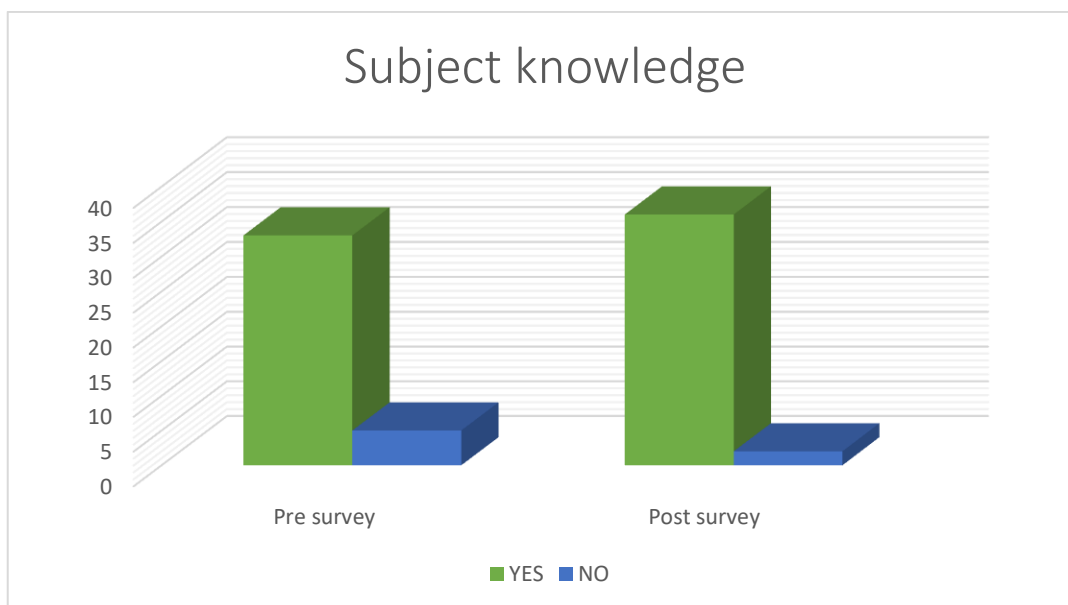
Figure 1: Do you like reading? Do you like reading in English? Did you like the audiobook “The Secret Garden”?

Figure 2: Do you know what an audiobook is?



2. Do you know what is the activity about?

According to figure n. 2, the majority of students (n. 33 out of 38) know what an audiobook is before doing the activity at the beginning of the semester, while 5 of them didn't know. As a post-activity comments, it is confirmed that just 2 students still don't understand what an audiobook is.



3. What is an audiobook?

As shown in table n. 1, most of the students are conscience of what an audiobook is and almost prepared to complete and activity based on it. Some of them make a confusion between the audiobook and the connection to listening and reading activity, but at least have an idea even if it's not very clear. Others understand the connection between the audiobook and technology.

Table n. 1 Explain in a few words what an audiobook is.

