

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LISTENING WHEN
TEACHING CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH IN LANGUAGE LABORATORIES OF
COLEGIO TÉCNICO PROFESIONAL SAN ISIDRO

A Research Study

By

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Abstract

Learning English has been an important aspect for Costa Rican Education. One of its main purposes has been to improve students' English competence in all skills. The implementation of language laboratories responds to the need of adjusting educational programs to a revolutionized world and of exposing teachers to new approaches, tools, and resources that can be applied in the learning-teaching process. For that reason, language labs were incorporated in high schools to carry out conversational English lessons. They are focused on developing the four language skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening. This research project aims at analyzing how the listening skill is developed in the language labs when teaching Conversational English in Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro in Pérez Zeledón. To support this research, it was important to assess the condition of language labs in order to understand how the listening exercises were implemented. This study also focused on describing the usefulness and applicability of a language lab in the implementation of listening activities. Furthermore, this paper defines the training teachers have to use language labs when developing listening activities. It also assesses the use and availability of listening materials that teachers have in the language lab, and determines the frequency with which listening activities are carried out by teachers. This study offers teachers a framework to put listening into practice when teaching conversational English lessons taking advantage of technological resources, web sites, and specific software to make more significant, updated, and dynamic activities in language labs when teaching conversational English lessons.

Keywords: listening, factors, implementation, teaching, conversational English in language labs

Chapter One: Introduction

This research analyzes the factors that influence the development of listening in a language lab by examining a variety of components such as the use and condition of the equipment in the labs, teacher training, available listening resources, and the implementation of listening exercises. It also reveals theoretical information about the importance of increasing students' listening competence, advantages of teaching English by using language labs, and the use of technology to fulfill students' needs.

Chapter I includes the background to the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, limitations, delimitations, and definitions.

Background to the Study

Since early stages of life, humans communicate among themselves by means of signs, sounds, gestures, and language. Regarding this, Bloch and Trager (1981) defined language as "the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory symbols" (p. 4). In other words, language entails the act of communicating with people by means of oral signs and codes. In this sense, Finocchiaro (1964) analyzed language as "a system of arbitrary vocal symbols, which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture to communicate or to interact" (p. 8). It means that communication is a social activity that allows people express their feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. Then, due to the need of communication among nations, individuals are forced to learn a second language. They need to learn how to communicate with people from other countries and cultures to ask for information about food, transportation, education, schedules, and so on.

English is the unified lingua franca that allows communication among most nations. Nowadays, English is considered a universal language since it is spoken by many individuals around the world either as their first or as a second or foreign language. In the case of Costa

Rica, Escalante (2001) affirmed that this country “has undergone stages experienced by other nations where English is recognized as an international language from initial reliance on imported books and adherence to strict methodological principles, to the actual condition of local authors publishing materials to meet local needs” (p. 12). Therefore, the knowledge and mastery of foreign languages have become a useful and necessary tool for the new generations to fulfill the demands of the current world, globalization changes, virtual atmospheres, international nets, and technology use.

Within the public sector in Costa Rica, the Ministry of Education has tried to focus the educational interests on the teaching of English, including it in the national curriculum to provide enough opportunities for the learners to have authentic use of the target language. The educational aims of teaching English in Costa Rica offer students a foreign language that allows them to communicate everywhere in the world, and gives them an instrument of scientific access, technological, and humanistic formation.

English teaching in Costa Rica.

In 1824, the teaching of English in Costa Rica was first registered as a subject to be taught in high schools. However, it was just after 1950 that teaching American English in Costa Rica arose as a necessity for the integration of the country to the contemporary world. Then, in 1960 Professor Elsa Orozco established the first English language degree program at Universidad de Costa Rica, and brought the “Audio-lingual method” to prepare university students to teach in the public elementary schools.

In 1991, the Ministry of Public Education published the introduction of the Program for English in elementary schools. Since then, this foreign language became a mandatory subject in Costa Rica. For this reason, foreign language programs were developed for teaching English in elementary schools and high schools. In 1994, José María Figueres

introduced foreign-language instruction in public elementary schools with the purpose of making public education more competitive. To support this statement, Escalante (2001) declared that “during three years ...technical support was provided by the World Teaching Organization of Boston, Massachusetts, which placed more than 200 teachers from the United States in primary schools of the Ministry of Public Education” (p.13). During Figueres’ administration (1994 -1998), the teaching of English and Computer Science was declared mandatory in all public schools of the country. It demanded the training of at least 500 teachers as well as the investment in technology and programs that are currently used.

At the beginning of the XXI century, some reforms and innovations were introduced in the education system. With it, the Ministry of Public Education intended to improve the quality and efficiency of the educational administration. In the national report about the development of education in Costa Rica, the Ministry of Public Education (2004) declared that the new reforms had “the purpose to achieve an integral development of the competitive human resources, preparing them to attack with success the challenges that impose the new world order of globalization in the new millennium” (p. 18). These reforms involved seventeen strategic policies. Three of them were specifically related to foreign languages. For instance, Policy One looked for the strengthening of English teaching in pre- school education. Then, Policy Sixteen was related to the promotion of the teaching of English in primary education until covering 80% of the country. At last, Policy Seventeen proposed “... to strengthen English teaching by means of the incorporation of Conversational English in eight technical fields” (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2004, p. 24). With these reforms, the Ministry of Public Education offered students more educational opportunities, and they could start learning a foreign language since pre-school.

An overview of literature in listening.

In the teaching of English, listening is one of the most important skills that has to be developed in the classroom. In fact, it is used in the class because students are exposed to a variety of oral instructions and explanations given by the teacher, listening to lectures, listening to their classmates, and more. However, Nunan (1997) said that “listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning. All too often, it has been overlooked by its elder sister: speaking” (p. 42). Certainly, in the language learning process, teachers prefer to focus on productive skills because they consider listening as a passive skill. Sometimes it seems that educators ignore that when students listen to spoken text, they learn new vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and intonation.

To better understand the role of listening in the process of learning a new language, it is important to recall the development of listening throughout history. Concerning this, Flowerdew and Miller (2005) declared that “the first languages taught in modern classroom settings were Latin and Greek” (p. 4). At that time, the main purpose of learning a second language was learning its grammar. Listening was not taught in language classes. The first language lessons were based on the Grammar-Translation Method, which perceived language as a descriptive set of finite rules that, once learned, gave learners access to the language. A grammar-translation syllabus consisted of two components: grammar and lexical items. It means that the only listening input that students were exposed to would be to “listen to a description of the rules of the second language (L2) in the first language (L1). As a result, when the L2 was used, the focus of any listening would have been on translation of lexical items or grammar structures” (Wallace & Walberg, 2005, p. 3). At that time, listening was not a skill to develop in the classroom, and learners were not able to listen to identify topics, messages, ideas, and others.

At the end of the 19th century, the Direct-Method (also known as the Natural Method) appeared. It was based on the idea that learners can learn a second language in a natural way, without using any translation. The target language was the only language used in the class. Based on such a notion, Richards and Rodgers (2014) referred to the Direct-Method as follows:

- a) Classroom instruction was in the target language.
- b) Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.
- c) Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.
- d) Grammar was taught inductively.
- e) New teaching points were introduced orally.
- f) Vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught through association of ideas.
- g) Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.
- h) Accurate pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.
- i) During the fifties and sixties, the dominant method in language teaching was Audiolingualism. (p. 12)

As it has been noticed, the emphasis on listening in the Direct Method was very limited and there were not any activities to promote the students' competence in listening.

After the Direct-Method, the Audio-lingual Method emerged. This method was developed during the Second World War. Its purpose was to train army forces, which were expected to develop oral fluency in a second language in just nine months. It was based on the scientific descriptions of language, which emphasized listening to pronunciation and grammar patterns, and then, imitating those patterns by means of drills and exercises. From this perspective, Wallace and Walberg (2005) manifested that with this method "students are encouraged to listen carefully either to a taped recording of, or a teacher reading out, a dialogue or drill. They then record their own version or respond to cues from the teacher to

repeat parts of the dialogue” (p. 117). Thus, memorization, repetition, pronunciation, and grammar were the main aspects developed. In fact, with the implementation of the Audio-Lingual Method, the listening skill started to have relevant characteristics as a significant skill when learning a language.

In the sixties, other teaching methods came into vogue with the Chomskyan revolution in linguistics. One of these methods is the Total Physical Response Method (TPR). Its founder was James Asher, who considered that a second language could be learned through commands followed by physical responses. For Asher (1977), “lessons should be developed in a nice environment, where the students can be as stress-free as possible” (p. 205). In these lessons, students must have active and dynamic participation. At first, students just listen to and follow commands such as *open the door, close the door, sit down, stand up*, and so on, and no verbal responses are necessary. Then, as students start feeling comfortable, they can ask questions to their classmates and teacher.

In this case, it seems that listening started having more importance and became more necessary for learning a second language because students were given oral information through a command or instruction to follow. They needed to understand the message to perform the command correctly. However, it was strongly criticized by some authors like Brown (1995), who stated that “it was especially effective in the beginning levels of language proficiency, but then lost its effectiveness as learners advanced in their competence” (p. 30). In fact, during all those years, there was a lot of controversy about the listening skill and its importance to learn English. Some experts had different notions about the implementation of listening tasks; however, they contributed to its study and importance in the classroom setting.

On his part, Curran (1976) also criticized the Total Physical Response Method: He expressed that “more involvement must be provided to the student than simply sitting in his seat and passively listening. He must be somatically or physiologically, as well as intellectually, engaged” (p.79). Certainly, this method was disapproved due to its pronunciation models and grammatical paradigms because listening was used just as a mechanical element, and not as a language skill.

Another educational movement developed at that time is the one known as *Suggestopedia*. This method was created by G. Lozanov, who believed that people can learn more than what they do. For him, learners can retain more information if their minds are relaxed. Therefore, Baroque music was used to get the desired relaxed state of mind that conducted to learning at that time. Regarding this idea, Brown (2007) described *Suggestopedia* as follows:

A significant proportion of activity was carried on with classical music in the background, and with students sitting on soft, comfortable seats in relaxed states of consciousness. Students were encouraged to be as “childlike” as possible, yielding all authority to the teacher and sometimes assuming the roles (and names) of native speakers of the foreign language. Students thus became suggestible. (p. 27)

As it is stated above, students listened to some music to get relaxed; however, it is noticeable that no listening comprehension activities were carried out. Even though Lozanov reported remarkable results with *Suggestopedia*, this method was criticized, and not a lot of people encouraged its use.

The Silent Way was another method that demanded listening in its first stages. It focused on discovering- learning procedures. Founded by Caleb Gattegno, the Silent Way aimed to develop students’ autonomy, independence, and responsibility. In language lessons,

the Silent Way used materials like colorful charts to introduce new vocabulary such as verbs, colors, numbers, adjectives, and others. Brown (1995) stated that in the Silent Way, “the teacher provides single- word stimuli, or short phrases and sentences once or twice, and then the students must refine their understanding and pronunciation among pronunciation models, grammatical paradigms, and the like” (p. 29). Like Suggestopedia, the Silent Way used listening just as a mechanical element and not as a communicative skill. Students were not exposed to or carried out significant listening exercises. The input students received and the students’ oral interaction and production was reduced to repetition of words or sounds. In that way, students could not be competent in listening.

During the seventies, Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell developed the *Natural Approach* based on Krashen’s theories of second language acquisition. These theories stated that a language can be learned by means of acquisition and learning. It means that learners can acquire a second language in the same way a child acquires and learns his first language. Krashen (1982) stated that “language acquisition is a subconscious process; language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are not only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication” (p.10). For this approach, listening was essential because students had to receive a lot of input before they start producing in the target language.

Through the Natural Approach, learners received information related to everyday language situations such as the radio, television, and conversations while the teacher provides the necessary input. To support this statement, Brown (2007) affirmed that “the initial task of the teacher was to provide comprehensible input, that is, spoken language that is understandable to the learner or just a little beyond the learner’s level” (p. 31). Learners

did not need to say anything during this period until they felt that they were able to do it. It means that the use of authentic listening materials was a must.

In the seventies some educators and linguists promoted *the Communicative Approach* or *Communicative Language Teaching*, as it is referred to today, which placed emphasis on real life situations that students encounter at any time. This approach proposes a focus on real-world contexts where students are active participants in their own learning process. In this regard, English for Tourism Program stated that “the teacher guides the learning process but shares the responsibility with the learners. They use critical thinking to solve problems, work in groups, take risks, discuss different topics, and appreciate and reinforce their own” (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2003, p. 14). The role of the teacher is that of a facilitator and guide, fostering autonomous learners who can learn the language not only in the classroom but also in real world life.

For Communicative Language Teaching, students must be provided with the necessary skills to communicate in any context. In this approach, listening exercises are characterized by the involvement of students in real-world listening situations, where they must report information through answering questions, having an opinion about the topic, participating in class discussion, and taking notes based on what they hear. Regarding this, Ministerio de Educación Pública (2003) declared in the Third Cycle Program that “the methodology used is participative, dynamic and offers the opportunity for real use of the language” (p. 23). For these activities, technology like the Internet, computer software, television, audio CD, and MP3 can contribute to the teaching- learning process with authentic real world simulations and meaningful tasks.

Another important aspect that must be considered when learning a language is the Multiple Intelligences theory proposed by Professor Howard Gardner, and published in his

book “*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.*” In his theory, Gardner assured that humans possess different types of intelligences such as the musical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, visual spatial intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, bodily kinaesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalistic intelligence (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 231). These intelligences give teachers the opportunity to combine diverse experiences in the classroom to help students develop their own abilities and strengths.

In the case of listening, this skill includes many intelligences such as the musical, linguistic, and interpersonal ones. This is because a person with musical intelligence has the ability to recognize songs, speed, and rhythm while someone with the linguistic intelligence has the ability to use language, understand others, and react appropriately to stories with different moods and learn new vocabulary or a second language that is used naturally. Regarding this, the MEP (2003) declared in the English for Tourism Program that “people with the interpersonal intelligence have the ability to understand other people and work effectively with them” (p. 20). Teachers have to take into account the students’ preferences to learn in order to develop listening activities focused on their skills and aptitudes. This is because all students have their own listening learning style and abilities.

In conclusion, students have been exposed to listening in different levels according to the approaches and methods used during the learning process. Nowadays, the listening competence has become a need to learn a second language accurately. Thus, teachers must be aware of the importance of listening and offer learners a variety of listening activities. Teachers should give their students the necessary support and guidance in the language-learning process to enhance their listening competence.

Direct and indirect strategies to enhance listening.

At the end of the twentieth century, the use of learning strategies came out. They consider students' needs and interests to enhance learning through strategies like monitoring, guessing, reasoning, and practicing. In this case, the listening skill can be put into practice throughout contextualized activities such as songs and movies. To this point, the English Program for the Fourth Cycle of Basic Education in Costa Rica stated:

Learning strategies are operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information. However, they can also be described as specific actions of the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, self - directed, effective and transferable. In other words, learning strategies are tools students use when they have to solve a problem, accomplish a task, meet an objective or attain a goal. Teachers should be aware of learning strategies in order to provide opportunities for all of their students to develop communicative competence. (MEP, 2003, p. 25)

There are two types of learning strategies: direct and indirect strategies, which can be applied to all language skills. According to Oxford (2006), direct strategies involve the new language directly, whereas indirect strategies provide indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy, and other means (pp. 37-135). Through the application of these strategies, learners are given opportunities for language use in the classrooms.

As listening is not an easy skill to develop, teachers need to determine ways to enhance their students' listening proficiency and apply useful learning strategies that are essential for them to become successful language users. According to Scarcella and Oxford (1992), learning strategies are defined as "specifications, behaviors, steps, or techniques

such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task...used by students to enhance their own learning” (p. 63). The learning strategies such as direct and indirect can make effective learners. In order to be a highly proficient learner, students have to know and be able to apply the direct strategies, which are directly involved with the learning of a foreign language. For example, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, and the indirect strategies, which give indirect support for language learning such as metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

The memory strategies include creating mental linkages, using imagery, semantic mapping, and using memory strategies for retrieval. Through the implementation of the strategies mentioned before, students can associate and elaborate the information they hear. Regarding this, Oxford (2003) stated the following:

Various memory-related strategies enable learners to learn and retrieve information in an orderly string (e.g., acronyms), while other techniques create learning and retrieval via sounds (e.g., rhyming), images (e.g., a mental picture of the word itself or the meaning of the word), a combination of sounds and images (e.g., the keyword method), body movement (e.g., total physical response), mechanical means (e.g., flashcards), or location (e.g., on a page or blackboard). (p. 13)

Learners may use a mental linkage memory strategy to relate new information they hear to familiar concepts stored in their memory. This strategy promotes comprehension and helps them remember new information easily. For example, if a student hears the word “house chores,” and then associates it to the word “house,” s/he can identify the context in which the word is used, understand the word, and remember its meaning quickly.

Another memory strategy consists of using images and sounds. By using imagery, learners are able to create mental images about what they hear. For example, if a learner

hears information about a set of daily activities, s/he can start making a mental image of the situations related to daily activities that are usually carried out at home, school, or during weekends.

In the case of the semantic map strategy, students can arrange concepts and relationships in diagrams, columns, and graphs. On the other hand, the memory strategy for retrieval is also worthy because learners can recall knowledge from memory so that they can employ the information in communication when needed.

The cognitive direct strategies are applied during language learning, language use, or language testing. According to Oxford (1990), some cognitive strategies are practicing (repeating, practicing sounds, practicing naturalistically), receiving and sending messages (getting the idea quickly), analyzing and reasoning (translating), and creating structure for input and output (taking notes). By implementing practicing students can learn sounds; they can repeatedly listen to any type of listening input and practice pronunciation of English sounds. This strategy focuses more on the perceptions of sounds rather than comprehension of meaning. Another cognitive strategy is receiving a message. Learners can effectively use skimming and scanning strategies to focus on the main idea or the details of what they heard. When learners try to understand a passage, they may focus on details instead of emphasizing overall information they hear.

