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LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AND VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE AMONG ELEMENTARY ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT A PUBLIC INSTITUTION IN ESPÍNDOLA

**HABILIDADES DE COMPRENSIÓN AUDITIVA Y CONOCIMIENTO DE
VOCABULARIO ENTRE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE INGLÉS COMO
LENGUA EXTRANJERA DE PRIMARIA EN UNA INSTITUCIÓN
PÚBLICA DE ESPÍNDOLA.**

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Listening Comprehension Skills and Vocabulary Knowledge Among elementary English as a Foreign Language Learners at a Public Institution in Espíndola

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to analyze the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension skills in elementary school students at a rural school in Espíndola, Ecuador. A quantitative approach was used, with a non-experimental, correlational design. The sample consisted of elementary school students, who were given two standardized tests: a vocabulary test that assessed form, meaning, and usage, and a listening comprehension test that measured auditory discrimination, interpretation of main ideas, and inference skills. The data were processed using descriptive statistics, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results showed that students have a better command of perceptual skills such as auditory discrimination and the use of nonverbal cues than of global and inferential comprehension skills. It was also observed that complex aspects of vocabulary, especially collocations and the recognition of derived forms, represent the greatest difficulties. Finally, a positive correlation was identified between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension, confirming that lexical development is a key component in strengthening oral comprehension in rural EFL contexts.

Keywords: correlation, listening skills, rural context, vocabulary aspects

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Habilidades de comprensión auditiva y conocimiento de vocabulario entre los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de primaria en una institución pública de Espíndola.

RESUMEN

El propósito del presente estudio fue analizar la relación entre el conocimiento de vocabulario y las habilidades de comprensión auditiva en estudiantes de Educación General Básica de una institución rural de Espíndola. Por lo tanto, se optó por un enfoque cuantitativo, con un diseño no experimental, de tipo correlacional. La muestra estuvo constituida por estudiantes de nivel educativo básica media, a quienes se les aplicó dos pruebas estandarizadas: una examinó las dimensiones de vocabulario: forma, significado y uso, mientras que la otra valoró las habilidades en comprensión auditiva. Así mismo, los datos fueron procesados mediante estadística descriptiva, la prueba de normalidad Shapiro-Wilk y el coeficiente de correlación de Pearson. De esta manera, los resultados evidenciaron que los estudiantes presentan un mejor dominio de habilidades perceptuales como la discriminación auditiva y el uso de claves no verbales, que de habilidades de comprensión global e inferencial. Asimismo, se observó que aspectos complejos del vocabulario, especialmente las colocaciones y el reconocimiento de formas derivadas, representan las mayores dificultades. Finalmente, se identificó una correlación positiva entre el conocimiento de vocabulario y la comprensión auditiva, lo que confirma que el desarrollo léxico es un componente clave para fortalecer la comprensión oral en contextos EFL rurales.

Palabras clave: correlación, habilidades auditivas, contexto rural, aspectos del vocabulario

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INTRODUCTION

What happens when students listen to a foreign language but cannot make sense of what they hear? Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in elementary school experience this challenge. Although they may show interest and motivation, they often struggle to understand spoken English. This difficulty is not only due to limited exposure to listening practice, but also to insufficient vocabulary knowledge (Pizarro and Aulestia, 2025). Ideally, both skills should be developed simultaneously to support effective communication. As Krashen (1984) points out, comprehensible input is essential for students to naturally acquire language structures and vocabulary. However, in many Ecuadorian EFL classrooms, particularly in rural areas, these skills are frequently taught in isolation. As a result, students often fail to understand oral messages and are unable to apply their existing knowledge in listening tasks (Mohini, 2019).

In this context, it becomes essential to acknowledge the close relationship between listening comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge. On one hand, listening comprehension involves the ability to distinguish phonemes, recognize words, understand grammatical structures, and draw on background knowledge to construct meaning (Rost, 2002). Additionally, Richards (2008) emphasizes that listening is not a passive act of receiving sounds, but an active, interactive, and goal-oriented process that requires attention, memory, and reasoning. These skills include identifying the speaker's communicative purpose, understanding the main idea and supporting details of the discourse, distinguishing between literal and implied meanings, and making inferences based on the information provided.