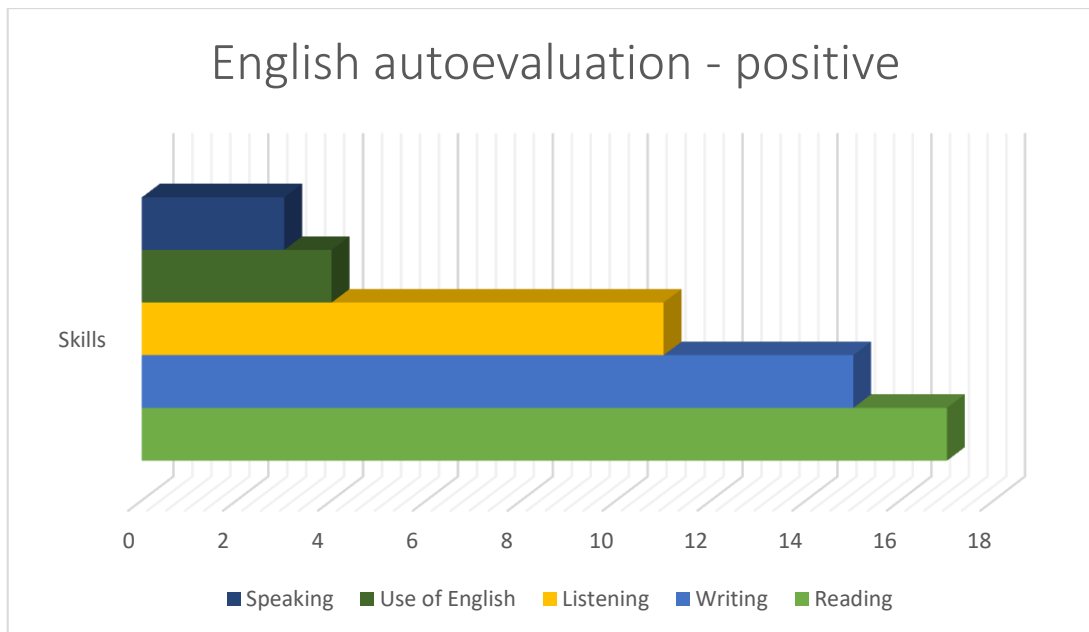
Definition of an Audiobook	Number of Students	Frequency
It is the recording of the contents of any book, read aloud.	14	36,84%
It is a talking book.	4	10,52%
It is a book, tale or history, which you can listen to the content while reading.	3	7,89%
It is a narrated book.	2	5,26%
It is a book that instead of reading it, you listen to it.	2	5,26%
It is the recording of the narrator's voice that tells a story.	1	2,63%
It is a tool that helps us, listening to the audios, while we observe the reading.	1	2,63%
It is an electronic book, which can be read by an electronic device.	1	2,63%
They are words taken from a reading to make poetry.	1	2,63%
It is a book in which there are also audios of what is written for a better understanding.	1	2,63%
It is a book with listening.	1	2,63%
Es una forma de aprender a leer.	1	2,63%
Is an audio track that narrates what was written in a book.	1	2,63%
It is a reading interaction with audio.	1	2,63%

Source: the authors (2021)

4. What is your level of English – positive aspects?

Figure n. 3 shows that 17 students think their forte is Reading, 15 students think is Writing, 11 is Listening, 4 is Use of English and 3 of them think their forte is Speaking. The options available to this question were multiple choices.

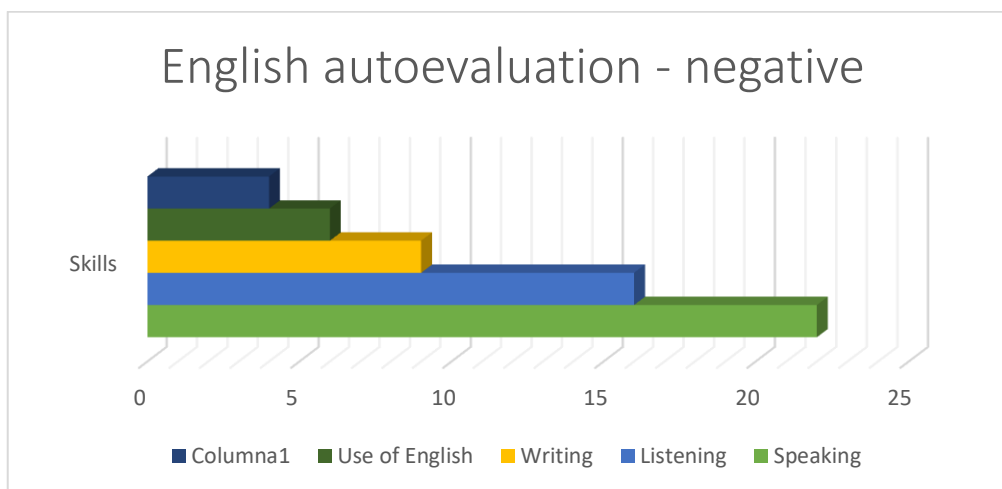
Figure n. 3 Which skill is your forte?



5. What is your level of English – negative aspects?

Figure n. 4 shows that 22 students think they’re not good at Speaking, 16 students think they should improve in Listening, 9 in Writing, 6 in Use of English and 4 of them think their worst skill is Reading. The options available to this question were multiple choices.