Furthermore, learners can analyze what they hear so that they understand the information in the new language based on their first language. It means that students may establish relationships among the target language and native language to understand better what they hear. Concerning this, O' Malley and Chamot (1990) declared that "the type of strategy used by the learner depends on the type of knowledge required for a given task" (p. 9). Therefore, teachers can help students apply a strategy to handle the information.

Learners can take notes about important aspects and details to focus on the most relevant information.

Regarding the implementation of compensation strategies as guessing intelligently, (using linguistic clues, using other clues) it is claimed that they help learners, especially beginning and intermediate students, deal with difficult tasks beyond their knowledge. They are also helpful for advanced students when they come across the same situation. The learners need knowledge concerning grammar, vocabulary, and stress patterns to guess information (Oxford, 1990). For example, a learner hears the words “*teacher*,” “*student*,” “*task*,” and “*classmates*.” Therefore, he/she can guess that this information is related to the classroom. Learners can take advantage and use other clues like observation of nonverbal behavior such as tone, facial expression, emphasis, body language, and background noise to put into practice analyzing nonlinguistic clues and promote comprehension.

Metacognitive strategies are also a way to improve students’ performance when engaged in listening tasks. These strategies include predicting, monitoring, evaluating, and problem solving, which are applied to enhance the development of students’ self-regulated and self-management listening. According to Oxford (1990), metacognitive strategies are called centering your learning, overviewing, and linking with already known material, paying attention, arranging and planning your learning, identifying the purpose of a language task, and seeking practice opportunities.

In the case of “centering your learning,” students are conscious of their own learning needs and abilities while “overviewing and linking with already known material” let learners connect information they had previously received with the new information.

Concerning “paying attention,” learners need this strategies to focus or concentrate on what they are listening to and on avoiding all distractors. In the strategy “arranging and

planning your learning and identifying the purpose of a language task,” learners try to figure out the purpose of the listening task they are dealing with to lead them in the right direction.

“Seeking practice opportunities” is a strategy that allows learners to create opportunities to practice their English. This includes the opportunities to do so outside classrooms. For instance, a learner may choose to practice the listening skill by listening to English songs. According to O’Malley and Chamot (1990), “students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to plan their learning, monitor their progress, or review their accomplishment and future learning directions” (p. 8). Indeed, the use of metacognitive strategies can positively influence students listening competence because they allow students to approach a learning task having awareness of their own knowledge and their ability to understand, control, and manipulate something. Students can be able of monitoring their own learning, using previous information, focusing on their own learning, and creating new opportunities to practice English.

In the case of “affective strategies,” learners use them to control factors such as emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values. They are very important because they include self-motivating, lowering the anxiety (using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation), encouraging yourself and making positive statements or rewarding yourself, and writing a language learning diary. The students find a reason why they are learning a second language. The affective strategies become a reason for students to achieve their language goals. Concerning this, Oxford (2003) stated that “When the learner consciously chooses strategies that fit his or her learning style and the L2 task at hand, these strategies become a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning” (p. 2). These strategies are applied with the purpose of allowing learners to use the language despite the

limitations they have or the challenges they might face when performing listening exercises with the target language. For this reason, teachers should provide a positive environment in the class and encourage students to use these techniques with the purpose of helping them become more autonomous learners.

The “social strategies” are necessary when interacting with others. For example, asking for clarification, asking questions, and developing cultural understanding. Learners study the culture of the speakers of English to ease their language learning process, and help themselves gain more insights into what they are listening. When learning a language, students not only know about the language but also about the culture of the language. Students can develop cultural awareness through respect towards other cultures and towards other viewpoints. Oxford (2003) clearly stated that social strategies “... help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language” (p. 14). These strategies are essential because students can learn both the language and social abilities like tolerance, respect, and cultural understanding while interacting with other people.

All these strategies and techniques can be implemented according to the teacher’s teaching style. It means that students can work in groups or individually, the topics may be varied, evaluation could be done by means of self- correction or evaluation teacher, and the activity could be designed according to the teacher’s and students’ interests, needs, and level.

Language teaching/learning through the use of language labs.

Language laboratories were developed and first used in the United States. According to Kenji (1984), labs were developed into five different stages: “(1) the beginning period, before World War II, (2) the establishing period, until 1958..., (3) the developing period, until the end of the 1960’s, the diminishing period, until the end of the 1970’s, and (5) the revival period, to the present” (p. 3). However, the use of technology in language teaching

dates back to 1880's when the "phonograph record began to be used in the area of teaching" (Johnston, 1987, p. 29); this phonograph was designed by Edison with the purpose of recording and reproducing sounds. Nonetheless, the first phonetics laboratories were not built until 1920 in some universities of the United States. According to Kelly (1976), the first language lab was equipped at Ohio State University in 1924 with "sixteen sets of headphones linked to a single output" (p. 240). At that time, laboratories were used with records; students listened to records and recorded their own voice.

Concerning the previous idea, some other authors have their own philosophy concerning the development of labs. As an illustration, Bygate (2001) declared that the "tape recorder and language laboratories gradually came into existence in the 1950, [and] they were mainly used for pronunciation, grammar and translation practice, often in the context of courses named as such" (p. 15). In this period, the equipment used was tape recorders as well as television. More schools created laboratories and new teaching methods for the use of language laboratories.

During the 1960s, the language laboratories were one of the most sophisticated tools designed for teaching a foreign language. However, at that time this innovation had some disadvantages regarding the time students had to work in the laboratory (it was not enough), and the lack of contribution to some courses. Thus, some teachers considered that language laboratories did not offer much involvement to language teaching. To better demonstrate this, Navas (2006) described the impact of language labs during the decade of the 1960's as follows:

Just as it became popular among some language teachers, others strongly criticized its use. This situation occurred for two main reasons. Certain language teachers who used the lab failed to implement appropriate activities especially designed for

language lab sessions. Other teachers confused its role in the language classroom. (p. 2)

These two arguments have to be taken into account when working in language labs. Activities must be designed and developed according to the labs' conditions because developing listening activities in laboratories involves the use of technological equipment, instructional and non- instructional materials as well of the use of space and the time. Furthermore, teachers' role is different from working in a common classroom; the teacher gives students more independence because students are more skillful working with a variety of resources in a language lab. When learning English in a language lab students develop competences that can be transferred to real life situations. Other aspects that need attention in labs when teaching are related to available materials, teacher training, students' knowledge handling devices, and classroom arrangement.

In the twentieth century, modern and sophisticated electronic devices appeared. Technological materials were introduced to the teaching of language, especially those called audio materials, contributing to the recovery of language labs in foreign language lessons. They were mainly used to develop students' aural-oral skills and to train language teachers. In accordance with Navas 2006, "it was obvious that the use of audio in the classroom began to gain territory rapidly" (p. 4), and its expansion was not only in the United States, its use spread to other countries, and Costa Rica was not the exception.

In the twenty first century, globalization tendencies set up the use of sophisticated and new technology in today's world. Considering this issue, the National Report about the development in Costa Rica established that the Educational Policy "Towards the 21st Century" tried to encourage the implementation of technology in Costa Rica's classrooms, with the purpose of forming "more qualified people in order to increase productivity and improve the spirit of competitiveness" (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2004, p. 6). One of

the strategic actions that this policy pointed out was to achieve excellence in education by means of the equipment available in the laboratories.

Conversational English in Costa Rica.

All this historical background about learning English in Costa Rica shows how important and necessary English is to the Costa Rican society. Through time, the Costa Rican education system has made the necessary adaptations to the curriculum to respond to the students' needs because of the social transformation in the development of the country.

The national curriculum has suffered changes to be adapted to the process of globalization. Thus, Technical Education in public high schools emerged as an answer to the present demand for specialized labor force in the different fields such as Tourism, Secretarial Management, Accounting, Computing, Mechanics, Agriculture, and in the learning of English. Shortly, the learning of English was also considered an important and fundamental subject to be included in technical education. In other words, it is important that students can find a job in the chosen vocational field and have an appropriate command of the English language in all skills when finishing high school.

As a way to achieve that goal, help them, and conquer a more demanding and globalized world, the Ministry of Public Education (2003) established Conversational English classes in public high schools for seventh, eighth, and ninth graders in 2003. This opportunity offered Costa Rican students a new educational proposal that instructs them to become more competent in English. The Ministry of Education and the Department of professional and technical education established in the Conversational English program that “the new English syllabus prepares the students to face challenging situations, which require the application of their command of the language and their integrated knowledge of the world” (p. 5). With this preparation, students can actively participate in the global economy

and easily communicate with others around the world. This policy was very significant for students of public high schools because it reduced a gap between public and private education that students receive in Costa Rica regarding quality and opportunities.

The teaching of Conversational English was one of the very significant changes adopted in The Educational Policy "Towards the 21st Century." This new plan has renovated the Costa Rican education system and the learning of English in public high schools. According to this revolutionized strategy, the Ministry of Public Education (2003) in the program of English for tourism declared the following:

Education ought to be a permanent formative process, which each person has not only a right, but also a duty to exercise. Achieving quality in education is an integral process through which the results reflect the initial aims. Through this process, learners are offered equality of opportunities to succeed and appropriate educational provision according to their needs, problems and aspirations. (p. 6)

According to this policy, English language learning should emphasize the four basic linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing to allow students to communicate efficiently according to the knowledge acquired. With the implementation of this new way of teaching English, students can become competent at using English because they have to be exposed to a variety of exercises and strategies that correspond to each skill. For that reason, all skills must be developed when teaching English, and it is not justified that teachers focus their classes only on some skills and skip others just for personal convenience. Teachers must be compromised to follow what the current education authorities establish.

Purpose of the Study

The overall aim of this study is to know how the listening skill is being implemented by teachers in language labs when teaching conversational English lessons. It is focused on the importance of implementing the listening skill to learn English as a foreign language.

Currently, it is imperative to provide students with the necessary tools to be competent in English. Teachers can offer students a kind of education that responds to their needs, interests, and society demands by changing traditional methodologies, techniques, and exercises. By keeping this in mind, teachers should constantly improve their way of teaching by adopting and adapting new trends to their personal teaching style, and by using more innovative resources as technology and the Internet.

Throughout this study, researchers analyzed some factors such as teacher training to use labs and technology, available listening materials, labs condition, and others with the purpose of helping teachers undergo some challenges that may influence the development of listening activities in language labs. The researchers reviewed and analyzed pertinent data to justify how, why, and which listening activities can be performed in language labs.

The researchers found their motivation to develop this study after knowing the needs of teachers to work in language labs regarding the teaching of the language skills, mainly listening. The high school where the study took place has four available language labs for teaching conversational English; however, they were underused since some teachers of English complained that they did not know how to work at labs and how to use technological resources. In synthesis, it was necessary to offer English teachers some proposals to work at language labs to obtain better results in EFL settings regarding the application of listening.

Research Questions of the Study

This educational research study addresses the following question:

How is the listening skill being implemented when teaching English for conversational classes in the language laboratories of Colegio Tecnico Profesional San Isidro?

To support this research question the following direct and practical questions emerged:

- 1) How do lab conditions influence the applicability of listening?
- 2) To what extent can the usefulness and applicability of a language lab influence the implementation of listening activities?
- 3) How are teachers trained in using language labs when developing listening activities?
- 4) How available are listening materials in language labs?
- 5) How frequent are listening activities carried out in the language labs?
- 6) What type of listening exercises can be implemented in language labs?

The answers to all of these questions will be provided throughout the study. The final results are described in the last chapter.

Significance of the Study

Around the world, English is the main business language, and it has become a need for those who want to succeed in the global workforce. Every day, more individuals speak English as a first, second, or foreign language. For these reasons, the Ministry of Public Education has incorporated English in the Costa Rican educational system as a fundamental tool to offer students the opportunity to communicate in and outside the country.

The establishment of English within the educational system has given students the possibility of developing oral and written communication skills. These skills include reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In the case of listening, it has a significant role in the English teaching classroom. It offers learners the necessary input to let communication take

place. As it is a receptive skill, listening enables students to acquire information by “providing [them] with large amounts of meaningful input. As students develop their receptive skill, greater amounts of input become meaningful to them and the greater chance they have of learning the language” (Lynch, 1990, p. 104). A way of helping learners develop this skill is by means of the language laboratories. These labs have been implemented in high schools as a response to satisfying educational necessities. Nunan (2005) specified that “the notion of Information Technology (IT) is becoming ubiquitous these days, with numerous education departments requiring teachers to demonstrate a degree of technological literacy. Many teachers, however, are uncertain of what technology is and what it is not” (p. 167). They still find obstacles to implement listening activities in the lab and to provide students with the necessary input to learn the language. Most of the time those obstacles are related to the use of technology, available materials, teacher training, and implementation of listening activities.

In the light of such problems, a case study about the factors that influence the implementation of listening objectives in the language laboratory may contribute to the improvement of this skill implementation. This research provides teachers and the Ministry of Public Education authorities with current information to enhance the use of language labs for implementing listening objectives, especially when teaching conversational English lessons.

Limitations

The researchers challenged some limitations throughout the research process. We listed below the most relevant.

- The work schedule of the researchers was a significant limitation because both had a full time job as teachers all day long, and one of the researchers worked at nights.

For those reasons, peer work only took place on weekends while taking care of children and doing household chores.

- Time was a huge constraint because both researchers worked five days a week as teachers of English. Then, the time to develop the study was very limited. In fact, the little amount of free time researchers had was used to carry out the study.
- Teachers' willingness to be observed was a challenge since some of the participants did not want to be observed or tested. However, three out of the seven teachers contributed with the project. This aspect limited the expectations of the researchers prior to starting the study since the idea was to involve more people in it.
- The lack of availability of some teachers to fill out the questionnaires was another limitation since the participants required time and willingness to answer a series of questions, and they also had to give their opinions and perspectives by writing some comments.
- Some personal situations as health problems were also part of the limitations faced to carry out this study.

Delimitations

The succeeding factors remark some of the aspects considered in the delimitations of this research.

- This study was designed by observing and collecting evidence from the teachers' classes and record book in language labs as well as teachers' opinions and knowledge at Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro.
- The design of the research, which is a case study, does not allow generalizing some findings in this research to other teachers or other language labs.

- Teachers who are interested in knowing how to implement listening activities in language labs may take this research as a reference.
- The materials and recommendations proposed for English teachers and students in language labs can be useful to enhance the implementation of listening exercises in language labs.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarifying meaning and use in this study, the following terms are defined. The definitions have been taken from different sources.

Implementation: Implementation is defined by Kessler (2013) as “the act of implementing (providing a practical means for accomplishing something); carrying into effect and putting into force or operation” (p. 239) while the *Thesaurus Roget's II: The New Thesaurus* (1980) defined it as “the act of putting into play” (p. 487). In this investigation, implementation is stated as the application of listening activities in the classroom.

Conditions: Condition was defined by Larousse Chambers English dictionary as a “particular state, circumstances, or as requirement and qualification” (1991, p.104). On the other hand, the *Merriam – Webster Dictionary* declared that condition refers to “something essential to the appearance or occurrence of something else (2004, p. 259). In this research, the conditions will refer to the circumstances of the language labs required by the Ministry of Public Education regarding infrastructure, technological equipment, furniture, and materials.

Application: The *Chambers Pocket Dictionary* defined application as “the act of applying, the act of using something for a particular purpose” (1993, p. 37). On the other hand, The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* described application as “the action of putting something

into operation” (2011, p. 63). For this survey, application will mean the act of putting into practice listening activities in the language labs.

Usefulness: The *Thesaurus Roget's II: The New Thesaurus* characterized usefulness as “the quality of being suitable or adaptable to the end” (1980, p. 1020). On the other hand, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* stated that usefulness is the fact of being useful or possible to use (2011, p. 1593). This study will refer to how suitable and useful technological devices, equipment, materials, and language laboratories are to carry out listening activities.

Activities: The *Chambers Pocket Dictionary* described activity as “something that people do for pleasure, interest, exercise, etc.” (1993, p. 10). The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defined activity as “a thing that a person or group does or has done” (2010, p. 17). In this study, activities will refer to a variety of listening exercises and tasks that can be implemented in the language lab.

Training: *Roget's II: The New Thesaurus* described training as “the act, process, or art of imparting knowledge and skill” (1980, p. 969). Another description of training was found in the *Larousse Chambers English Dictionary* as “teaching in the practical side of a profession” (1991, p. 584). For the current investigation, training will mean specialization in terms of years of experience, number of workshops, and number of conferences for handling technological devices, developing listening skill, and using the language lab.

The use: The *Larousse Chambers English Dictionary* stated that use is “the act of using or putting to a purpose” (p. 608). On the other hand, the *New Thesaurus* characterized use as the condition of being put to use (1980, p. 1020). For this survey, use will refer to the employment of materials, technological equipment, and language labs for practical purposes when developing listening activities.

Availability: *The Oxford English Dictionary* defined availability as “something able to be used or obtained” (2010, p. 109). The word “available” was also stated by the Chambers Pocket Dictionary as “able or ready to be obtained or used” (1993, p. 52). In this survey, availability will mean accessibility to resources such as instructional and non-instructional materials, and technological equipment in the language laboratory.

Materials: *The Merriam – Webster Dictionary* described materials as apparatus necessary for doing or making something (2004, p. 770). *Roget’s II: The New Thesaurus* characterized materials as “things needed for a task, journey, or other purpose” (1997, p. 301). For the current investigation, materials will be considered as instructional, non-instructional, and technological things such as software, recorded audios, videos, books, magazines and others that are needed in order to implement listening activities.

Frequency: *The Larousse Chambers Dictionary* defined frequency as “commonness of occurrence” (1991, p. 208) while *The American Heritage Dictionary* referred to it as “occurring or encountered regularly” (2004, p. 345). “Frequency” is defined by the *Collins English Dictionary* as “the number of times that an event occurs within a given period; rate of recurrence” (2006, p. 319). For this research, frequency will refer to the regularity in which listening activities are developed each time the observed teachers work in the labs according to the schedule and number of lessons assigned to each of them.