In this sense, listening comprehension encompasses a set of interrelated skills that enable learners to derive meaning from spoken language, an ability that is central to second language acquisition. These skills include: (1) identifying the main idea, (2) recognizing specific details, (3) inferring meaning, (4) auditory discrimination, and (5) interpreting nonverbal cues (Field, 2008; Heredia, 2018; M. Al-Rashidy and A. Alsabbagh, 2023; Richards, 2008). Unsurprisingly, one of the central concerns in second language acquisition and applied linguistics has revolved around understanding how listeners respond to spoken language. From this perspective, the cognitive demands associated with listening comprehension are explained through several theoretical models developed over time. According to



Richards (2008) and Rost (2002), three widely recognized models, bottom-up processing, top-down processing, and the interactive model, offer complementary views on how listeners decode and interpret auditory input.

On the other hand, vocabulary knowledge is a core component of language proficiency and serves as a foundation for communication and understanding in second language learning (Cook, 2017). In this sense, it stands as one of the strongest predictors of language proficiency and a key element of language teaching and research that requires explicit attention (Maskor and Baharudin, 2016). As noted, vocabulary is often considered the starting point of language learning and teaching. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary knowledge comprises several strands, with three central dimensions: form, meaning, and use. Each of these components contributes to a deeper and more functional understanding of a word. Equally important, in second language acquisition, vocabulary knowledge is frequently examined in relation to the four major language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Mateo and Criado, 2021). Moreover, Maskor and Baharudin (2016) classify these four skills into two broader vocabulary functions: receptive and productive. These distinctions offer valuable insights into how learners process, understand, and use lexical items according to the communicative context.

Previous studies further support the strong connection between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension. For instance, Khajavy and Aghaee (2023) argue that, within EFL teaching, the interaction between vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge is conditional rather than linear; without sufficient vocabulary, background knowledge alone cannot substantially enhance listening comprehension. Similarly, Tong, Hasim, and Abdul Halim (2022) found that vocabulary fluency plays a crucial role in enabling learners to process spoken input efficiently, demonstrating that automatic lexical access is essential for developing listening proficiency. In addition, Amponsah (2024) highlighted the central role of vocabulary growth in strengthening second language literacy skills. Consistent with these findings, Zhang and Graham (2020) reported that the three dimensions of vocabulary, form, meaning, and use, significantly predict listening comprehension, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of lexical competence. Likewise, Rafique et al. (2023) established that vocabulary knowledge, particularly receptive vocabulary, is a key determinant of English proficiency, underscoring the importance of incorporating vocabulary-centered approaches in L2 instruction.



However, despite the valuable insights provided by these studies, they offer limited understanding of what occurs at the primary level, particularly in rural educational contexts. For this reason, the researcher was motivated to examine the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension skills among elementary EFL learners in a rural public school. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the vocabulary knowledge and the listening comprehension skills among elementary EFL learners at a public institution in Espíndola. In order to provide evidence that can inform teaching practices and support the design of pedagogical strategies that more effectively address learners' needs. In this vein, the present research is guided by three specific objectives: (1) to identify students' vocabulary knowledge, (2) to determine their listening comprehension skills, and (3) to examine the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension skills among elementary EFL learners at a public institution in Espíndola. In this sense, the study has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the theoretical understanding of receptive language skills in early EFL education and provide empirical evidence that strengthens pedagogical decision-making at the primary level.

METODOLOGY

The research implemented a quantitative approach. As Gay et al. (2011) mentioned, this method emphasizes the use of structured tools such as tests or questionnaires, to gather numerical data suitable for statistical analysis. In this study, data was obtained through an achievement test, and the resulting scores were used to examine whether a relationship exists between the development of listening comprehension skills and the vocabulary knowledge. In this sense, the quantitative design enabled objective measurement, making it possible to identify potential correlations between both variables.

This study employed a cross-sectional design because the data were collected at a single point in time from a specific group of participants. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a cross-sectional design allows researchers to obtain a snapshot of participants' characteristics, opinions, or behaviors without follow-up observations. In this case, it enables the researcher to examine students' current levels of listening comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge.

Furthermore, this research follows a non-experimental design, which, as noted by Creswell (2012), involves observing and measuring variables as they naturally occur, without manipulation or random assignment. The researcher does not control or influence the conditions of the study; rather, the focus is



on identifying patterns and relationships between variables in their natural context (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker, 2014). Such an approach is typical of descriptive and correlational studies in education, where the purpose is to explore associations rather than determine causality. Therefore, this correlational non-experimental study aimed to describe existing conditions and examine the relationship between listening comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge among the participants.

The population of this study comprised elementary-school students at a rural public institution in Espíndola, Ecuador during the 2024-2025 school year. Since the manageable size of this group, the sample corresponds to the entire population with a total of 30 participants selected through a non-systematic sampling technique, allowing the researcher to focus on a specific group that meets the study's criteria (Cresswell, 2018). These learners share similar characteristics, including an English proficiency level corresponding to CEFR A1.1, an age range between 11 and 12 years old, and instruction received through traditional face-to-face modalities. Finally, this relatively small and cohesive group will provide a suitable context for the systematic application of the research tools and the accurate observation of the variables under investigation.