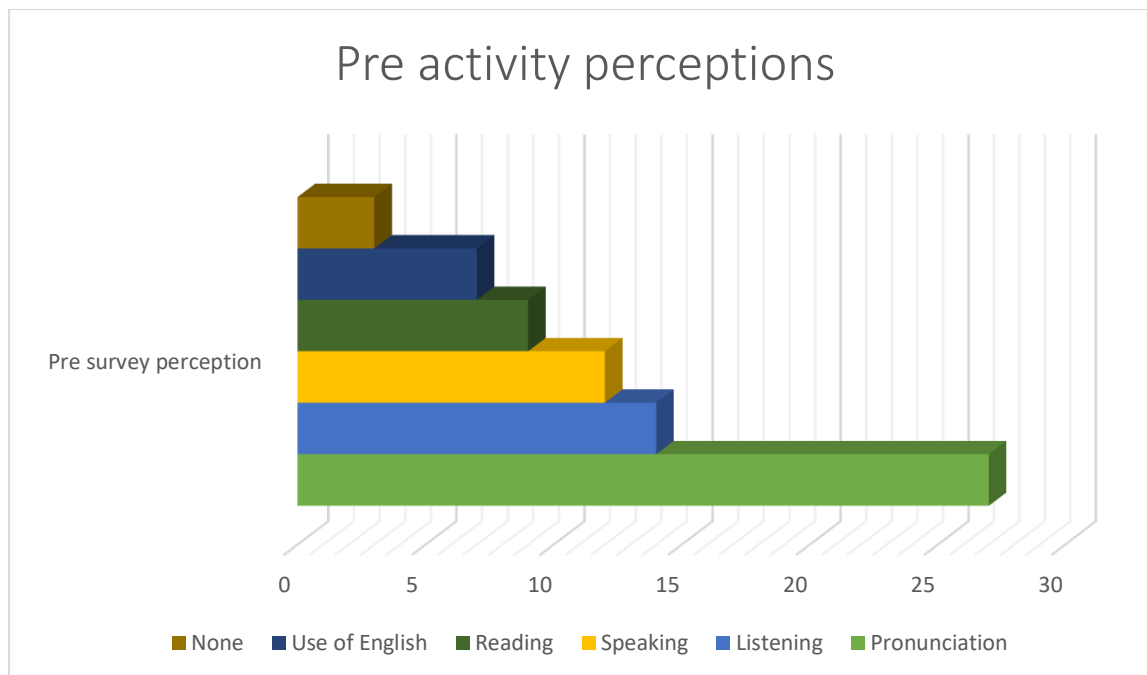
Figure n. 4 Which skill is not your forte?



6. What is your perception before doing the activity at a linguistic level?

Before doing the activity of the audiobook, students thought that they were going to improve their skills in English as following: 27 students hoped to improve their Pronunciation, 14 thought their Listening skill would improve, 12 thought about Speaking, 9 of them had the idea that Reading would be better throughout the audiobook activity, 7 thought about Use of English and 3 students had the perception that the audiobook activity wouldn't help them to improve none of their skills in the English learning process.

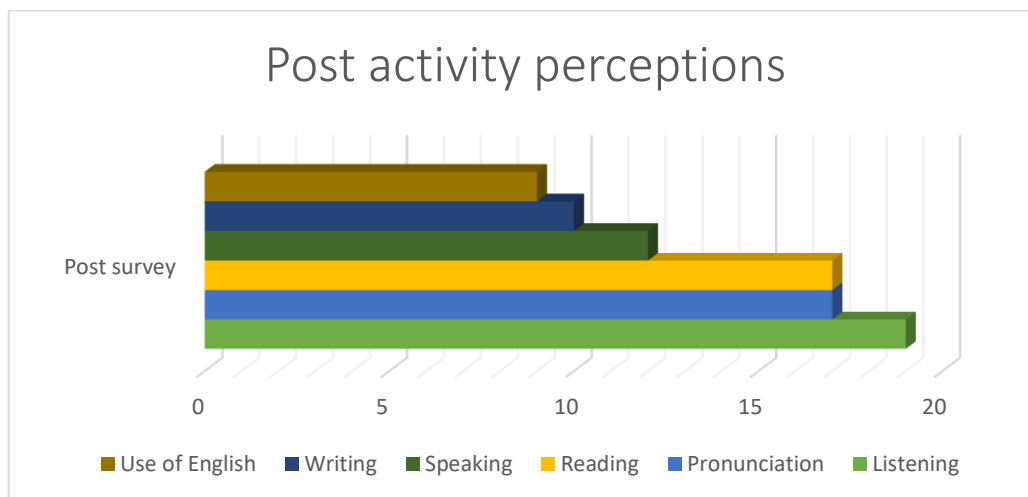
Figure n. 5 Which skills do you think you will improve?