Summary

The chapter above stated the reasons that encouraged the development of this research by giving background information about how listening has been applied mainly in language labs. Hence, it also remarked the research questions that supported and led this study as well as the importance that this work has for teachers, students, and MEP authorities as a way to boost the implementation of listening. In the same way, this chapter included

some limitations that the researchers faced throughout the development of the study, the delimitations, and how and why it can be used as a reference for other teachers of English who consider the implementation of listening exercises as a very necessary aspect to learn a foreign language. The definitions of crucial terms were also given with the purpose of guiding the reader to have a better understanding of the study, its boundaries, and implications.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two will explain the most relevant theoretical information used as a guidance and support to develop this study. Such data constitute a basis of reference that eventually will support the conclusions and findings drawn by the researchers.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe listening and its importance when learning a second language. It also focuses on the materials and activities teachers use for teaching listening. Some information regarding language labs is similarly included: advantages, use of technology, arrangement of the lab, methodology, instructional materials, and activities that can be carried out in language labs. There is also information related to teacher training, technical education in Costa Rica, and conversational English teaching.

Listening as a Language Skill

Many authors have several opinions about what listening as a skill really is. Various definitions have been given to listening through time, but today there is not a common description for it. As a of matter fact, Helgesen (2003) said that “listening is an active, purposeful process of making sense of what we hear... listening, along with reading, is a receptive skill. That is, it requires a person to receive and understand incoming information” (p. 24). Thus, listening is a process of receiving and understanding information that Richards and Schmidt (2010) described as “the process of understanding speech in a first or second language” (p. 344). It means understanding phonemes, words, grammatical structures, and meaning. Through listening students understand what people say and learn how to speak clearly. They learn how to use words, stress, and intonation properly to achieve effective communication.

Listening is not a simple skill. It is an active process that requires focus and attention, especially when listening in a foreign language. It forces listeners to concentrate on the message and meaning. For Rost (2005), “listening is a complex cognitive process...

encompassing receptive, constructive, and interpretive aspects of cognition” (p. 503). Thus, listening is the process of hearing to sounds, utterances and sentences, and interpreting meaning. In other words, “listening is the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear” (Underwood, 1989, p.1). A good listener is able to criticize lectures and ideas exposed by speakers, filter out distractions, and focus on the message. In the case of students, it is not easy to become a good listener. For this reason, teachers should encourage students to practice listening and guide them to become active listeners.

Importance of listening.

Everyday activities are especially related to a great number of listening activities. According to Morley (1991), "we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write” (p. 82). People spend a lot of time having conversations, listening to music and radio programs, watching TV, and others. To explain this, Lindsay and Knight (2006) stated:

We listen to a wide variety of things, for example; what someone says during a conversation, face to face or on the telephone; announcements giving information, for example, at an airport or railway station; the weather forecast on the radio; a play on the radio; music; someone else’s conversation (eavesdropping); a lecture; professional advice, for example, at the doctor’s, in the bank; instructions, for example, on how to use a photocopier or other machinery; directions; a taped dialogue in class. (p. 45)

It means that, in real life situations, people have many reasons for listening; for example, for social interaction, sharing information, entertainment, and others. According to Rankin (1928), “oral language is found much more frequently than written language. Listening or the

ability to understand spoken language is the most frequently used of the four language arts” (p. 623). In the case of adolescents, listening related activities are those carried out in social and cultural events as well as those performed in classrooms. However, when talking about listening, people are not always aware of how much listening is involved in most daily actions.

Regarding language learning, listening (as well as speaking, reading, and writing) is one of the four skills to become competent at using a foreign. However, listening is the first skill that humans develop when trying to learn a second language. Individuals have to listen to many utterances every day. It is by means of listening that learners acquire information and achieve good communication. Renukadevi (2014) clarified this point as follows:

Listening is the most significant part of communication as it is pivotal in providing a substantial and meaningful response. Especially in learning a language for a communicative purpose, listening plays a vital role, as it helps the language learner to acquire pronunciation, word stress, vocabulary, and syntax and the comprehension of messages conveyed can be based solely on tone of voice, pitch and accent; and it is only possible when we listen. Without understanding input appropriately, learning simply cannot get any improvement. In addition, without listening skill, no communication can be achieved. (p. 60)

Teaching listening is absolutely necessary for second language learning. Learners need to be exposed to spoken language to develop their ability of identifying words, sounds, and messages. Teachers should provide their students with opportunities to understand and respond to what they listen to.

Listening materials.

Frequently, teachers tend to take advantage of printed materials like isolated copies or books. They look for a book, check its content, and select what they consider is appropriate to develop a topic. In this process, they might omit some aspects that are extremely important in teaching a second language. When choosing materials, it is important to keep in mind Edge's (1993) words:

Materials exist in order to support learning and teaching, so they should be designed to suit the people and the processes involved. Where this is not the case, it is the materials, or the use of them which need to change. Our purpose is not to teach materials. Our purpose is to teach students and to use material in that process. (p. 43)

Teachers should use different materials when teaching listening. It is a valuable resource for teachers in the implementation of listening lessons. However, it is necessary to adapt these materials to suit individuals' learning styles, classroom settings, and the purpose of the activity.

Several authors offer different recommendations for choosing materials. For instance, J. Brown (1994) suggested three strategies to match blueprint materials to classroom and students' needs. These are "adopting, developing, or adapting" (p. 157). Another recommendation given by this autor to choose appropriate materials is to "decide what types of materials are desirable..., all available materials might prove useful..., and some form of review/evaluation procedures must be set up" (p. 157). It is because most of the times books are based on a particular approach, topic, and strategy.

Teachers must look for the most suitable materials, which can be found in catalogs, books (textbooks and workbooks), journals, and copies. To determine this suitability, the

teacher must examine all the materials. The evaluation must be given taking into consideration the aspects described by Brown (1995), which include:

The materials background; author's background, and publisher's reputation. Fit to curriculum; approach, syllabus, needs (language and situations), goals and objectives, content (techniques and exercises). Physical characteristics; layout (space, pictures and text, highlighting), organization, editorial qualities (clear and easy directions, accurate content, clear examples), material quality (paper, binding, tear-out page). Logistical characteristics; price, auxiliary parts (audiovisual aids, workbooks, software, unit tests), and availability. Teachability; teachers edition (annotations and plan activities to help teachers), reviews, and acceptability. (p. 161)

Nowadays, learners can have easy access to listening materials. Listening exercises are commonly found in publications based on audio recordings on CDs, MP3 players, radio, TV, internet, and teachers can even record their own voice. Indeed, today listening materials are "widely available and relatively inexpensive" (Field, 2009, p. 47). Nonetheless, before using recorded material in class, the teacher needs to check its language, length, content, the style and the speed of the delivery, how close to real speech it is, and the quality of the recording.

Recorded materials can provide a lot of benefits for both students and teacher, but it is important to keep in mind that this type of materials can also have certain disadvantages. Regarding the advantages, there is the possibility of listening to native speakers' voices in the classroom, the option of stopping and repeating the passage as often as necessary, the opportunity of working on their own in any place at any time, and hearing several people talking at the same time. Regarding the disadvantages, distortion and misunderstanding appear when tapes and recorders are not of high quality. According to Yagang (1993), "unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment can interfere with the listener's

comprehension” (p. 17). Such a problem has a negative impact on students’ listening performance, causing frustration and negative answers.

To work in the classroom teachers can provide students with non-authentic and authentic materials. For Field (2009) “non-authentic texts are those that have been written especially for language classes” (p. 51). They contain simple language and are used with the purpose of facilitating the learning language. According to Harmer (1991), “this type of language is artificial in nature and the conversation may not be right. But all over the world these types of texts are used to teach listening and make students better learners” (p. 185). This type of materials provides practice and confidence for students. Simple language and grammar structure make students feel they are learning the new language.

For other authors, listening materials must be authentic. This authenticity “usually refers to listening items originally intended for the ears of a native listener rather than specially prepared materials for language learners” (Field, 2009, p. 23). It lets the students learn in a more natural environment, with real situations, and with little hesitation. For Kilickaya (2004), “learners feel better with authentic materials helping them involve in the ‘real’ language as long as we, as teachers, provide them with pedagogical support” (p. 157). A real-life listening situation makes students feel they are listening for a purpose. For learners, having a reason for listening is more interesting than just listening to isolated words and sentences.

Nonetheless, before using authentic materials and activities, the teacher must have provided the appropriate linguistic indications to students. To refer to this, Richards and Rodgers (1996) argued the following:

Students will find listening to authentic texts more difficult than listening to the usual idealized and standardized material. The degree to which they can perform the

activities suggested will depend on what linguistic and paralinguistic clues are available and how able the learners are to make use of them. (p. 186)

On his part, Peterson (1991) affirmed that “in real-life situations, the vocabulary used is much more difficult than the one used in the classroom. However, students may be assisted by body language and tone of voice” (p.108). Thus, teachers’ work may focus on determining and choosing the most suitable materials and activities to avoid students’ confusion and frustration. Teachers should expose learners to a range of listening experiences, they should be purposeful, and should help students build up confidence in their own learning process.

Listening activities.

From the early stages of English language teaching, listening was only used to teach new vocabulary and grammar. Nowadays, teachers of English realize that to successfully communicate in English, learners need know how to listen effectively, “there is no spoken language without listening” (Rost, 2001, p. 1). Effective listening enables students to take part in real oral communication; they can understand and respond to what they hear.

In real life situations, people have many reasons for listening. For Galvin (1985) , people listen to: “ a) engage in social rituals, b) exchange information, c) exert control, d) share feelings and e) enjoy yourself” (p. 4). It means that everyday people are exposed to a great number of listening experiences with the purpose of communicating. In the case of learners of English, “they will find themselves sooner or later in a variety of situations where they will need or want to listen to English being used in real life for a range of purposes” (Underwood, 1989, p. 1) such as listening to the teacher’s instructions or explanations, listening to talks, and others. Indeed, several authors have different opinions to explain these purposes. For Rixon (1993), “the aim of listening comprehension is (or should be) to help

learners of English cope with listening in real life situations” (p. 1). He described these situations as follows:

Listening to announcements in stations, airports, etc., listening to the radio, watching a film, play or TV, participating in a conversation face- to- face, taking part in a lesson, participating in a meeting, seminar or discussion, listening to a talk or lecture, eavesdropping on other people’s conversations, and participating in a telephone conversation. (p. 2)

In the classroom, listening for entertainment activities comprise watching a program or film to talk about it, working with subtitle programs on television (sometimes looking at the subtitle, sometimes not), listening to record stories in episodes, and listening to recordings of foreigners’ personal experiences.

Activities applied for information consist of listening to a passage to identify grammar, vocabulary, stress, intonation, and (or) sounds. The strategies used to work with this type of activities are skimming to get the general understanding of the passage, scanning for specific information, extracting main points, and inferring about opinions, attitudes, etc. However, none of these activities can be applied in the classroom unless they have been planned in relation to the different stages or phases. These are: a) Pre-listening, b) While-listening, and c) Post –listening (follow up).

In the first stage, the teacher can offer students a wide variety of activities for the preparation of listening including: the teacher giving background information, the students reading something relevant, the students looking at pictures, discussion of the topic/situation, a question and answer session, written exercises, following the instructions, and consideration of how the while-listening activity will be done (Underwood, 1989, p. 31). It is a way of activating students’ background knowledge to prepare them for unfamiliar words,

sounds, and structures. It also helps build up confidence and gain students' interest to facilitate comprehension. It is by means of the pre-listening stage that teachers can ensure that listening activities are reliable. To this regard, Yagang (1993) declared that this stage "... not only provides encouragement but also develops students' confidence in their ability to deal with listening problems" (p. 95). Pre-listening activities prevent the stress of hearing to something that is completely unknown, and make while listening exercises easier. In this stage, the teacher can provide students with a clear context by giving them an idea about the people involved, the setting, and the reason for the dialogue or text.

In the next stage (while-listening), students are asked what to do while they are listening to the text. Students listen to main ideas, specific events, and details. They have to listen carefully to perform a task based on the listening. During this stage "students verify and revise their predictions. They make interpretations and judgments based on what they heard" (Abbas & Mohammad, 2011, p. 982). Students do these activities during or right after they listen to the text with the purpose of helping learners develop the ability to understand what they hear in the new language. While-listening activities involve: "a) marking / checking items in pictures, b) identifying pictures, c) storyline picture sets, d) putting pictures in order, e) completing pictures, f) picture drawing, g) carrying out actions, h) making models/ arranging items in patterns, i) following a route, j) completing grids, k) form/ chart completion, l) labeling, m) using lists, n) true/ false, o) multiple choice questions, p) text completion (gap-filling), q) spotting mistakes, r) predicting, and s) seeking specific items of information" (Underwood, 1989, pp. 35-44). In this stage, it is important to give students the opportunity to listen to the text two or three times before working on specific tasks. In this way, students can focus on global meaning, make assumptions, and verify them. Although classroom while-listening activities are generally student centered, the teacher

must provide students with activities according to their levels and abilities, clear instructions, and clarification.

In regard to the last stage (post –listening), students associate with what they have heard from the listening passage to their own ideas and experiences. These types of activities are usually expansions of the pre-listening activities. The following are examples of post-listening activities: “a) problem – solving and decision making, b) interpreting, c) role play, and d) written work.” According to Abbas and Mohammad (2011), “post-listening activities provide opportunities for teachers to assess and check students’ comprehension, and clarify their understandings; to extend comprehension beyond the literal level to the interpretive and critical levels” (p. 982). These follow ups allow check for comprehension of what students have heard in the pre-listening or while-listening activities. It is not testing, but a way of checking if students understood the passage and if they can apply this to their future.

Another important aspect of planning and choosing the activities is to take into account that all activities will depend on a quantity of factors described by Underwood (1989) as: “the time and material available, the ability of the class, the interest of the class and teacher, the place in which the work is being carried out, and the nature and content of the listening text itself” (p. 33). Students’ background knowledge is another factor that affects listening activities. When students have poor listening comprehension, they do not make connections to the vocabulary they are exposed to. For this reason, the teacher must prepare students for new and difficult vocabulary with the help of books, videos, and songs that contain vocabulary students can relate to.

Language Labs

There are not many terms to define language labs. Many people agree that they are special rooms equipped with the appropriate technology in order to help language students improve their listening and speaking skills. For Stone (1988), “a language laboratory is an instructional technology tool consisting of a source unit that can disseminate audio materials to any number of students at individual seats or carrels” (What are language laboratories, para. 1). On the other hand, the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus* (2008) stated that a language laboratory is “a room in a school or college in which students can use equipment to help them practise listening to and speaking a foreign language” (p. 804). Over all, language laboratories are especial classrooms equipped with audio materials: audio recorders, computers, headphones, TV, a specialized software, and others. In these labs, students learning a foreign language can practice different language skills.

As it is stated in the literature review of the current research, the language laboratory has helped a lot in language teaching for more than a century. Its main purpose has always been helping students of foreign language improve their listening and oral skills. According to Antich, Gandarias, and López (1988), “the main objectives of the language laboratory are to make the individual practice of students more effective, and increase the productivity of language teachers who only need to focus on the student’s production and the mistakes encountered” (p. 175). Language labs involve students in active language learning exercises through individual practice, activities are student-centered, and the teacher serves as a guide.

Advantages of language labs.

Some investigations have shown the existence of some advantages of the use of language labs for both students and teachers. One of those surveys is the one carried out by Danaher and Danaher (1998). In this study, they found that the use of the laboratory was fun

and led to increasing learners' confidence, facilitating learning either individually or in pairs. Another result these investigators discovered is that, according to the interviewed learners, labs helped students improve their pronunciation of particular words as well as the techniques applied while learning and speaking a second language. Furthermore, some students told them language labs helped them familiarize themselves with the way to speak fluently and accurately. Not less important is the issue that most of the students who were part of the investigation expressed that the use of a language laboratory is extremely easy; all students could work on their own without fear or embarrassment. The last finding of this analysis was the opportunity that language labs gave students in order to listen to native speakers as much as possible.

Language labs offer advantages for both teachers and students. In the case of the first ones, they can offer students individualized instruction according to their learning styles and needs. Teachers can monitor and evaluate students' performance, correct errors, and ensure equal participation in class. Another opportunity that labs provide is to improve the quality of instruction. Regarding this, Huntley's (1998) pointed out that "teachers who demonstrate the usefulness of the lab for learning languages are also likely to increase the chances of future funding for improvements in educational technology" (para. 5). To simply word it, the use of language labs offers teachers the opportunity to improve their teaching style by applying varied evaluation, instructions, and methodology.

Regarding students, language labs allow them to work more independently according to their own needs and learning styles. They become familiar with the use of technology and follow specific instructions. At the same time, they learn a foreign language. Huntley (1998) denoted the following:

The advantages lie in being able to speak and/or listen at their own pace, resulting in decreased anxiety and a greater willingness to take risks. By recording and listening to their own voice, they are also able to monitor their own performance, recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and evaluate their own progress over time. An additional advantage in gaining familiarity with the language lab is the greater comfort with the growing field of language learning technology overall and the confidence in accessing materials independent of a classroom environment. (para. 4)

In addition to the advantages mentioned before, other authors refer to language labs' advantages in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension, and fluency. Laboratories allow the participation of all students and facilitate communication at the same time that promote motivation. Thus, it seems that there are several benefits in the use of these labs despite the fact that they have been criticized and considered old-fashioned by some others.

The use of technology in language lessons.

Since the creation of language labs, a series of cubicles were equipped with cassette decks as well as microphones and headphones. Nowadays, it is common to see language labs equipped with complementary technology or devices such as TVs, DVDs, tape recorders, computers, and Internet. Jensen argued that "without a doubt we are in the center of a monumental technological paradigm shift, one which will eventually change the way all instructors teach and the way students learn" (as cited in Singhal, 1997, para. 21). Trends in education are constantly changing with significant improvements. Through the use of technology, teachers can transform their own teaching style to build exciting and meaningful language experiences for learners. Educators can expose their students to a variety of resources, content, and tools to help them improve their own learning.