To ensure ethical compliance, informed consent forms were distributed to the students' legal representatives, authorizing the researcher to administer the instruments and document the results. Additionally, the researcher, who also served as the classroom teacher, obtained authorization from the school authorities and was granted the necessary time to conduct the study responsibly and effectively. The testing technique was used through two A1 standardized tests as the primary instruments, designed to obtain quantitative data on students' listening comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. The tests included multiple-choice, matching, and fill-in-the-blank items, providing measurable and reliable evidence of learners' proficiency. Each test consisted of five items, evaluating specific dimensions of the two variables.

The test design was based on recognized standardized assessments developed by Cambridge and the British Council, ensuring validity and alignment with international benchmarks. Furthermore, an external validation process was carried out with the participation of five experts, who reviewed the instruments to verify their relevance, clarity, and accuracy. Their evaluations were analyzed using Aiken's V coefficient, which confirmed the validity of the test items. This process enhanced the



reliability and credibility of the collected data and supported an objective comparative analysis of students' performance.

The test comprised two sections. The listening comprehension section assessed students' ability to understand oral input in English at an A1 level, focusing on identifying main ideas, specific details, and interpreting short conversations or instructions. The vocabulary knowledge section evaluated learners' understanding of word form, meaning, and use, determining their lexical repertoire and ability to apply vocabulary accurately in various contexts.

RESULTS Y DISCUSSION

Objective 1. To identify the vocabulary knowledge of elementary EFL learners at a public institution in Espíndola.

Table 1. Students' vocabulary knowledge

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Meaning - Matching (2 points)	30	1.373	0.519	0.400	2.00
Vocabulary context (2 points)	30	0.953	0.572	0.000	2.00
Spelling (2 points)	30	1.567	0.407	0.800	2.00
Recognizing words form (2 points)	30	0.770	0.601	0.000	2.00
Collocations (2 points)	30	0.883	0.520	0.000	2.00
TOTAL (10 points)	30	5.547	2.078	2.200	10.00

Note. Number of participants (N); Standard deviation (SD)

The results revealed that students possess a foundational level of vocabulary knowledge, performing strongest in basic aspects such as spelling ($M = 1.57$; $SD = 0.41$) and meaning-matching, which surpassed half of the full score, yet encountering notable difficulties with more complex components like collocations score ($M = 0.88$; $SD = 0.52$), vocabulary in context, and grammatical word-form recognition ($M = 0.77$). These weaker indicators correspond to the dimensions of vocabulary "depth" and "use," underscoring that deeper lexical knowledge is essential for supporting higher-level listening



processes. This pattern is consistent with Khajavy and Aghaee (2023), who showed that both vocabulary breadth and depth significantly predict listening comprehension, with breadth exerting a stronger influence. Likewise, the findings align with Tong et al. (2022) and Zhang and Graham (2020), who emphasized that multiple dimensions of vocabulary knowledge, especially meaning and use, substantially contribute to L2 listening performance. The observed distribution also reflects Nation's model of vocabulary development, which posits that vocabulary breadth typically develops earlier than depth, particularly in limited-input environments. Similar trends were reported by Amponsah (2024), who found that learners commonly succeed in basic meaning-retrieval tasks but struggle with more nuanced aspects of lexical knowledge, reinforcing the developmental pattern seen in the present study.

Objective 2. To determine the listening comprehension skills of elementary EFL learners at a public institution in Espíndola.

Table 2. Students' listening comprehension

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Details (2 Points)	30	1.250	0.584	0.000	2.00
Main Idea (2 Points)	30	0.950	0.461	0.000	2.00
Inferring Meaning (2 Points)	30	1.150	0.494	0.000	2.00
Auditory Discrimination (2 Points)	30	1.440	0.428	0.800	2.00
Interpreting Non-Verbal Cues (2 Points)	30	1.450	0.442	0.500	2.00
Total (10/10)	30	6.240	1.755	3.300	9.50

Note. Number of participants (N); Standard deviation (SD)

Students demonstrated stronger performance in auditory discrimination and interpreting non-verbal cues, while scoring considerably lower in identifying main ideas and inferring meaning. This pattern suggests that learners rely heavily on perceptual strategies—such as phonological cues and visual information—rather than on advanced lexical processing. Such reliance is typical at early proficiency levels, where beginners compensate for limited vocabulary by depending on bottom-up cues to construct



meaning. These results align with Lange and Matthews (2020), who found that segmentation skills and vocabulary knowledge jointly influence listening performance, highlighting the interplay between perceptual processing and lexical competence. Likewise, the weaker outcomes in global comprehension reflect the claims of Rost (2002) and Richards (2008), who argue that higher-level listening processes require the integration of vocabulary knowledge, contextual inference, and flexible mental processing—abilities that are still developing in young EFL learners.