7. What is your perception after doing the activity at a linguistic level?

Comparing the post activity answers to the student's expectations, according to figure n. 7, the results were as following: 19 students confirmed they improved their Listening, 17 students ended improving their Pronunciation and Reading skills, 12 of them turned into having more confidence in Speaking, 10 students in Writing and 9 students in Use of English.

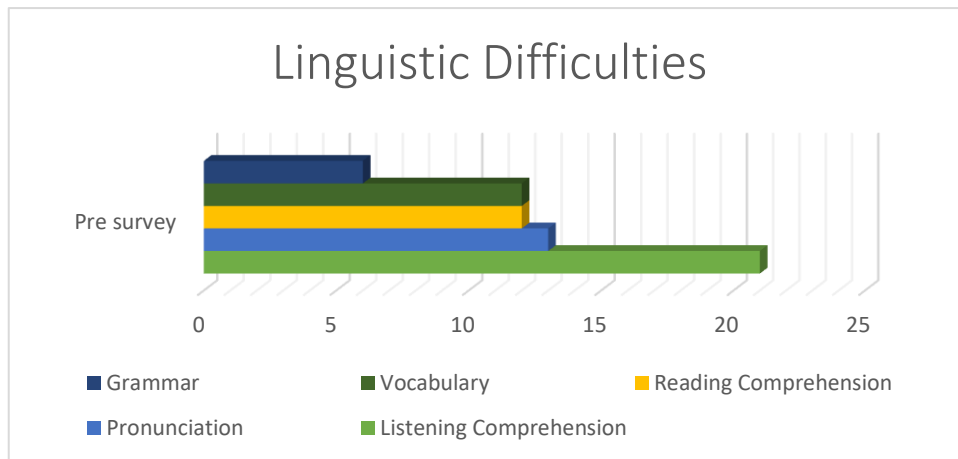
Figure n. 6 Which skills do you think you improved reading to an audiobook?



8. What is your perception about linguistic difficulties before the activity?

Figure n. 7 shows which linguistic difficulties students expected to face during the audiobook activity as following: 21 students most worried about Listening comprehension, 13 of them about Pronunciation, 12 students thought that they would have difficulties in Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary, while 6 students had the perception of having difficulties with grammar structures.

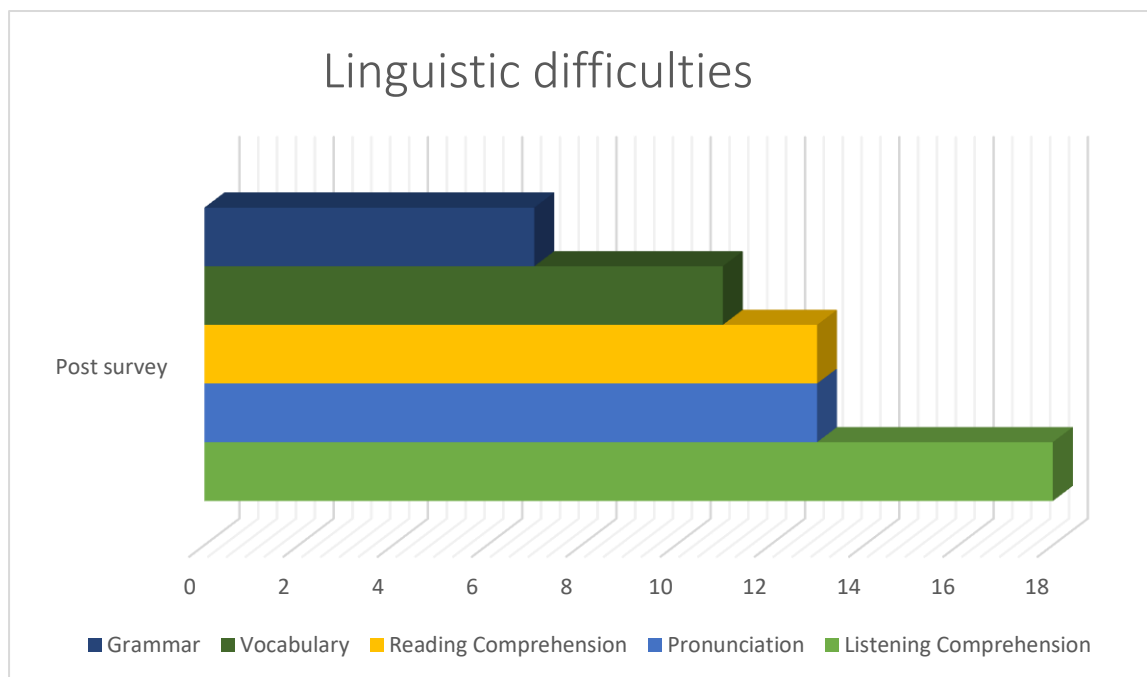
Figure n. 7 Which linguistic difficulties do you think you will face while reading?