Some tools teachers use in the classroom are TVs and DVDs, recorders, computers, and internet. Teachers use the first ones in their lessons to play videos on several topics, and the students use the tape recorders to record their voice and monitor their fluency and pronunciation. In the case of the computers and the Internet, language instructors and students use them in different ways such as accessing electronic mail, chat rooms, and specialized software, as well as retrieving and accessing information in web sites and YouTube videos about any topic anywhere.

Undoubtedly, the Internet has affected all aspects of society, economically and educationally. It has given people more opportunities to easily communicate with each other and access information fast around the globe. Internet has become a useful tool in almost every field in our current world. In this sense, Lewis (1994) stated that “the Internet is a confederation of thousands of computers from various sectors of society such as education, business, government and the military. It is a network of thousands of computer networks” (p.12). In the educational field, the Internet offers a lot of advantages to develop classroom activities and to enhance students’ ability to learn English.

Concerning the e-mail, it has been used to give students the opportunity to become involved in real, authentic situations that let them improve their communicative ability. Furthermore, Singhal (1997) highlighted that “even timid or inhibited students can benefit from the meaningful interaction and communication e-mail makes possible” (para. 1). The use of this type of technology involves all students in the learning experiences that can be carried out in the lab and favors the development of activities in a more reliable context.

In the case of language learning and culture, students can obtain information about geography, history, economy, and political issues of the countries where the target language is spoken. According to Koua (2013), this can be possible because “students can read web

versions of daily newspapers and same-day news reports from sources such as the French Embassy's gopher service, the daily *Revue de Press*” (p. 565). In addition, several websites offer different software for language learning as well as exercises about listening, grammar, reading, writing, and literature.

Arrangement of a language lab.

For years, students from public high schools have been taking academic English courses as the primary way to be in touch with English. By doing this, The Ministry of Education expected students to be fluent in English; however, the reality was very different because most of the students could not express themselves in English. One of the reasons for students' lack of oral communication in and out the classrooms could be because most teachers prepare students for a written test and the evaluation administered at the end of the process is mainly focused on reading and writing. Fortunately, the Ministry of Education realized that a change in how students learn English was needed. As a result, English for communication became part of the curriculum in many public high schools. However, it was not enough to offer students contextualized activities. Therefore, English labs were established at technical high schools to fill the void of that lack of communication and offer students and teachers a new and modern option for learning and teaching English.

The establishment of language labs at technical high schools has been one of the most relevant projects carried out by the Ministry of Public Education. By the year 2013 there were 392 language labs in the country, sponsored by Law 7372 (MEP, 2006-2014, p. 274). The use of technology has become a very significant part of students' lives, and many technological tools are commonly used at homes, work, and for entertainment. Therefore, the use of audiovisual equipment such as tape recorders, microphones, computers, speakers and

others for learning and teaching English in a lab favors students to learn in a more trustworthy context.

In order to make language labs more effective, some aspects such as equipment, teaching materials, programs, and evaluation should be carefully considered. Regarding equipment, it has to be arranged according to a diagram offered by the MEP called the CAROUSEL CLASSROOM. According to this proposal, the Carousel classroom is defined by the Ministry of Public (2003) as follows:

The Carousel Classroom is based on the technique of the same name, where the facilitators create “stations” where different activities are presented at the same time.

For example, rather than a group of forty people going through four activities for two hours, four groups of ten participants are divided into four activities. After thirty minutes at one activity, each group rotates to another station and another activity. (p. 1)

As it was explained by the previous quotation about the English lab’s arrangement, it is very important to achieve a more active and dynamic teaching learning process. The lab is divided into six environments to facilitate students’ learning (see figure 2.1). It also favors students to work following their own progress.

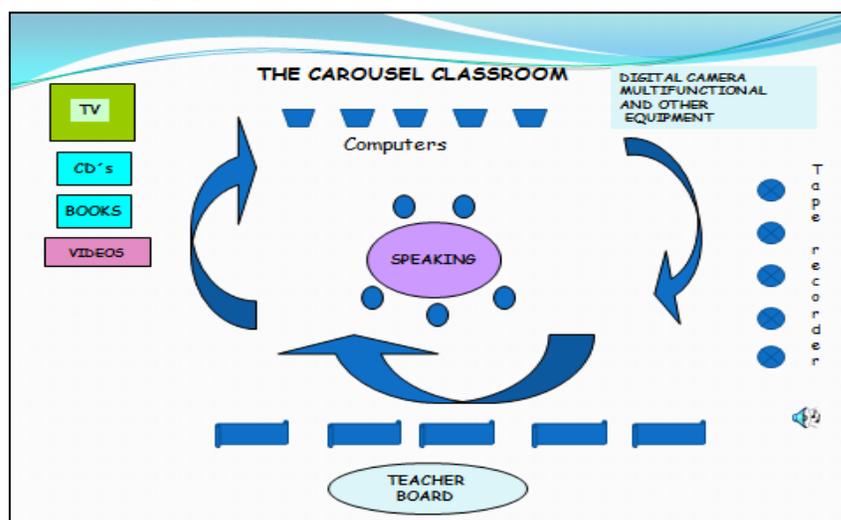


Figure 2.1. Sample of a carousel classroom. Taken from Ministerio de Educación Pública.

However, its main goal is to promote language learning through a series of well-defined environments, which help the students acquire a new language through the use of diverse human, physical, and electronic resources. Those environments are listening, speaking, reading, writing, independent studies, and special needs which are described by the Ministry of Public Education (2003) as follows:

Listening: This section of the class emphasizes the listening skill and provides opportunities to the learners to improve the sound, stress, and intonation by constant exposure to oral texts and other types of exercises. Students are seated at hexagonal/round shaped tables, carrying out assigned tasks.

Speaking: This section only has the round or hexagonal table with chairs. Students discuss the topics provided by the instructor and try to arrive at conclusions, which will be used for further discussion.

Reading: There is also a setting that allows students to read at their own pace. Of course, common tasks are assigned by the teacher as well.

Writing: This section promotes the development of the written ability through a series of tasks assigned to the group of students as a team or individually.

Independent studies: This activity is an integral part of the class, and it is reinforced by the use of computers, as tools for language learning, information researching, and production of pieces of the oral and written language. The use of multimedia resources and specialized software offers the opportunity for the students to progress at their own pace.

Special needs: This is an action directed by the teacher who has to have a record of each student. It is a wonderful opportunity to provide special assistance to the

students who may show learning difficulties in one area, or who have a higher level of proficiency in some or all of the skills. (pp. 1-3)

Working in this way, teachers help students advance at their own rate. However, teachers must take into account aspects concerning time, activities, classroom arrangement, and the available equipment. At this point, educators should establish the specific time each activity lasts with the purpose of developing all the planned activities.

Recommended methodology in the carousel classroom.

Regarding the methodology recommended in the carousel classroom, Communicative Language Teaching can be applied because it makes use of real-life situations that need communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life; in that way, the students are offered a context where they can interact and communicate more effectively. In the case of the teachers' role, the carousel methodology emphasizes that teachers will find themselves becoming active facilitators of their students' learning in communicative classrooms. According to the MEP (2003), the teacher's role in the carousel classroom is described as follows:

The teacher in the Carousel Classroom has to be an innovator who is taking advantage of the resources and the training opportunities. He/she is the person in charge of activating learning in their students by providing learning situations. The role of the teacher, besides being a specialist in the field, should be that of a source of knowledge of the classroom, the institution, and the community where he/she is immersed. S/he has to be an expert in the use of all sources of materials, audio visuals, electronic devices, teaching, and evaluating techniques and be familiar with the international and national current situation. (p. 4)

Therefore, the teacher in a language lab is not only the person in charge of teaching but a guide, a specialist, a person who offers students new, interesting and demanding situations and experiences to learn. Furthermore, he or she must know how to operate all the equipment needed. On the other hand, the student becomes an active and dynamic participant in the learning process because s/he moves around the different stations and experiences singular situations that enhance his or her ability to communicate, interact, and show comprehension of the activities carried out.

Instructional materials for language labs.

The learning teaching process of a language is a complex practice that requires the combination of many dynamic factors such as a knowledgeable teacher, a target content to be taught, and didactic materials among others. For a nonnative English speaker, to learn a second language is difficult because there are aspects that may interfere with that goal. For that reason, the use of supporting materials can make this process a much more undemanding experience.

For instance, the use of visual aids as a picture is worth more than a thousand words, and this is particularly true when teaching English as a second language. Visual aids can be used to teach everything from vocabulary to prepositions. In addition to instructional advantages, visuals keep lessons interesting for the learners.

However, the use of materials to teach English in a public high school has been almost reduced to the use of a book, a notebook, a board, and a set of photocopies. The use of the most appropriate material to learn English is mostly affected by aspects such as teacher's availability and creativity, school's economic resources, and students' economic situation as well.

Teaching the English language in public schools should not be textbook dominated. Teachers must have an available supply of varied teaching aids to avoid the use of inadequate and obsolete materials. Another aspect that must be considered is the price of the resources because not all students can afford even very cheap materials.

Certainly, to have a reduced range of materials to transmit what teachers want students to learn may be an unproductive technique to achieve teachers' main goal, which is the learning of a second language. To this point, Freeman and Richards (1996) explained that "the assumption was made that differences among teachers in how they organize instruction, in the methods and materials they use, and how they interact with pupils would have different effects on how much children learned" (p. 354). The use of interesting instructional materials makes English lessons easier and more enjoyable for the students and even for the teacher.

For the purpose of offering students appropriate conditions to learn English, The Ministry of Education established the creation of language labs in some technical high schools. Those rooms must be equipped with some required and specific technological devices such as computers, tape recorders, internet connection and appropriate furniture, a storage shelf, a television, tables for group work, chairs, and others. Regarding this, Siarkiewicz (1976) stated that the language laboratory "accompanied the development of technical equipment which provided better recording and replaying conditions" (p. 105). In the case of Croft, he argued that "the laboratory is assumed to be a useful tool for conducting pattern practice drills enabling the teacher to spend classroom periods on more created work" (as cited in Siarkiewicz, 1976, p. 105). In this sense, a language lab offers students a more reliable context to learn because all macro skills are integrated by using innovative technological tools and proper instructional materials.

Undoubtedly, with the use of language labs, students may be more comfortable and willing to learn because they are digital natives and use technology every day to communicate with friends, download music, songs, videos, or enjoy movies when sharing with their peers.

The use of the Internet for teaching purposes is also a very useful and current innovation for learning a language. It offers a big variety of links and web sites that can be used for teaching English as a second language. However, due to the failures of the connection of the Internet in the lab, some teachers may use designed software for teaching English. The software or instructional programs can be bought or obtained for free. Some of the language learning software used in high schools are “Tell me More,” “Rossetta Stone,” and “Doctor Help.” All of them are global leaders in language learning software, and they are applied to aid people learn different languages including English.

Teaching in a language lab requires skillful students and teachers who know how to handle technological devices such as computers, projectors, tape recorders, and others. The teacher must be very creative, active, and well-informed to guide the students in the development and implementation of activities. One aspect that affects the transmission of knowledge is that teachers are trained to teach a language, but they are not told how to carry out this process because it is only learned by experiencing. It means that teachers have the theoretical knowledge, but they may not have the appropriate methodology, techniques, and even materials to teach a language. Regarding this issue, Richards and Lockhart (1996) stated:

Experience is insufficient as a basis for development: While experience is a key component for a teacher development, it may be insufficient itself as a basis of professional growth. Many aspects of teaching occur day in and day out, and

teachers develop routines and strategies for handling these recurring dimensions of teaching.... Experience is the starting point for teacher development, but in order for experience to play a productive role, it is necessary to examine this experience systematically. (p. 3)

For that reason, teachers must be trained to teach in a language lab, and schools must supply the instructional aids to help students learn English with the best conditions.

Free listening exercises online to work in the lab.

There are different web pages that offer free alternatives for practicing listening.

Following there is a list of some of those pages, which can be helpful for working in a language lab.

<http://www.eslwonderland.com>: This page contains various listening activities for use in the lab. Exercises include listening to descriptions and solving exercises such as fill in the blanks and multiple choice.

<http://www.esl-lab.com>: Also called “Randall’s ESL Cyber Listening Lab.” This webpage contains various listening quizzes where students have to listen to everyday conversations with adult and children's voices. The quizzes include pre-listening, listening, and post-listening exercises as well as vocabulary activities.

<http://www.elllo.org/>: (English Listening Lesson Library Online): In this web page listening activities include videos of people discussing different topics with quizzes and transcripts, free MP3 files with conversations, vocabulary tasks, language notes, and printables.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/index.shtml> (BBC Learning English):

This site includes videos on different topics with printable worksheets.

<http://www.eviews.net/>: This site offers a range of listening activities in MP3 format that include interviews of people with different accents. Exercises include listening comprehension and transcription in PDF format plus a prepared lesson plan.

<http://www.ompersonal.com.ar/omaudio/contenidotematico.htm>: This web site has 40 conversations in OM AUDIO format for elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. Each unit contains Spanish translation (except for the advanced level), grammar focus, activities with online answers, links -related to the topic, and audio files.

www.eslgold.com: Presents various links for listening practices, videos on pronunciation, links to listening websites, links to videos (TV commercials, broadcasts, etc), textbooks recommendations (how to find recommended books for practicing listening), and recommendations for practicing listening.

<http://www.dailyesl.com/>: This site offers short conversation starters for everyday situations in audio recording and scripts. Each topic includes discussion questions and situations for online investigations as well as PDF worksheets.

<http://www.englishclub.com>: Provides links for practicing listening by listening to television or radio news in English on the computer, some classic pieces of poetry in MP3 format, online dictations, and videos for learning English online.

<http://www.eslfast.com/robot/>: 1,500 ESL/EFL conversations on 25 topics are found on this page. They include the scripts and the audio files for practicing English.

<http://www.eflnet.com>: Supplies seven topics for advanced levels. Students have to listen to an article and answer questions. The answers can be checked online.

<http://www.english-test.net/toEIC/listening/autobahn.html>: in this website, learners can find 200 conversations used for practicing listening for the TOEIC test. They include audio files

in MP3 format, activities online and in PDF format as well as listening comprehension transcripts.

<http://www.real-english.com>: Presents English lessons on different topics through videos.

There are lesson plans and recommendations for teachers to work with these videos. Lessons are designed for beginners, intermediate, and advanced students.

<http://www.rong-chang.com/listen.htm>: This website offers links to sites that include listening and speaking activities, free online software, online radio news, online videos, and other sites.

<http://www.mansioningles.com/listening00.htm>: It provides 50 descriptions for beginners, intermediate, and advanced learners. Descriptions include audio files as well as fill in the blanks exercises based on them.

<http://www.saberingles.com.ar/listening/index.html>: It offers some listening comprehension exercises where students have to listen to different descriptions and fill in the blanks based on what they hear. It includes online evaluation and mp3 format.

<http://www.parapal-online.co.uk/listening.html>: This website provides multiple-choice exercises with audio files for higher-level students.

<http://www.examenglish.com/FCE/fcelistening.htm>: Presents several situations that students have to hear to solve multiple choice exercises and complete sentences.

Both students and teachers are free to download materials from these webpages for educational purposes. They are free in the web and can be an important tool for practicing listening in the lab.

Activities that can be carried out in language labs.

Traditional language labs tend to be used in listening and repeating exercises.

Nonetheless, teachers can adapt or modify any activity and use it in the lab. Completing a

task, solving a problem, or giving an opinion are part of the activities students and teachers can carry out in labs. These types of activities can be identified in the language lab activities described by Huntley (1998) as follows:

1. Students record dialog journals to the teacher on tape.
2. Students study each one of a series of similar calendar or magazine pictures (pets, cars, landscapes etc.) and record a description of the material on their blank tape. Students listen to each other's tapes to identify the picture.
3. Students build or make something based on taped instructions (origami, Lego, paper airplanes etc.)
4. Students listen to a problem (personal, academic, societal, environmental etc.) on tape and then record a solution. Students then listen to each other's solutions.
5. Students record directions to a place of their choosing on a map. Other students listen to the directions, trace the route on a map, and attempt to find the correct destination.
6. Students record a schedule of their day/week/weekend, and other students listen and complete a chart.
7. Groups of students record the weather forecast for different times of the year. Other students listen and complete a weather chart.
8. Students record directions for locating various objects/words/numbers in a grid. Other students then listen to the tape and complete the grid.
9. Students listen to a series of sentences about a process or narrative in random order. They must collaborate on reconstructing the correct order of sentences, and then, record the story/process in their own words.

10. Students tell a chain story by starting a story with two or three sentences at one tape recorder, moving on to the next tape recorder to listen to the beginning of another student's story and adding several more sentences. When the process is completed, students can listen to and comment on the completed stories. (para. 6)

In short, numerous activities can be carried out in the lab to help students gain valuable language skills. Incorporating these types of activities into the language teaching process is an innovative way of teaching, but all of them must be planned in advance and follow the correct sequence. When working in the lab, teachers must keep in mind that the focus of the class is the learner, and everything has to be planned based on students' needs. Materials and activities must be reliable and enough with clear instructions to guide students toward a goal. It is important to encourage learners to work independently and provide feedback after each activity. When the teacher uses the language lab proficiently, students are motivated and engaged in their own learning process.

Teacher Training

English teaching in Costa Rican high schools started with the collaboration of foreign teachers due to the lack of graduated teachers from local universities. As a result of Costa Rica's relationships with other countries, English became a priority in the economic field. Thus, the government's necessity of English speakers to establish stronger and permanent associations with those nations favored the inclusion of English as a required subject in the educational curricula.