Objective 3. To associate vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension skills among elementary EFL learners at a public institution in Espíndola.

Table 3. Shapiro Wilk Normality test

Shapiro-Wilk					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	W	p
Listening Comprehension	30	3.30	9.50	0.969	0.502
Vocabulary Knowledge	30	2.20	10.00	0.950	0.173

Note. Number of participants (N)

After presenting the results for listening comprehension and vocabulary knowledge, Table 3 reports the Shapiro–Wilk normality test conducted for both variables. The analysis confirmed that the data followed a normal distribution, with listening comprehension obtaining a p-value of 0.502 and vocabulary knowledge a p-value of 0.173. Since both values exceed the significance threshold ($p > 0.05$), the assumption of normality was met. Consequently, a parametric correlation test (Pearson's r) was applied to determine whether a relationship existed between the two variables, based on the following hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis (H_0):

Students' "listening comprehension skills" and students' "vocabulary knowledge" are not associated.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):

Students' "listening comprehension skills" and students' "vocabulary knowledge" are associated.

Hypothesis test



Table 4. Pearson Correlation: Vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension.
Matriz de Correlaciones

	Vocabulary Knowledge	Listening Comprehension
Vocabulary Knowledge	—	
Listening Comprehension	0.687***	—
<i>Note.</i> * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001		

A positive and statistically significant correlation was identified between students' vocabulary knowledge and their listening comprehension skills ($r = 0.687$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that learners with stronger vocabulary knowledge tend to demonstrate higher levels of listening performance, confirming the close association between these two receptive skills. Given that the correlation is moderate in strength, positive, and statistically significant, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is supported, while the null hypothesis (H_0) is consequently rejected. In this vein, Khajavy and Aghaee (2023) similarly reported that vocabulary breadth and depth strongly predict listening performance, especially in tasks requiring meaning interpretation. Tong et al. (2022) and Zhang and Graham (2020) also found that deeper lexical knowledge plays a significant role in learners' ability to infer and understand main ideas. Thus, the present results are consistent with the broader literature, confirming that limited vocabulary depth constrains global and inferential listening skills in EFL learners.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the current study was to answer the following general question: What is the relation between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension skills? The results showed that students exhibited strong foundational vocabulary skills, likewise, they were able to relate words to their meanings reasonably well.. However, more complex aspects of vocabulary posed difficulties: collocations and recognizing word forms which showed low performance, revealing gaps in vocabulary depth and morphological awareness. These findings imply that breadth vocabulary emerges earlier than depth vocabulary, particularly in lowinput learning contexts such as rural EFL environments. The results underscore the need to strengthen collocational knowledge and morphological awareness to improve overall language proficiency. Moreover, the small, single-school sample limits the generalizability of



the findings. Future studies should involve larger, more diverse populations and investigate the effects of explicit instruction targeting vocabulary depth.

Regarding listening comprehension, the results showed that students performed best on tasks supported by perceptual cues. Interpreting non-verbal information and distinguishing sounds were the strongest areas, indicating that learners made effective use of visual clues and phonological signals to understand spoken input. Conversely, identifying the main idea yielded the lowest score, and inferring meaning showed only moderate performance, revealing difficulties with higher-level comprehension skills. These patterns suggest that beginner learners rely predominantly on sound-level and visual cues when more advanced interpretive abilities are still emerging. This highlights the importance of reinforcing strategies that foster global understanding and inferential reasoning, particularly in rural contexts where exposure to English is limited. Future studies should adopt mixed-methods approaches to investigate how students process spoken language and evaluate instructional interventions designed to strengthen inferential and main-idea listening skills.

Finally, the overall pattern revealed that students who demonstrated stronger vocabulary skills also performed better in listening tasks requiring the identification of explicit details. Conversely, difficulties in vocabulary depth corresponded with weaker outcomes in higher-level listening skills, including identifying main ideas and inferring meaning. This research extends our knowledge since it demonstrates that even at early proficiency levels and in rural settings with limited exposure, vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in shaping listening comprehension. However, one important limitation is the correlational design, which does not allow for establishing causality that also restricts generalization. Future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to examine how targeted vocabulary instruction influences the development of listening skills and should include larger and more diverse learner populations across rural and urban contexts.

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