9. What is your perception about linguistic difficulties after the activity?

According to the students’ experience, the answers to the question about linguistic difficulties, at the end of the activity were the following: 18 students had most difficulties in Listening Comprehension, while 13 of them affirmed they faced some problems with Pronunciation and Reading Comprehension, 11 students had some troubles with Vocabulary understanding and 7 students with Grammar structures.

Figure n. 8 Which linguistic difficulties do you think you faced while reading?



10. Is the audiobook an efficient and satisfactory activity in English learning process as per students' perception?

As shown in Table n. 2, a lot of students think that the Audiobook is a favorable activity to do in class as they consider it a good source, project, which can help in reading, listening, writing and pronunciation during the learning process. Hence, with reference to the negative aspects or disadvantages that students underlined in their comments, it seems that it's preferable a shorter audiobook to analyze as it has a high frequency. Also, having the opportunity to choose the genre or title of the audiobook, listening to an easier audio regarding pronunciation and speed or having a glossary at a disposal containing the most difficult words. Moreover, students suggested a more flashy and fun activity related to the audiobook or illustrated books to use.

Table n. 2 Please give a suggestion about the Audiobook Project.

Students' suggestions and perceptions		
	Number of Students	Frequency
ADVANTAGES		
It is a very good source to study English, which helps students a lot in learning process.	9	23,68%
Keep practicing reading and listening with stories to reinforce our learning.	6	15,78%
Continue giving these types of projects to students to improve English.	6	15,78%
My suggestion is that audiobooks should be used more as they are very interesting and help to concentrate better.	3	7,89%
We should listen to an audiobook more often .	2	5,26%
Listen to audiobook to learn how to pronounce and write English.	1	2,63%
DISADVANTAGES		
Make the audios a little shorter .	6	15,78%
There should be more book to choose from, various genres .	5	13,15%
Audiobooks should be easier to understand regarding the audio .	5	13,15%
Create a glossary of words whose context is not easily understood.	5	13,15%
Try to make it more flashy and fun .	3	7,89%
It should be as clear as possible to people who are not fluent in English (graphics, questions or games to check comprehension of the content).	3	7,89%
that does not contain many words and that is represented in images .	1	2,63%

It is a **demanding project**, dedication and time are the key.

1

2,63%

Source: authors (2021)

Discussion

No studies are using the audiobook as a technical tool in L2 contexts, unlike the extensive research in L1 contexts.

This study has explicitly been tried to investigate which skill is better improved from a student's point of view, and as future research, this could be proved by testing students' skills effectively.

A small number of studies in the L2 context observed some benefits of using audiobooks in terms of vocabulary gains or enhancement of listening fluency (Chang, 2011), comprehension and reading fluency improvement (Chang & Millet, 2015), and a positive attitude toward reading and engagement with the task in English (Tragant & Vallbona, 2018).

Therefore, this study focuses on motivation in reading, especially in English, having fun with technology during the English learning process, and getting to know which skills students have the perception they improve during mentioned audiobook activity.

The research conducted with students of the third level of English at the Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo ended with their wish to continue with this kind of activity as they realized their improvement in English, having fun through innovative activities, using audiobooks.

Conclusión

The use of audiobooks leads to positive effects on reading abilities, maintains students' interest in this innovative activity. Still, it can be concluded that this research is limited to the overall input received, which can be proved and tested on students to check their adequate understanding and improvement in the English learning process in possible future research.

Many advantages can be taken into consideration, among which are the students' engagement and the motivation to read more and improve their skills in English. It is believed that reading and listening to books in English simultaneously can have a positive impact on students and help them improve their language skills in both L1 and L2.

Data collected and compared show a conscience in improving their listening and reading comprehension and pronunciation as it is a way to check how to read and pronounce correctly.

However, it is recommended to implement audiobooks in the English learning process, considering the level of the book chooses, the pronunciation of the audio, a short, fun, and full of new vocabulary story, maybe supported by images to facilitate the understanding.

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