The preparation of teachers of English as a profession in Costa Rica dates back to 1954. According to Córdoba, Coto, and Ramírez (2005), the Universidad de Costa Rica gave teachers "the first training based on the Audio-lingual Method. However, it was until 1957 when English became part of the curricula with the opening of teaching English as a major in

the College of Education of the University of Costa Rica” (pp. 4-5). Then, this method was implemented in public high schools with the purpose of developing linguistic skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In the context of the Costa Rican public education system, during many years teachers of English were aided with textbooks and programs that guided them in the teaching process. However, due to the demands of the current world, teacher’s formation has become an imperative in recent years. In this regard, Richards and Nunan (1990) expressed:

One interpretation of the development of Second Language Teaching in the last twenty years or so is that a substantial degree of professionalization has taken place. Thus, the theoretical basis of the field has move from the study of phonetics and grammar theory – once considered as necessary (and sometimes sufficient) basis to launch a student into a career as a language teacher- to include the study of pedagogical grammar, discourse analysis, second language acquisition, classroom – based research, interlanguage syntax and phonology, curriculum and syllabus design, and language testing. (p. 3)

It means that teachers of second languages must be fully professional in terms of language knowledge and appropriate language teaching methodology. For that reason, professional teaching practice is a very relevant process that requires intensive training.

As it is well known, English language teaching is not a simple procedure. Considering this, Richards and Nunan (1990) affirmed that “good teaching is a complex, abstract phenomenon comprising clusters of skills, such as those related to classroom management and lesson structuring” (p. 1). For that reason, educational teacher training should prepare them to overcome future classroom situations and offer them a theoretical basis regarding the teaching of a language. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that

specialization in universities is not enough to have a professional preparation and an appropriate teaching performance. Teachers need to have broad knowledge about different aspects related to teaching.

As time passes, educational methods, approaches, and strategies become obsolete and some teachers easily forget what they learned at the university, theory turns into vague memories, and, in most cases, it differs a lot from the real contexts. In fact, most teachers understand the magnitude of teaching just when they come to the classroom and develop a lesson. To this aspect, Richards and Nunan (1990) assured that successful language teaching requires both education and practical training. It means that “the effectiveness of both the purely educational and the practical training aspects of the teacher preparation program can be increased by not maintaining the strict separation of these two components that is typical in most programs” (p. 134). Through experience, educators may enhance integration of theory and practice. This experience becomes a very relevant opportunity for teachers to visualize many aspects involved in teaching, which are not reflected in theory.

Based on the information stated above, it is noticeable that practice is essential regarding teachers’ performance in teaching a second language. Therefore, teachers should not see the conclusion of a major in the university as their ending of professional instruction. With the purpose of improving teachers’ training, the Costa Rican government has carried out a series of workshops guided to Mathematics, Computer Science training, and professional development of English teachers.

Teachers of English need training in different areas, and this has been an essential issue taken into account by the Ministry of Public Education in Costa Rica. Now, that is shown by the declaration of the Executive Ordinance N. 18752- MEP that officialized the creation of the National Center of Didactics (CENADI) (MEP, 2004, p. 82). This organism

was established to be in charge of educators' training at the national level. Its main purpose is to offer teachers a permanent formation, to detect training necessities, and give professional updating.

Teacher training regarding technology.

Technology is part of many people's lives. It is everywhere and changes constantly. In the world of education, it has had a great impact because it offers many advantages particularly for foreign language education. In fact, the incorporation of technology in education brought about some changes regarding teaching. As a result, teachers have to be able to handle technological equipment. Regarding this aspect, Navas (2006) declared the following:

During the history of language teaching... technology has always played a key role.

In the twentieth century, a wide variety of electronic devices had been used in order to make the process of learning a foreign or second language easier due to a new approach. It was obvious that the use of audio in the classroom began to gain territory rapidly. (p. 4)

One of the most advanced uses of technology in education refers to the implementation of language labs. In accordance with the previous idea, the same author declared that "when the language lab started gaining popularity the lab spread not only in language institutes but also in high-schools and universities due to the increasing interest in learning other languages" (p. 5). In Costa Rica, the implementation of language labs is a privilege for some public high schools, students, and teachers.

Even though the lab is a very highly developed tool, some teachers consider that it has some shortcomings because they are mostly associated with the computer science

subject. Some of these disadvantages are described by Howatt and Widdowson (2004) as follows:

The audio-visual methods had their own technological rival, however in the form of the early language laboratory which came on to the scene at much the same time. It was a major installation and the cost distorted school equipment budgets for a long time, but its initial impact was weakened by the rather old-fashioned drill-based learning which it promoted. (p. 249)

On the other hand, some teachers think technology's usage is very complex and worry about managing technological devices because they are not sure about the knowledge they have in this field. As a matter of fact, "language labs require better-prepared teachers who can put the new equipment and techniques to good use as well as conduct the class. When used properly, labs can greatly increase the effectiveness of good teachers (Lado, 1964, p. 174). In the case of Costa Rica, the lack of knowledge can be the reason why some teachers continue teaching with just boards and markers.

In sum, the use of technology in the classroom provides plenty of educational resources for students and teachers. However, there are some factors such as teacher training opportunities, use of technological equipment, appropriate materials, economic sources, and others that may affect the use of an English lab. Regarding this, Carlson (2002) pointed out that:

Teacher training in the use and application of technology is the key determining factor for improved student performance (in terms of both knowledge acquisition and skills development enabled by technology). Educational technology is not, and never will be, transformative on its own – it requires teachers who can integrate technology into the curriculum and use it to improve student learning. (p. 7)

Consequently, it can be inferred that training opportunities are necessary to use English labs successfully.

Technical Education in Costa Rica

Technical education in Costa Rica, at a formal level, is a recent phenomenon that was born as a result of the demand of new competent labor force. Regarding this, Argüelles and Gonczi (2000) stated that it was born as an organic process in the last fifty years. In fact, in 1957 the first technical high school was officially created dependent on the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) (p. 85). Currently, Technical education is offered in 127 high schools through thirty two modalities. The financial support for technical high schools is regulated by the law 7372. Technical education has the following study modalities: agriculture, industry, and services. Among the specialties offered are Ecological Tourism, Secretarial Management, Occupational Health, Tourism, Computer Sciences, Electromechanics, Electrotechnics, General Electronics, Industrial Electronics, Precision Mechanics and Microelectronics (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2004, pp. 15-32). All of them prepare students with technical basic and necessary theory to be put into practice throughout the development of projects, investigation, and the application of technology. According to Ministerio de Educación Pública:

The plan of studies of the Diversified Education is composed of three nuclei:

Common, Technological, and Complementary. The Common nucleus is composed of the subjects: Spanish, Social Studies, Mathematics, Sciences, Foreign Language,

Psychology and Philosophy. The complementary nucleus: It is constituted by a group of activities of eminently formative and recreational character. The

Technological nucleus: It has different purposes, in this way; in the academic branch, it offers to the students' educational opportunities that allow them to acquire useful

abilities for the domestic life, auxiliary techniques for their future professional life, and a relative and appropriate training for their incorporation to the productive life.

(p. 16)

Thus, one of the main purposes of the technical nucleus is to train students to be part of the labor force.

Students of technical high schools must study six years to obtain a certificate in technical education. After finishing the twelfth level, students should carry out a supervised practicum or a graduation project to obtain half of a technician title; similarly, they should apply for the national standardized test to conclude the Diversified Education.

This cycle offers the students varied alternatives to satisfy their interests and needs. Moreover, this educational modality offers students two options once they graduate: The first one is to continue towards higher education or to be incorporated in the labor market. This is the reason why students are offered integral development with specific modalities through which the strengthening of their abilities and skills can help them to face realities of life in a world where competitiveness is a daily issue.

A very significant advantage of technical education lies in the possibility of studying the same modalities in the university and finding a job faster than other students who studied in academic high schools.

Additionally, technical education's quality has been improved during the last years with the integration of technology and modalities in the curriculum, and this fits well with recent economy and job demand; however, some areas need to be reinforced as the mastery of a second language, more infrastructure, teacher training, and a closer relationship between technical high schools and local enterprises.

Technical education is centered on the social, economic, and educational needs of the place in which the high school is located with the purpose of changing or improving any situation in favor of students, their families, and even the community. Educational programs, as well as scientific progress and high schools, are organized and developed to achieve technical education objectives.

In the region of Pérez Zeledón, there are five technical high schools: Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro, Colegio Técnico Profesional General Viejo, Colegio Técnico Profesional Pejibaye, Colegio Técnico Profesional Platanares, and Colegio Técnico Profesional Ambientalista Isaías Retana Arias (CTP AIRA). They offer twenty three specialties including Call Center, Accounting, Computer Science, Precision Mechanics, Agroecology, Gardening, and Tourism. All of these institutions teach conversational English in Third and Fourth cycles.

Through law 7372, the Department of Professional Technical Education of Costa Rica provides economic resources to all technical schools to carry out different projects such as equipping specific labs in different specialties. That is the reason why technical high schools have the possibility to invest in language labs. In the case of Pérez Zeledón, only Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro, Colegio Técnico Profesional General Viejo, and Colegio Técnico Profesional Pejibaye have language labs.

Conversational English teaching.

The use of communicative language is centered on the effective use of language for practical communication purposes. It is achieved through the learning of topics related to the basic needs of people, realization in time, society and in the national and international surroundings. A sample topic is exchanging information on health: the symptoms and prevention of common and more recent diseases. Likewise, drug abuse is another topic for

discussion in the English class. Furthermore, the syllabus takes into account other relevant areas of a well-rounded education, such as the job market and careers in terms of active participation in the development of society.

Regarding mediation activities developed in the English for conversation lessons, students should explore, experiment, discover, and reconstruct their knowledge. The teacher must provide similar opportunities for everybody and take into consideration the participants' needs, problems, and expectations. According to MEP (2003), learning is described as:

a comprehensible, dynamic and meaningful process for those who learn. It is guided by the interest shown by the learner towards its acquisition and it is orientated to the acquisition of learning. From this perspective, the teacher is the person who organizes and guides the learning situations, taking into account not only the students characteristics (background, learning styles, and others.) But also the curriculum, and the cultural and natural context. (p.10)

The main emphasis of English for Conversation is the use of language for communication, but it does not mean the exclusion of any of the basic linguistic skills. On the contrary, all the skills should be integrated and put into practice in every activity carried out in the classroom. It means that the teacher should apply different teaching procedures by emphasizing the different skills: reading, speaking, writing, and listening. To this point, the MEP declared in the English for Conversation program that “equal amount of classroom time should be devoted to the development of each of the four linguistic skills. In this sense, any learning activity in the development of a topic (should take into consideration the integration of these skills)” (2003, p. 10).

Regarding listening, that program established the following main principles for assessing listening:

1. The language used should be delivered at normal speed.
2. The input should be delivered twice.
3. The language used should be as authentic as possible.
4. When using recorders, they should be of excellent quality.
5. Recording equipment has to be in excellent conditions.
6. The setting should be free of noise. (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2003, p. 23)

This same program establishes 17 objectives; only one of them is clearly related to listening which is “to encourage the development of listening comprehension abilities in such a way that the students can identify specific details and understand information from an oral text” (p. 23). The aim of each program is to aid teachers with a general view of the objectives, skills, and topics that must be developed. Each teacher of English is responsible for the activities, experiences, and situations that take place in the classroom.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of chapter three is to present the qualitative methodology that was used to answer the research questions mentioned in Chapter One. These questions are meaningful since they deal with practical problems and lead to an improvement in the teaching learning process. The structure of this chapter starts describing the methodology and the type of research. Next, the setting where the study took place is clearly defined, and the population's information is established according to the research purpose and needs. This chapter also presents the role of the researchers throughout the development of the survey, the data collection process, and the data analysis part that supported the findings of the study.

Research Design

This research was based on qualitative principles that focus on descriptions, observations, impressions, and numbers. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) offered the following definition for this type of research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices ... turn the world into a series of representations including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

The current survey is embedded in a qualitative design because it was aimed at analyzing how the English foreign language listening activities are being implemented in the language lab when teaching conversational English.

The kind of research developed in this paper is a case study. A case study is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as, “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is, “in effect, your unit of analysis” (p. 25). This study took place in a very specific context, focusing its attention on language labs, activities, materials, and teachers.

Through this case study, it was possible to analyze how listening exercises are being implemented in the language labs when teaching conversational English. According to Baxter and Jack (2008) “a case study enables the researcher to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ type questions, while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated” (p. 556). In this sense, this study attempted to analyze how lab conditions influence the applicability of listening, how well trained teachers are, how available listening materials are, and how frequent listening activities are carried out. These correspond to the characteristics of a case study. The purpose of answering these questions was to have a better understanding of some factors that influence the applicability of the listening skill in language labs.

In order to gather the necessary information for answering the research questions, the case study allowed the use of a variety of sources. To this point, Baxter and Jack (2008) highlighted:

Potential data sources may include, but are not limited to documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation... In case study, data from these multiple sources are then converged in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Each data source is one piece of the “puzzle,” with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon. (p. 554)

The sources included in this investigation involved observations, questionnaires, and documentation analysis during the data collection process. All these instruments were extremely important to obtain the findings of the study.

Site Selection

This work was carried out in the Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro, which is located in Pérez Zeledón. The reasons why this institution was chosen to develop this research are that it has four language labs equipped with some technology. All students have the opportunity to take Conversational English lessons in these labs every two weeks according to an established schedule. These lessons must emphasize the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Another important reason is the participants' willingness to cooperate with this research.

This high school was founded on February 1974 as El Liceo Nuevo de Pérez Zeledón. At that time, there were six seventh grade groups composed of 189 students. The institution was located in the building that belonged to Pedro Pérez primary school and worked just in the afternoons.

In 1976 El Liceo Nuevo de Pérez Zeledón became Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro following an industrial model. At the time, three specific specialties were taught: accounting, secretarial management, and electro-mechanics. It was until 1980 that this institution had its own building.

Currently, this school has 879 students; 588 of them in third cycle, and 321 in fourth cycle. Its staff consists of 88 teachers, eleven administrative workers, eight janitors, three cooks, three coordinators, and five security guards. Regarding infrastructure, it is divided as stated in the table 3.1 (source Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro, administrative offices).

Table 3.1.

Infrastructure of Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro

Room	Quantity
Academic Classrooms	26
Administrative offices	04
Auditorium	01
Cafeterias	01
Coordination offices	02
Computer labs	04
Dining rooms	01
Gymnasiums	02
Industrial workshops	03
Language labs	04
Library	01
Parking lots	03
Photocopy center	01
Principal's office	02
Secretarial offices	01

Note. The information gathered in this table was provided by the administrative personnel of the high school.

Participant Selection

Regarding the selection of the participants, the researchers selected seven English teachers as a sample. In qualitative research, Richards and Lewis (2003) declared that “only a sample of a population is selected from any given study. The study’ research objectives and the characteristics of the study population (such as size and diversity) determine which and how many people to select” (p. 5). In this study, the number of participants was carefully chosen based on the different aspects involved.

The method applied was the quota sampling since the participants selected have certain characteristics as experience, knowledge, or insights into the research paper. In simple wording, participants were chosen because they work as English teachers and teach

conversational English lessons at laboratories, and mainly they improved the study with their perspectives. Upon dealing with the contributors, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) remarked that “selecting research settings and populations involves identifying those which, by virtue of their relationship with the research questions, are able to provide the most relevant, comprehensive and rich information” (p. 49). For this research, the teachers chosen provided significant information regarding the training they have to use technology, the use and availability of listening materials, and the frequency of the listening activities carried out in the lab.

These teachers work at C.T.P. San Isidro, teaching conversational English, all of them have a university degree in English Teaching. As it is seen in table 3.2., five informants hold a Licentiate’s degree, 1 of them a Bachelor’s degree, and the other a Master’s degree. There are no teachers with a Doctorate’s degree. All of them have some experience as teachers of English and as teachers of public schools. Also, the majority of the respondents holds a tenure condition, while the other 3 teachers are associated. Only five of these teachers accepted to be observed during 4 lessons of 60 minutes. Four of the teachers observed were in charged of teaching conversational English for eighth level and the other one was teaching seventh level.

Table 3.2.

Academic degree, experience, and employment condition of the informants

<i>Informants' Data</i>	
<i>Academic Degree</i>	<i>Total of teachers who have received training</i>
Bachelor	1
Licentiate	5
Master	1
Doctorate	0
Others	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Teaching Experience</i>	<i>Total of teachers</i>
Less than one year	0
1-5 years	1
5-10 years	3
10+ years	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Experience in Public Schools</i>	<i>Total of teachers</i>
Less than one year	0
1-5 years	2
5-10 years	3
10+ years	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Employment Condition</i>	<i>Total of teachers</i>
Associate	3
Tenure	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>7</i>

Note. Information taken from the questionnaires administered to the teachers.

In a similar vein, the technical coordinator of the school provided relevant information of each language lab of the school so that the researchers could obtain information about the quantity and conditions of the technological devices in each language lab. The record book of each lab was available to obtain information about the listening activities that the teachers implement in the language lab based on the carousel technique and the frequency with which labs were used.

Role of the Researchers

This study was carried out by two researchers who have the same academic level; both hold a Bachelor's degree in the English Teaching Major from Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica and a Licentiate's Degree in Education From Universidad Castro Carazo. In the same way, these investigators were working on the present survey to complete their graduation project to obtain the Licentiate's Degree in Applied Linguistics in English at Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, Pérez Zeledón, Brunca Extension.

Both researchers work as teachers of English at Colegio Técnico Profesional San Isidro where this study took place. In relation to the researchers' experience at the moment of conducting the study, researchers have taught academic, conversational, and technical English for about 14 years. Both teachers have experience working in language labs as teachers too. In this sense, the researchers contributed to the study by bringing their personal experience, and knowledge about teaching and learning English in language labs related to listening skill.

The researchers' experience was used as an element to justify and lead the development of the study since working in language labs is not a simple teaching activity. In this sense, Huntley (1998) stated that "many existing labs are being underused because of the inadequacy of training for teachers and because of the lack of communicative materials available for use in a lab situation" (para. 1). Therefore, based on their experience, the literature review, and the collection and analysis of information, the researchers attempted to analyze some factors that influenced the implementation of listening activities in laboratories.

Researchers performed a non-participant role during the study. Their role consisted of observing, analyzing, and describing the participants' way of teaching, the implementation of

listening stages, students' involvement, use of technology, and the activities carried out when teaching English. Moreover, a record book of the use of laboratories was analyzed to establish the frequency teachers work at the labs, the activities applied, and the equipment used when developing listening exercises. Furthermore, some checklists were used by the researchers to know the quantity and conditions of technological and non- instructional materials.

Data Collection

For the purpose of collecting data, this research involved the use of a structured observation checklist in the language labs to assess their conditions. A second observation checklist was administered to determine the usefulness and applicability of language labs in the implementation of listening activities. Another observation checklist was used as a way of gathering data to support this research. Five teachers were observed three times during 4 60- minute lessons to establish the role of listening comprehension in the classroom. Also, a questionnaire was administered to seven teachers in order to know their opinions regarding the application of listening activities in language labs.

The structured observation checklist (Appendix A) was designed by the researchers with the purpose of assessing the language labs to know the applicability of listening. It consisted of a checklist that reveals the number and conditions of the technological devices, non-instructional materials, and didactic materials in each language lab. This instrument provided the researchers with specific information about the available equipment used in the labs to carry out listening activities.

In each language laboratory, the observers were able to place a checkmark next to the condition of each piece of equipment and materials available. The conditions could be excellent, regular, deficient, or non-existent. Through this instrument, it was also possible to

gather information about the arrangement of each language lab. According to the carousel classroom proposed by the Ministry of Public Education, each language lab must be divided into six different environments such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, independent studies, and special attention. In this observation, it was possible to identify the stations that were clearly defined in each lab.

The second instrument called checklist for the analysis of the record book (Appendix B) was a rating scale checklist designed with the purpose of analyzing the record book used in each lab to have evidence of the teachers' attendance to labs, activities developed, equipment used, maintenance's report as well as instructional and non -instructional material applied during lessons. This analysis was done to establish validity and obtain well-supported findings of the listening activities that the teachers implemented in the language lab based on the carousel technique. In the first part of the analysis, it was possible to identify the frequency teachers report maintenance and condition of the equipment. Similarly, this analysis revealed the frequency with which teachers carried out Conversational English lessons in the lab and the equipment they used.

The structured observation checklist (Appendix C) involved direct observation of three classes for each teacher in order to gather information about the listening activities being carried out in the language labs. The observation checklist included a list of aspects to be checked. These aspects were related to the listening stages developed (pre-listening, while listening, and post-listening), listening activities, and students' involvement during the class. Through this instrument, it was possible to observe the classroom arrangement during the carousel class as well as the materials and equipment used by the teachers. To fill out this instrument the observers had to check the appropriate blank: YES, NO, and jot down relevant information about the class.

The questionnaire for teachers (Appendix D) was administered to seven teachers of Conversational English with the purpose of discovering the training they have to use technology and of assessing the use and availability of listening materials. It also helped to know the frequency of the listening activities carried out in the lab. With these questionnaires it was possible to “deal with literate respondents ... to get a high response rate (at least 70%), and the questions did not require a face-to-face interview or the use of visual aids” (Bernard, 2002, p.14). The respondents had to answer a closed format questionnaire by choosing an answer among different options given in each question with the purpose of gathering quantitative and qualitative information.

To detect problems in the questionnaires, they were tried out with similar respondents to those who replied in the investigation. All the problems detected were revised and tested once more.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the first instrument, which is about quantity and condition of technological devices in the language labs, were analyzed by comparing relevant information to theory related to the carousel technique and the minimal requirements established by the Ministry of Public Education for teaching English in the labs.

The information gathered from the record book was summarized in graphs to show the rate of the maintenance given to the equipment and its condition as well as the frequency of the use of language labs and equipment.

The third instrument covered the evaluation of five classes of Conversational English, three per teacher. A holistic rubric was used to assess skill focus, listening stages, listening tasks, students' involvement, use of technology, and use of instructional materials. The analysis of this evaluation was represented in a description.

In the case of the information gathered from questionnaires, a descriptive analysis of the results was used to report frequencies and numbers. It means that a statistical description of the numbers was made to summarize the data about teachers' training, material used for listening, and frequency of the carried out in the language labs. This summary was illustrated in tables and graphs.

The process began with a review of the results in order to ensure accurate data before starting with the analysis. After administering the survey, the responses of the participants were analyzed, and this process was followed by an accurate interpretation of the results. These results were summarized in graphs and charts.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation of the listening skill at language labs in conversational English classes. In order to support this investigation, some factors such as labs' conditions, their usefulness and applicability, teachers training, availability of listening materials, and frequency listening activities were also studied.

This chapter summarizes, arranges, and transforms data into information that responds to the research questions proposed for this study. The information taken from the structured observation checklists of each language lab, the analysis of the record book of each lab, the observation of five lessons, and the questionnaires administered to five conversational English teachers was triangulated. This chapter is concerned with some fundamental analysis of data from the different instruments administered.

Language Lab Conditions that Determine the Applicability of the Listening Activities

In order to determine the conditions of the language labs of C.T.P San Isidro, an exhausting examination of each language lab was done through an observation checklist designed by the researchers based on theoretical information and by the analysis of the record book of each language lab. By using the checklist, the researchers gathered data regarding the condition and amount of equipment available in each lab, the instructional and non-instructional equipment used, and the stations' arrangement.

Through the second instrument, it was possible to know the conditions of each lab based on teachers' reports. These reports were taken from the record book of each language lab, which included information related to equipment use and maintenance to ensure that all equipment required for working in the language lab was operating efficiently at all times.

Based on the MEP's regulations, each language lab must have a series of technological devices because "technology offers new ways of teaching and learning, and provides new ways for all involved in education to be openly accountable to parents,

communities, and students”(Noeth & Volkov, 2004, p.1). For this reason, the first part of the analysis was related to the technology available in each language lab. Through the analysis, it was possible to know that currently the four language labs are equipped with most of the minimal technological devices required by the Ministry of Public Education (see Table 4.1). However, there are still requirements that are not available in the labs such as having a projector and a scanner.

Table 4.1.

Information about the number of technological devices available

English language lab's requirements	Technological devices available in the language labs			
	Lab #1	Lab #2	Lab #3	Lab #4
1 Printer	1	1	1	1
1 Scanner	0	0	1	1
5 Computers	5	5	5	5
1 Microphone	5	5	5	5
1 Television set	1	1	1	1
2 Radio recorders	5	5	6	6
1 DVD	1	1	1	1
3 Voice Recorders	4	4	4	4
1 Projector	0	0	0	0
1 Software	1	1	1	1

Note. The information in this table was taken from the observation checklist obtained from each lab.

Another important aspect that was taken into account in the current study is related to the non-instructional equipment available in each language lab because they are tools for assisting the teaching process. The first instrument evidenced that all language labs fulfill the MEP's regulations in general. Nonetheless, all of them lack air conditioning, two of them do not have a file cabinet, and the group-work tables are not enough in each lab.

The information gathered from the checklist and the record book about the conditions of non- instructional materials and the technological devices was compared and analyzed. The study revealed that part of the available non-instructional equipment in the language labs, such as chairs and computer desks, is not in excellent conditions. In fact, only 70 percent of the furniture in lab 1 is in the expected conditions. Unfortunately, (as shown in Table 4.2), the situation is similar in the rest of the labs.

Table 4.2
Non- instructional equipment condition

Condition	Lab 1	Lab 2	Lab 3	Lab 4
Excellent	70%	60%	50%	50%
Regular	10%	20%	40%	40%
Deficient	0%	0%	0%	0%
Non- existent	20%	20%	10%	10%

Note. Excellent = the equipment can be used without any problem, Regular= the equipment can be used but present some trouble, Deficient = equipment cannot be used, Non- existent= the

In the case of technological devices, the observation checklist showed that most of this equipment such as the DVD, speakers, TV, headphones, voice recorders, and radio recorders are in excellent conditions. It means that teachers have the opportunity to develop listening activities in the classroom with any of these devices. Nonetheless, there is still a significant percentage of equipment (see Table 4.3) in regular conditions, and there are even some pieces that are deficient or non-existent, for example, a scanner, projector, and printers. Another important aspect to take into account is that the computers and Internet connection are in regular conditions in all labs, affecting in this case the Internet accessibility in the high

school's labs. In this way, most students cannot have access to the innumerable websites that can be used for practicing listening.

Table 4.3

Information about technology condition in each language lab

Condition	Lab 1	Lab 2	Lab 3	Lab 4
Excellent	70%	60%	60%	50%
Regular	20%	30%	30%	40%
Deficient	0%	0%	10%	10%
Non- existent	10%	10%	0%	0%

Note. Excellent = technological devices can be used without any problem, Regular= technological devices can be used but present some trouble, Deficient = technological devices cannot be used, Non-existent= the technological device is not available in the lab.

To reinforce the previous information, an analysis of the record book was done. This examination attempted to describe the equipment condition and maintenance during the years 2014 and 2015 in the four language labs. In this way, it was possible to have a general view of the problems presented in each language lab every time teachers attempted to use them because the observation carried out by the researchers only revealed the physical condition of the equipment at that specific time.

The study revealed that in 2014 teachers worked in 59 opportunities in lab 1, and in several times they reported problems with computers, the Internet, and software. Concerning language lab 2, teachers reported problems with computers, software, and the Internet during the 51 opportunities in which they worked in the lab. During 2015, these labs reported problems with three computers, the Internet connection, software, and recorders again.

In the case of lab 3, it also presented problems with the equipment in both years. The main problems were related to computers, the Internet connection, and software. Based on the findings, computers had problems 50% of the times teachers attempted to use them during 2014 and 29, 1% of the times during 2015. However, the main problem was related to the software because it did not work during 2015. Figure 4.1 depicts this situation.

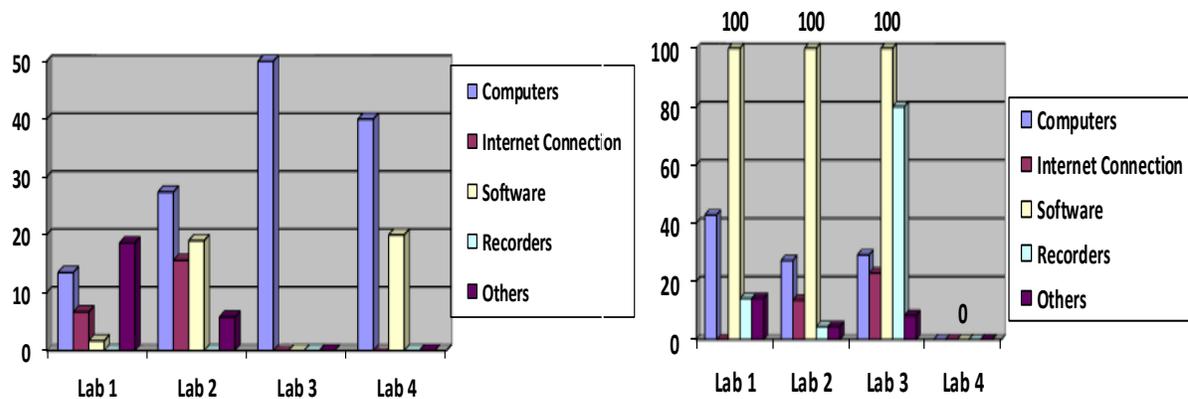


Figure 4.1. The graph on the left shows the registered problems in each language lab during 2014, whereas the graph on the right represents the problems reported during 2015. Percentages represent each category in a Linkert scale based on the frequency teachers use each lab. The information presented in these graphs was taken from the registered book.

Similar to the rest of the labs, lab 4 also had several problems associated with the equipment. In 2014 computers reported problems 40% of the times teachers tried to use them, and the software 20% of the times. Unfortunately, the record book showed that the equipment was not used during 2015, even when the lab was used in 50 opportunities.

Regarding maintenance, it is important to keep in mind that it “is not only useful in the scope of preventing breakdowns, and thus lost time that could be spent in use properly, but it can be extremely helpful to the productivity of a machine” (Dowler, 2015, para. 4). Unfortunately, the record book evidenced that in both years laboratories 2 and 3 rarely received some maintenance while laboratories 1 and 4 never received any kind of

maintenance. This means that the conditions of the equipment in each language lab must be improved according to the MEP's regulations to enhance English teaching in language labs.

Another problem found in all labs deals with their arrangement. To promote language learning, the MEP demands the application of the Carousel technique through a series of well-defined environments. However, in this case all language labs were not labeled and arranged according to the MEP's regulations.

Usefulness and Applicability of the Language Labs in the Implementation of Listening Activities

This study aimed to describe some factors that may influence the implementation of listening exercises in language labs. In this case, the researchers observed and analyzed aspects such as the development of listening stages during the class, student's involvement in listening activities, use of technology by teachers and students, classroom arrangement of the technological devices and furniture, and the use of instructional materials to put listening exercises into practice. In order to gather data on these aspects, a checklist was designed and used to observe classes of three collaborative teachers in three opportunities during four lessons of 60 minutes. In other words, each teacher was observed during 12 lessons in conversational English lessons.

Through the observations to each teacher, the researchers could notice the procedure the observed teachers followed to carry out listening exercises in the language labs. The first component observed was the organization of the listening exercises in their different corresponding stages. In an analysis performed to the teachers' methodology, it was found that not all of the teachers followed the proper principles when carrying out a listening task. Even though the collaborative teachers had enough time to spend in each phase of a listening exercise, they sometimes skipped a stage, mainly the pre-activity and post activity. Most of

the teachers put emphasis on the performance of the while -activity as a main goal to accomplish during the listening task.

In relation to the students' involvement in the listening exercises, they were willing to participate in the activities. However, when teachers gave listening instructions orally, some students did not understand them and some of them needed an individual explanation to follow the instructions. When students worked on the computers and internet, they were advised not to spend time accessing YouTube, Facebook or other social networks because they were distracted from the activities and were not involved in the activities. Therefore, the teachers had to monitor some aspects such as task performance and use of technology. Some students did not finish the exercises on time, and some activities were not checked because of the lack of organization of time.

Regarding the use of technology by students and teachers, most students showed abilities for handling technological devices such as computers, speakers, and headphones. It was interesting that some students helped the teachers to handle situations as the connection of speakers and sound problems with the computers. However, it was not possible to observe the manipulation of other types of technology like Internet web sites, recorders, blue ray, TV, and DVD because they were not used even when they were available in the lab. Unfortunately, when the software did not run well or a computer did not work during the class observed, the teachers preferred to work with photocopies rather than with other available devices such as the blue ray.

When working on language labs, the arrangement of the room must be set based on the application of the carousel technique as it was established by the MEP. However, in this case language labs were not arranged according to the regulations, only labs 1 and 2 followed some of the regulations regarding the arrangement and availability of furniture. To

sum up, the labs had a specific space for listening with five radio recorders, a row of five computers, a group work table, and a corner with a TV and DVD; however, the other macro-skills as speaking, reading, and writing were not clearly set. The labs' stations in all labs are not labeled to allow students to rotate from one station to another and follow a sequence of activities to learn the new language without the teacher's instruction. In sampling words, the purpose of the Ministry of Education to enhance students' competence in all skills is not taking place.

One of the main points to study during the observations was the implementation of listening during the classes. Consequently, the researchers proposed a variety of listening exercises that can be developed at labs as participating in a telephone conversation, eavesdropping on other people's conversations, listening to a talk or lecture, participating in a meeting, seminar, and discussion, taking part in a lesson, participating in a face-to-face conversation, watching a film, play or TV, and listening to radio and listening to announcements in stations, airports. The purpose of the observations carried out was to identify the listening activities the teachers developed in the class and to compare the results with those tasks that were proposed to implement listening in the language labs.

When analyzing the checklist used, the study revealed that teachers carried out similar listening exercises as listening to a talk, dialogue, or conversation, and participating in face-to-face conversations. When developing these exercises, the students mostly filled in the blanks, carried out multiple-choice activities, and answered questions. Only one teacher worked with a video to practice listening, this video was projected on the board with a video beam. In the rest of the cases, students had the opportunity to practice listening just when they applied the activities mentioned. The teachers observed carried out some activities

in the labs that were not proposed by the researchers such as listening to songs. The students were asked to listen to songs to complete some missing information.

Teacher Training to Use Language Labs when Developing Listening Activities

Nowadays technology is changing the way of teaching, and it must be accessible to all students. With the implementation of language labs, students and the teacher have the opportunity to access technological tools to promote real-life events in the classroom according to current individual learning styles. Wilga (1981) referred to the use of the language lab in teaching English as follows:

- 1) For the first time in the history of foreign-language teaching, each student may have the opportunity to hear native speech clearly and distinctly.
- 2) The students may hear this authentic native speech as frequently as he and his teacher desire.
- 3) The taped lesson provides an unchanging and unwearingly model of native speech for the student to imitate.
- 4) In the language laboratory, the student may listen to a great variety of foreign voices both male and female.
- 5) Each student may hear and use the foreign language throughout the laboratory session, instead of wasting time waiting for his turn in a large group, as he does in the usual classroom situation.
- 6) The laboratory frees the teacher from certain problems of class directions and classroom management, enabling him to concentrate on the problems of individual students. (p. 321)

However, in order to achieve successful lessons in the language lab, they must be implemented properly. For this reason, teachers should have certain knowledge and skills to understand how and when technology should be used. Unfortunately, many teachers do not have the proper training for handling technological tools.

To know more about how trained teachers from C.T.P. San Isidro are, seven teachers were asked to answer a questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire contained general data about the seven informants, such as their academic degree, experience, and employment condition. The results showed that all of them have teaching experience and a university degree related to English.

In section B of the questionnaire, informants were requested to answer the following multiple-choice questions: 1- What training have you received? 2- Who offered you this training? 3- How important is teachers' training to carry out listening activities in an English lab? 4- How much competence do you have for handling technological devices in the language lab? 5- In which fields do you need more training for working in a language lab? For questions 1, 2, and 5 respondents could choose more than one alternative.

Regarding the first question, all the informants affirmed that the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) has provided them with some training about the carousel technique, assessment, methodology, and use of the language. Nevertheless, they have never received preparation for handling technological devices in the language lab, accessing electronic addresses, and using online activities. These results evidenced that all requested teachers have some training about teaching English, but they still need more preparation in all areas, especially for technology.

In fact, most of the respondents strongly agreed about the little competence they have for handling technological devices in the language lab (see Figure 4.2). For this reason, most of the informants considered that teachers' training to carry out listening activities in a language lab is extremely necessary.

In this way, it is evidenced that teachers are not effectively using the language laboratory when carrying out listening activities. Thus, it limits students' possibility to be

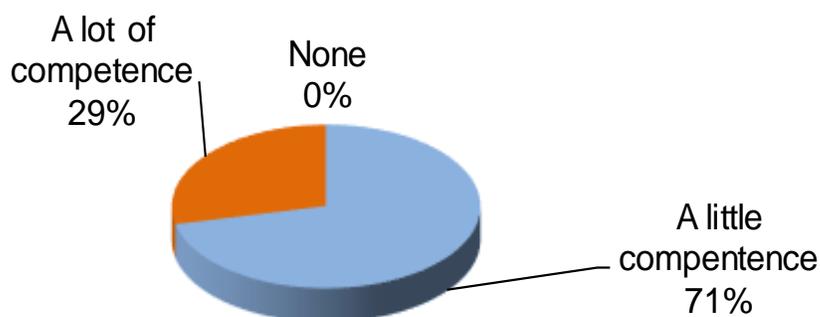


Figure 4.2. Teachers' competence for handling technological devices. Results gotten from the teacher's questionnaire.

exposed to a variety of listening exercises via headphones, videos, computers, the Internet, and many other tools found in the language lab.

Use and Availability of Listening Materials in the Labs

The teaching process in language labs requires previous organization regarding the type and availability of instructional, non-instructional, and technological materials. Planning the use of materials and activities developed in labs prevents waste of time, student lack of interest, and ineffectiveness of resources. In this way, a more productive use of time, a better use of sources, and the accomplishment of listening objectives are guaranteed. In this regard, Dwyer (2010) stated:

Classes in the laboratory must be planned in such a way that the overall objective of the lesson is to bring about a transfer of any mechanical skill taught in the laboratory to a functional context reflecting the way the student has to use that skill outside the classroom in real life. (pp. 7-8)

Another important aspect to take into account is that the use of resources in language labs must be well planned with the purpose of adapting the activities to the available materials. Currently, a variety of materials and technological devices can be useful for teaching English in the labs. Teachers who work in those labs must know about the available resources, their

condition, and their purpose of use. In addition, teachers should know how to use technological devices, how to develop activities in language labs, and strengthen students' abilities and competences to communicate in English.

For that reason, a questionnaire was administered to teachers with the purpose of assessing the use and availability of listening materials that they have in the language labs. As seen in Table 4.4, the analysis of the questionnaire showed that teachers mostly used recorded materials taken from the Internet and adapt them to the content, objective, and the activities.

Table 4.4

Information about the materials teachers use in the language labs

Materials Used in the Language Labs when Implementing listening Activities	
Materials teachers use	Total of teachers who use the material
Recorded materials	6
Videos	5
Listening texts	4
Own recordings	2
Live presentations	1
Others	0
Type of materials used	
Adapting	6
Authentic	4
Non-authentic	3
Adopting	3
Developing	3
Sources teachers use	
Internet	5
High School library	3
Bookstores	2
Others	1

Note. Information gathered from the questionnaire administered to seven teachers

In this particular study, informants were also asked about the difficulties for finding listening materials. An important number of teachers (71%) highlighted that getting listening

materials is an easy activity because nowadays many listen exercises are available on the Internet. However, teachers must know that not all the available materials on the Internet can be useful or proper for teaching listening exercises because there are important aspects such as the language, grammatical aspects, intonation, accents, abbreviations, and the registers that must be considered.

Informants were also requested about the cost of listening materials, the availability and accessibility of listening materials in the lab. Some teachers (57%) agreed that their cost is affordable. However, the availability of listening materials in the language labs as well as the students' accessibility to listening materials is not considered as high. To support this, just 14% of the interviewed teachers considered that this availability is high, while 57% valued it as moderate, and the other 29% as low. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that language labs must provide students and teachers with varied resources to improve listening and other skills. Teachers must not overuse computers or only plan classes based on the Internet connection because there are other available resources to assure a more dynamic and attractive class.

Regarding the use of technology, teachers agreed that students from C.T.P. San Isidro are not very competent in handling technological devices in the lab; most of them just have a basic level (86% of the students). It means that students do not take advantage of the opportunities provided by the language lab. However, the researchers concluded that one factor that affects students' competence for handling technology is the lack of practice using the resources that are in the lab because the activities are limited to some devices.

On the survey, teachers were asked about the websites they mostly use when developing listening activities in the lab. All of the respondents worked mainly with esl-

lab.com (Randall's lab), and just a few work with eslwonderland.com, ello.org, and ompersonal.com (see Figure 4.3).

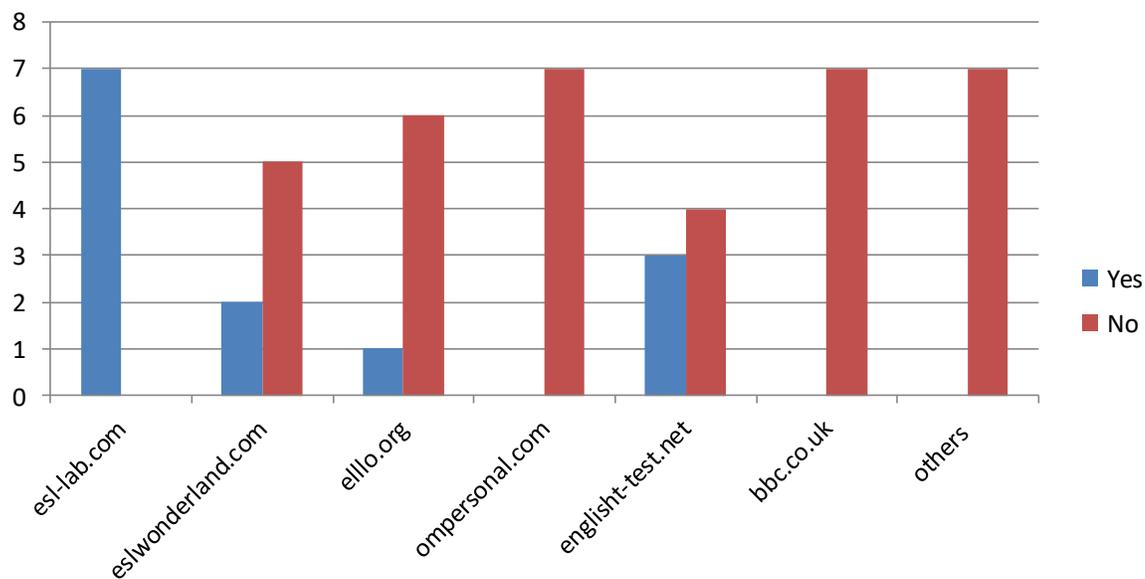


Figure 4.3. Information about the web-sites teachers mostly use in the language labs

Unfortunately, it seems that those are the only websites used in the labs because none of the teachers chose the option that corresponds to other websites. In fact, there are several free websites that can be used for both students and teachers when practicing listening in the lab. Teachers can take advantage of on-line resources to vary and apply more listening exercises.

To sum up, the selection and use of material must be an important factor to take into account when working in language labs because EFL students need to be exposed to authentic material that resembles real life experiences. For that reason, every language lab requires the availability of varied instructional material in good conditions to be used productively according to the students' level, content, and objective proposed. Teachers can access different sources on the Internet and organize stations with material that students can use independently to improve their learning of English.

Frequency of Listening Activities Carried out in the Language Labs

In order to collect more reliable information about the frequency with which listening takes place in language labs, the answers given by the teachers in the questionnaire, the record book from each lab, and the data gathered from the lessons observed were compared and analyzed. Regarding the questionnaire, informants were asked about the skills they focus on the most during conversational English classes. In this case, the majority of teachers (5 teachers) said that they focus their lessons on speaking activities, and they occasionally carry out listening activities when teaching conversational English. According to their arguments, speaking should be the first skill teachers teach because students need to know how to communicate, and most tests in their classroom are administered orally. For them, listening is the second or third skill implemented in class because it is difficult to find tracks or videos about the topics they teach in the classroom.

In the same questionnaire, the respondents were asked about the difficulties they face when developing listening activities in the language labs (see Table 4.5). In this case, they expressed that the development of listening activities in language labs is especially affected by the lack of Internet connection and teachers' lack of training regarding technology. For this reason, Internet web sites and headphones were the most used technological devices in the language labs.

Table 4.5

Information about listening activities in the language labs

<i>Listening activities in the language labs</i>	
<i>Difficulties when developing listening activities</i>	<i>Total of teachers who have found difficulties</i>
Lack of internet	5
Lack of training	4
Students' inability to concentrate	4
Students' interest	3
The instructional materials available	3
Listeners' limited vocabulary	3
Equipment condition	3
Time consuming	3
Native speaker's speed	2
Lack of technological devices	1
Established learning habits	1
Problems of interpretation	1
Others	0

Notes. Information gathered from the questionnaire. Column on the left shows the possible difficulties teachers may face when developing listening in the lab whereas the column on the right contains the number of teachers who have these difficulties.

Likewise, through the analysis of the record book, it was possible to answer the following questions “How often do teachers carry out listening exercises when teaching conversational English in the language labs?” and “How often do teachers use equipment for developing listening activities in the language lab?” The answers to these questions were collected and evaluated by means of a checklist and rated on a 5 point Likert scale: 5= “always” – 4= “often” –, 3= “sometimes” –, 2= “seldom” - and 1= “never”. An operational definition was established to quantify the frequency with which labs are used as well as the frequency with which equipment is used to develop listening activities. Frequency is related to 200 school days. Language labs and equipment were always used if the record book showed that they were used 200 days, from 80% to 99% of the use was considered as often used, from 41% to 79% signified sometimes, from 1% to 40% represented rarely used, and 0% was identified as never used. The information corresponds to the years 2014 and 2015.

The study indicated that sometimes teachers used labs 1 and 2 during 2014, but labs 3 and 4 were rarely used in the same year (see figure 4.4). During 2015 teachers sometimes used labs 3 and 4 to carry out Conversational English lessons. However, labs 1 and 2 were rarely used. Based on these results, it can be stated that labs were not used as demanded by MEP because all of them must be used every day.

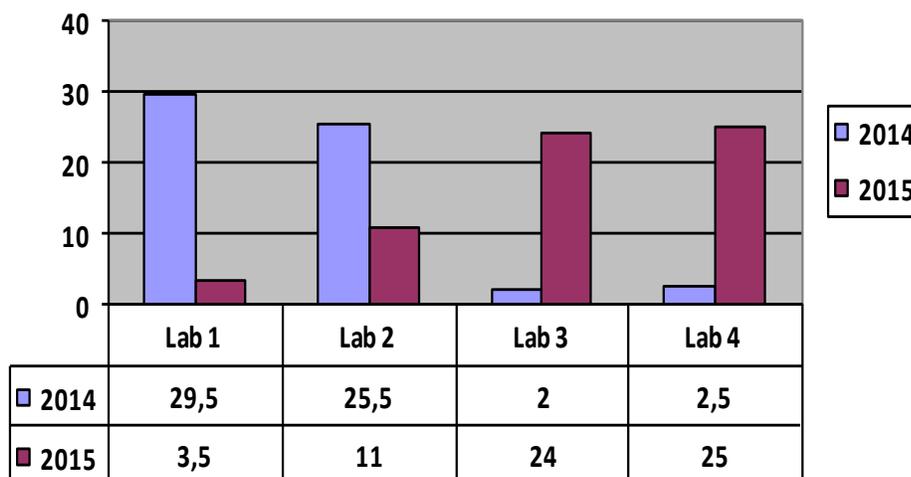


Figure 4.4. Frequency teachers used language labs during 2014 and 2015

Regarding the observations of the collaborative teachers, the study showed that teachers only carried out a few listening activities. In fact, during the lessons observed only 7 activities were related to listening. It means that the time spent in listening activities was very limited. On the other hand, the listening activities developed did not follow the methodological principles because teachers skipped some listening stages such as pre-listening and post-listening. Similarly, the strategies used to get students involved in listening activities were only based on exposing students to some listening activities.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to analyze how the listening activities are applied and describe some factors that can influence their implementation when teaching conversational English in language labs. The researchers achieved this objective, and varied conclusions arose throughout the analysis carried out. These conclusions will have significant contributions to the teachers and students where the study took place, to every teacher of English who works at labs, and to MEP authorities. Based on the analysis of the present research and the conclusions yielded, the researchers also suggest a series of recommendations for the teachers involved in the study, English teachers in general, MEP authorities, and the principal of the institution where the study was held with the purpose of improving the teaching and learning of the listening skill at these language labs.

Conclusions

From the previous analysis and theoretical information given, important conclusions are drawn. First, the study showed evidence regarding the implementation of the listening skill. However, the listening activities were very limited compared to the activities carried during the lesson and some of the teachers observed did not follow the theoretical and practical principles of the teaching of the listening skill. The basic stages required to perform listening activities were sometimes skipped. Some of the teachers went straight to the point when performing listening exercises, omitting the structure proposed by the Ministry of Public Education.

The research displayed insights regarding the methodology used in the labs. It was not always properly followed when implementing listening activities. In some cases the unplanned time spent on one skill such as reading may affect the implementation of listening exercises. Therefore, the time required to develop listening exercises was not enough to

achieve the purpose of the objective or function put into practice throughout the performance of a listening exercise.

Another important conclusion stated is that most of the teachers observed performed almost the same listening activities. They did not use a variety of listening exercises that can be applied to enhance students' listening skill.

Regarding the use of strategies, the teachers did not apply some direct or indirect strategies that can be useful to enhance students' listening proficiency.

The teachers observed need to improve the application of the carousel technique and it can be improved since some of the stations were not set or arranged properly. Then, some skills were not developed during the class and the correct process proposed by the MEP did not take place.

The study also revealed that the listening exercises developed had a similar level of difficulty; therefore, most of the time students are exposed to the same listening exercises. In the same way, the frequency with which listening activities were carried out in the labs was lower than expected. Even though teachers declared that conversational English lessons focused on listening and speaking, the survey evidenced that students are not frequently exposed to a series of listening experiences.

In regard to the students' reaction toward listening, the researchers observed that the learners followed the instructions and got involved in the activities; however, at the end of the class not all of them acquired the desired level of understanding of the exercises.

In relation to the language labs conditions to develop the listening skill, the researchers concluded that labs are equipped with the minimal requirements regarding non-instructional resources as the Internet, computers, and recorders. Thus, even though the

conditions in all language labs can be improved, they are suitable for carrying out listening activities.

Another significant conclusion is that although most of the teachers have a lot of experience teaching English and have received some training to work at language labs, they did not apply varied listening activities during the observed classes. Most of the teachers agreed that they need more training regarding the use of technological equipment and access to online activities. They all agreed that training to carry out listening exercises at labs is extremely necessary.

The study showed that students were exposed to some technological devices to carry out listening exercises. Therefore, there was an overuse of the same technological equipment; computers and headphones were the most used while recorders, blue ray, T.V, DVD, and software were almost never used. Also, teachers could not handle challenging situations as adjusting computers' volume or solving simple issues about the Internet connection. Both teachers and students need to improve the way they use technological equipment in the lab.

As mentioned in the literature review, the Costa Rican education system has made necessary adaptations of the curriculum and has implemented conversational English lessons in public high schools. With the purpose of making those lessons more effective and significant, the Ministry of Public Education provided public technical high schools with language labs equipped with updated technology. In the case of C.T.P. San Isidro, there is plenty of equipment (TV, DVD, radio recorders, voice recorders, computers, the Internet, speakers, and headphones) in each language lab that can be used in different listening activities. However, the record book evidenced that the equipment maintenance almost never

takes place and the Internet connection is unstable. Therefore, some activities cannot be developed and some links or websites cannot be accessed when necessary.

Regarding the instructional materials, teachers used a video and recorded materials gotten from the Internet. Thus, the availability of listening materials in the language labs was very limited, especially when there were problems with computers and the Internet connection. Teachers agreed that obtaining material from the Internet to apply listening activities is easy; however, they work mainly with esl-lab.com (Randall's lab) even when there are plenty of free webpages that teachers and students can use to practice listening.

Throughout the investigation, it was also possible to know that the most relevant difficulties teachers have when working at labs are the lack of training they have, the lack of Internet access, the instructional materials available, equipment condition, and students' inability to concentrate. Perhaps these are the reasons why teachers prefer to work in the classroom by teaching traditional lessons rather than work in the language laboratories and deal with technological resources. Unfortunately, this situation causes a waste of resources and reduces students' possibility to learn English in a more reliable context.

As a synthesis, all these conclusions embrace the end of the research, but they attempt to promote a discussion of the existing possibilities and limitations when carrying out listening activities in the language labs.

Recommendations

The next recommendations are of high concern for the English language teachers, the principal from C.T.P San Isidro, and MEP authorities due to the clear benefits provided by language labs to students' listening competence.

Recommendations for teachers.

Teachers must perform listening exercises based on the theoretical and practical principles of the teaching of the listening skill. It is important to review literature to know about experts' proposals and opinions about the implementation and listening exercises in language labs.

Educators must expose students to a variety of listening exercises by applying more direct and indirect strategies. It is extremely necessary to vary mediation activities to take into account different learning styles. Students become more competent at using English in all skills when they are involved in different exercises, and when they are exposed to varied accents and situations. The exposure to a wide range of listening experiences can build up students' confidence in their own listening ability, help them understand what listening entails, and show them how they might approach it to make listening purposeful for them. Teachers must provide students with different real life tasks to help them improve their communicative ability every time the language labs are used.

When teaching, teachers should follow the correct structure to activate students' mental processes: the pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening stages should be carefully carried out to obtain the desired results.

The implementation of listening activities must be communicative, contextualized, and meaningful to the students. Students' interests, characteristics, and abilities have changed. They are more demanding, more skillful at using technological devices. Students are in constant contact with English by watching TV shows, movies, listening to music, and playing games. Consequently, the teaching/ learning process should respond to their way of learning, interacting, and behaving.

Teachers can take advantage of student's ability to use technological devices such as cellphones, storage devices, and tablets by developing listening exercises that include all the available equipment in the language labs. Every time conversational English lessons are carried out in the language labs, participants have to deal with all the available resources and must be aware of their proper use.

When teaching, educators must keep in mind that the carousel technique is just one of many techniques that can be implemented in language labs. It is not advisable to overuse the same exercises because students may lack interest, and it may result in the detriment of students' listening comprehension skill.

When adapting, adopting, or using materials from the Internet, educators must be careful since some sources have some mistakes related to language, grammar, spelling, among others. Furthermore, some materials are not proper for the students' level, needs, or context.

In the current study, the researchers propose an Action Plan that can be helpful to know about didactic resources, websites, and a variety of activities to boost listening in the language labs.

Recommendations for the school principal.

As it was mentioned in the literature review, teacher's training is necessary to work in language labs. Factors like age and lack of knowledge can affect teacher's willingness to try new methodologies, use innovative sources, and change traditional ways of teaching. Space in language labs is limited because of the furniture and technological equipment. Some necessary furniture, such as group work tables is necessary, and the proper lab arrangement in the required stations is a must. The areas for each specific skill have to be labeled to help students work independently and let them know how to learn a second language in a lab.

Working in the language labs requires a lot of use of technological equipment. For that reason, equipment maintenance should be carried out more regularly to avoid wasting of time. In simple wording, equipment, the Internet access, and software should always be in excellent conditions in order to favor the development of more listening exercises and improve students' listening competence. The equipment maintenance must be constant or at least carried out when teachers inform about any situation.

Researchers also suggest checking the record book regularly to know about the use of labs by teachers, the equipment condition, and the technological devices used when working in the labs.

Recommendations for MEP authorities.

The Ministry of Education must provide teachers with the necessary training to work in the language labs to guarantee the proper implementation of listening objectives.

The use of technological equipment in high schools must be supervised because resources and time can be wasted.

Teachers must receive constant workshops about planning mediation activities with the purpose of keeping quality in education and of knowing more about techniques and strategies to apply for the different skills.

In order to help teachers and students to implement the recommendations given to teach and learn English in language labs, an Action Plan is proposed. It is a dynamic, updated, and meaningful way to use technological devices to improve the listening competence.

Action Plan

After analyzing the findings of the research project regarding the factors that influence the implementation of the listening skill in language labs, as part of the

recommendations, the researchers suggest the next action plan that consists of a group of activities that can be implemented to boost students' listening comprehension skill in Técnico Profesional San Isidro High School. It is important to use this proposal in language labs, and it was designed to work with students in eighth grade.

Objective.

The main purpose of this proposal is to offer English teachers a techno-listening kit that contains a series of practical listening exercises that can be used in language labs to improve students' listening comprehension skill through the use of technological devices.

Description.

The project's name is Techno-listening Kit. It is a didactic aid to develop listening exercises in language labs. This plan is organized into seven units about different topics corresponding to eighth level according to the syllabus established by the Ministry of Public Education. The units must be developed during a month in weekly sessions. The Techno-Listening Kit has two handbooks: one for the teacher and the other one for the students as well as a Compact Disk (CD) with audio, videos, and PowerPoint presentations to carry out some of the listening exercises proposed. The first unit is about "Description of people's appearance." It is subdivided into "This is my body," "What does he look like?" "My qualities and flaws," "Let's sum up." The second unit is "Ask for and give help in an emergency" and it is organized into the following lessons: "What happened?," "You need to see a doctor," "What's your emergency?," "What's your emergency?" The third unit is "Accept and decline invitations." "What are your plans?," "Let's go to the movies," "Let's have a party," and "Let's sum up" are the contents to work weekly.

Regarding the fourth unit, it is called "Ask for and offer goods and services." It is organized into the following lessons: "Where can I get it?," "Let's go shopping," "Let's go to

the supermarket,” and “Let’s sum up.” In the case of the fifth content, it is “Describe travel plans and tourism.” It includes the following lessons: “What are your plans?” “Where is Jersey?” “What is the best way to get to the airport?” and “Let’s sum up.” The sixth unit is focused on safety at work. It is developed in four lessons: “What causes accidents?,” “Fire is dangerous,” “Let’s talk about safety,” “Let’s sum Up.” The last unit is centered on the topic booking by phone, “Table for two,” “I want to book a room,” “I want tickets for,” and “Let’s sum up” are the supporting lessons to carry out this unit.

The following MEP objectives are developed throughout the development of the seven units proposed in the Action Plan.

- Identifying steps and procedures.
- Interpreting procedures from stated information.
- Understanding details from texts.
- Identifying different opinions and choices.
- Identifying salient points from oral texts.
- Understanding information when not explicitly stated.
- Understanding short passages and messages on the phone.

This proposal was designed for eighth level because most of the teachers observed during the development of this research were in charge of teaching conversational English for eighth level. Also, eighth graders are more familiar with the use of technological devices in the language lab and the carousel technique. At this level, learners have certain knowledge of vocabulary, grammar patterns, and instructions acquired when they were in seventh level. Moreover, these learners can follow specific commands, understand language lab vocabulary given by the teacher, and read basic instructions written on the web pages they have to access

for carrying out the different tasks. Also, eighth graders are independent and they can be confident when interacting with classmates and teachers.

The teacher's handbook.

This is a guide for the teacher to implement listening exercises in the language lab. This book includes general information, table of contents, the listening exercises proposed for each lesson, the references, image references, and a website list. It is a list of varied websites to find listening exercises that can be implemented in the language labs.

All lessons are organized into the topic, the goal, and the different stages that must be followed during the lesson such as the warm up, presentation, pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening stages. The Warm up includes instructions for the teacher to carry out short activities to start with the lesson. It is called “Breaking Up” because the students start thinking about the content that is going to be studied.

The presentation (showing the way) includes a dropbox with some vocabulary, phrases, grammar patterns, and some recommendations for the teacher to introduce the lesson and prepare students for the activities.

The Pre- listening stage in this handbook is called “Loading Ideas,” and its purpose is to help the teacher prepare students for listening, to ensure students’ success, and get students motivated by knowing the reason why they are doing a specific task. In this stage, the activities are planned to activate students’ prior knowledge about the topic by thinking about the topic, learning new vocabulary, and starting making predictions.

The While- listening stage (Time to listen) includes teacher’s tips, which provide ideas and suggestions for the teacher when working on the listening tasks.

For the Post- listening stage the handbook includes a section called Follow Up. It explains to the teacher how to ask students to carry out activities that can be used in real life beyond the classroom.

The teacher's handbook also contains a CD. This CD includes some audios or tracks to carry out the listening tasks. Some of the tracks are MP3 recordings while others are videos. The tracks are taken from different websites, while others are authentic recordings from books.

The students' handbook.

This handbook includes the table of contents, the listening exercises proposed for each lesson, the references, and image references. This handbook for students has many listening exercises planned and organized according to the proper methodological stages: warm-up, pre-activities, while-activities, and post-activities.

In the warm-up section (breaking up) students have to carry out different exercises like games, songs, puzzles, and crossword puzzles related to the studied topic. In the While-listening part (Time to listen) students listen carefully to the information to carry out a specific task. They are asked to listen to the information by listening to the teacher, audios, small talks, conversations, dialogues, and descriptions. Then, students must ask for clarification, complete the task, listen again, check the answers, and finally go over the answer with the whole class. The students have to listen for main ideas, specific events, and details among other activities. In the case of the Post-listening section students are asked to make a phone call, write a different ending for a listening short story, propose a new title for a listening passage, and others.

With the purpose of helping students to be competent at using English, all skills must take place during the conversational English lessons. Therefore, after carrying out the

research, it was concluded that the listening skill must take at least one hour per week. At least two listening exercises well organized with all the stages are recommended in the proposal to be implemented weekly. To sum up, each unit has at least eight listening exercises to be developed during a month.

The material used is authentic and non-authentic but designed for eighth graders with the purpose of improving their English level proficiency at using the listening skill. The exercises are planned carefully taking into account students' level, interests and English knowledge. Through the implementation of this proposal, students and teachers are encouraged to use technology for academic purposes and take advantage of all the technological equipment available in the language labs. Furthermore, teachers are motivated to offer students more dynamic and contextualized activities to get them involved in the development of the listening activities carried out in the labs to improve their listening understanding. This proposal will be donated to the observed teachers as a way to help them have available listening exercises during the school year.

Implications.

To work with the techno-listening kit, the following aspects must be considered.

1. This proposal must be implemented with eighth graders and follow the proper stages proposed to involve students step by step in the development of the exercises.
- 2- This plan must be developed in language labs because some technological devices are required to perform some listening exercises.
- 3- When performing some listening exercises, the Internet connection is necessary.
- 4- The application of this proposal requires teachers' and students' knowledge to handle technological devices and to overcome possible challenges.

5-The listening tasks are designed to be developed in approximately eighty minutes (two lessons).

6- When technological devices are needed to perform a listening task, the instructor must be sure they work properly.

7- Proper distribution of time is needed to complete all the planned exercises for every lesson.

8- The additional materials can be used with students who finish exercises before the time appointed or for extra practice.

9- Not all tracks were downloaded and recorded because some activities are carried out on-line.

10- The users of the materials must read and analyze the teacher's guide before the development of any listening task to avoid wasting of time.

11- The use of the web-site list is an important way to reinforce student's listening performance.

Benefits.

Implementing the Techno-listening Kit might have the next advantages for teachers and students. The following are some of the benefits students might have:

- Exposure to authentic listening exercises designed according to their level and interests.
- Students are encouraged to use technology as an interesting tool to learn English.
- Students' availability and willingness to handle technological devices can be used as a positive factor to learn English.

- Exposure to a variety of listening exercises and technological devices minimizes lack of interest and boredom.
- Students might develop or improve competences required in real life regarding the use of technological machines.
- Students are encouraged to work more independently and look for other alternatives to learn English out of the classroom.
- Students are expected to become more competent in the listening skill.
- Students are exposed to different accents, varied vocabulary, and varied exercises.
- Students' learning styles are taken into account when listening, watching, or completing written information among others techniques.
- Students' proficiency in other skills can be indirectly improved when performing listening tasks.
- Teachers can be provided with listening exercises planned according to the MEP's regulations.

Teachers might save time and money when using the Tech-listening Kit. The following are some of the benefits teachers might find:

- A variety of online exercises to take advantage of the Internet connection.
- Varied and dynamic activities that require the use of technological devices available in the labs.
- Accessible and free websites to design and plan more listening exercises.
- Available listening exercises that can be adopted or adapted to be developed in their classes.

- English can be taught in a more reliable and contextualized way, breaking all traditional roles.

Chapter Six: References and Appendices

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Appendices

Appendix A. Observation checklist for the use of technological devices in language labs.

Research question 1: How do lab conditions influence the applicability of the listening?

1- Amount of technological devices in the room

Quantity	Device	Quantity	Device	Quantity	Device
	Printer		Whiteboard		DVD/ Blue Ray
	Scanner		Headphones		Voice Recorders
	Speakers		Television		
	Computers		Radio recorders		

2- Technology condition

DVD /Blue ray	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Printer	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Internet	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Speakers	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Television	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Computers	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Headphones	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Voice recorders	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Radio recorders	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Scanner	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent

3- Amount of non –instructional equipment

Quantity	Device	Quantity	Device
	Whiteboard		Teacher's chair
	Teacher's desk		File cabinets
	Chairs		Air conditioning/Fans
	Book shelves		Computer Desks
			Group work tables

4- Non- instructional equipment condition

Whiteboard	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Teacher's desk	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Chairs	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Teacher's chair	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Book shelves	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
File cabinets	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Fans/ Air conditioning	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Computer Desks	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Group Work tables	() Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent

Clearly defined stations

___ Listening

___ Speaking

___ Writing

___ Reading

___ Special attention

___ Independent studies

6- Supporting Didactic Materials

Updated bibliography	()Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Manuals	()Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Catalogs	()Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Internet Accessibility	()Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Magazines	()Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent
Specific software	()Excellent	() Regular	() Deficient	() Non-existent

Appendix B. Observation checklist for analyzing the register book used in the**labs.**

Research question 1: How do lab conditions influence the applicability of the listening?

Research question 2: To what extent can the usefulness and applicability of a language lab influence the implementation of listening activities?

Language lab N°: _____ Date: _____

	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Equipment maintenance				
The register book shows evidence of the maintenance given to ...				
1. Computers				
2. Internet connection				
3. Software				
4. Recorders				
5. Others				
Equipment condition				
The register book shows evidence of the condition of ...				
1. Computers				
2. Internet connection				
3. Software				
4. Recorders				
5. Others				
Language lab use				
Teachers carried out Conversational English lessons in the lab				
The register book shows who access the lab				
Equipment used				
Use of the equipment in the language lab				
1. Computers				
2. internet				
3. Software				
4. Recorders				
5. TV and DVD				
6. Headphones				
7. Speakers				
8. Others				

Appendix C. Observation checklist of a conversational English lesson.

Research question 2: To what extent can the usefulness and applicability of a language lab influence the implementation of listening activities?

Teacher observed: _____ **Date:** _____

Number of Lessons: _____ **Number of activities carried out:** _____

Number of listening activities carried out: _____

Components observed			Comments
Listening stages developed			
Pre-listening			
While- listening			
Post listening			
Students' involvement			
Following instructions			
Getting involved in activities			
Finishing on time			
Handling technological devices properly			
Use of technology to carry out listening activities			
Internet web sites			
Headphones			
Computers			
Recorders			
TV and DVD			
Others			
Classroom arrangement			
Equipment is arranged based on the carousel technique			
Stations are clearly established based on the carousel technique			
Use of instructional materials			
software			
Storage machines (recorders, usb)			
Photocopies			
Visual aids (videos, movies, comedies, flashcards, TV shows)			
Listening tasks carried out			
Participating in a telephone conversation			
Eavesdropping on other people's conversations			
Listening to a talk or lecture,			
Participating in a meeting, seminar or discussion,			
Taking part in a lesson,			
Participating in a face- to- face conversation			
Watching a film, play or TV			

Listening to the radio			
Listening to announcements in stations, airports, etc.			
Others			
Strategies used to get students involved in listening activities			
Helping students understand what listening entails and how they make approach it			
Making listening purposeful for the students.			
Exposing students to a range of listening experiences			
Build in up student's confidence in their own listening ability.			
Others			

Comments: _____

 Observer's Signature

 Teacher's Signature

Appendix D. Sample of questionnaire for teachers to know about teachers'**training.**

Research question 3: How are teachers trained in using language labs when developing listening activities?

1- What is your major in? _____

Degree: _____ Bachelor _____ Licentiate _____ Master _____ Doctorate
_____ other

2- Years of experience teaching English in Public High schools

_____ Less than one year

_____ 1-5

_____ 5-10

_____ 10+

3- Employment condition:

_____ Tenure

_____ Associate

Using a language lab

1- Training you have received from the Ministry of Public Education

_____ Handle technological devices used in an English lab

_____ Development of listening activities

_____ Access to electronic addresses

_____ Application of on line activities

_____ Implementation of the carousel technique

_____ Handle an English lab

_____ Assessment

Others: _____

2- Importance of teachers training to carry out listening activities in an English Lab

_____ extremely necessary _____ necessary _____ unnecessary

4- Competence you have for handling technological devices in the English Lab

_____ A little _____ A lot _____ None

5- Write YES/ NO Next to the Fields you need more training for working in a language lab

_____ Handle technological devices used in an English lab

_____ Search of reliable sources

_____ Development of listening activities

_____ Access electronic addresses

_____ Application of on line activities

_____ Handle an English lab

_____ Assessment

Others: _____

Appendix E. Sample of a questionnaire for teachers to get information about the materials used.

Research question 4: How available are listening materials in language labs?

1- Which materials do you use for developing listening activities in the lab?

- Recorded materials
 Listening text (recorded text)
 Own recordings
 Live presentations
 Videos

Others: _____

2- Which Type of materials do you use in the labs?

- Authentic
 Non-authentic
 Adapting
 Adopting
 Developing

3- Where do you get Instructional Aids?

- Internet
 Bookstores
 Authentic
 High school

Others: _____

4- How difficult is it to find listening materials?

- Hard Easy Almost impossible

5- What is the cost of listening materials?

- Expensive Affordable Inexpensive

6- How is the availability of listening materials in the lab?

- High Medium Low

7- How is students' accessibility to listening materials in the lab?

- High Medium Low

8- How is students' competence for handling technological devices in the language labs?

- High Medium Low

9- Which of the following Web-sites do you use to develop listening exercises in the lab?

- _____ <http://www.esl-lab.com> (Randall's lab)
- _____ <http://www.eslwonderland.com>
- _____ <http://www.elllo.org/> (*English Listening Lesson Library Online*)
- _____ <http://www.ompersonal.com.ar/omaudio/contenidotematico.htm>
- _____ <http://www.english-test.net/toEIC/listening/autobahn.html>
- _____ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/index.shtml>

others: _____

7- Use of technological devices in the language labs when developing listening

Equipment	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Internet web sites	()	()	()	()	()
Headphones	()	()	()	()	()
Computers	()	()	()	()	()
Recorders	()	()	()	()	()
DVD	()	()	()	()	()
TV	()	()	()	()	()