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The general skill of Listening in English as a Foreign Language for Cuban Language Schools

La habilidad generalizada escuchar en inglés como lengua extranjera para las escuelas de idiomas cubanas

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Abstract

This article defines and describes the concepts of generalized skill, generalized operations, and operations. It provides the internal structure of the generalized skill to listen to English as a foreign language for students of Cuban language schools and its effectiveness was corroborated by a group of experts.

Keywords: skill, generalized skill, operations, listen.

Resumen

En el presente artículo se definen y describen los conceptos habilidad generalizada, operaciones generalizada y operaciones. En el artículo se aporta la estructura interna de la habilidad generalizada escuchar en inglés como lengua extranjera para estudiantes de las escuelas de idioma cubanas. Su efectividad fue corroborada por un grupo de expertos.

Palabras clave: habilidad, habilidad generalizada, operaciones, escuchar.

Introduction

The study of a foreign language is of vital importance from personal and strategic points of view, from the social point of view, it favors the insertion of the individual into society with better professional conditions, whether in the area of tourism, research, international relations, foreign collaboration and the establishment of new friendly ties.

The Ministry of Education in Cuba created the Languages Schools in 1961 belonging to the subsystem of Adult Education, with a still present objective, the learning of a foreign language to respond to the individual and collective needs of improvement in this aspect of the workers and to the interests of our country, immersed at that time in plans of social development on a large scale from its opening to the world.

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Currently, due to the transformations that have taken place in our country as a result of scientific-technological and social development, this Education has been immersed in different social programs related to the study of languages, especially for foreign collaboration, so nowadays we talk about Youth and Adult Education. People who present an autonomous nature since they have work experience, family, defined interests, and social life. The public is conditioned by personal and situational factors so they make their own choices considering the experience and the environment in which they live. They do not have much time to learn, so they set their objectives, an aspect that makes them increasingly demanding with the quality of their learning, they know what they want and what they need to learn.

Developing listening skills is a cornerstone of acquiring a foreign language and is pivotal in the overall learning process. Listening enables learners to comprehend spoken language, which is essential for understanding conversations, instructions, and various forms of media. When learners engage with native speakers or authentic materials, they gain exposure to the natural flow and rhythm of the language. This exposure not only aids comprehension but also helps learners distinguish between different accents and dialects, enriching their understanding of the language as a whole.

Moreover, effective communication hinges on the ability to listen attentively. Language is inherently interactive, and conversations require participants to respond to one another. By honing their listening skills, learners become better equipped to engage in meaningful dialogues. They can pick up on cues, such as tone and emotion, which inform the context of a conversation. This responsiveness fosters deeper connections and enhances social interactions, making learners feel more confident in their ability to communicate effectively.

Listening also plays a crucial role in pronunciation and intonation. By hearing native speakers, learners can mimic the sounds and patterns of speech, which is vital for sounding natural in their target language. This practice helps to reduce accents and improve clarity, making it easier for others to understand them. Furthermore, listening aids in the development of a learner's ear for the language, allowing them to recognize subtle differences in pronunciation that may alter meaning.

In addition to improving pronunciation, listening enhances vocabulary acquisition. When learners hear words and phrases used in context, they are more likely to remember them and understand their meanings. This contextual learning approach allows for a deeper grasp of vocabulary, as learners can see how words function within sentences and conversations. Consequently, they are better prepared to use these words appropriately in their speech, facilitating more effective communication.

Finally, developing listening skills fosters cultural understanding. Language is deeply intertwined with culture, and listening to authentic materials—such as music, podcasts, or films—provides insights into the customs, values, and social norms of the language community. This cultural awareness enriches the learning experience and helps learners navigate social situations more adeptly. Ultimately, by prioritizing listening in their language studies, learners equip themselves



with essential tools for effective communication and cultural engagement in their new linguistic environment.

There have been several notable research studies and investigations related to listening skills in language learning. Some of the key areas of research and findings include:

Vandergrift (1999) - "Facilitating Second Language Listening Comprehension: Acquiring Successful Strategies". This article discusses strategies that can help learners improve their listening comprehension in a second language. Goh (2000) "A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning". Goh explores cognitive strategies for teaching listening and emphasizes the importance of metacognitive awareness. Buck (2001) "Assessing Listening". Buck examines various methods for assessing listening skills in language learners and discusses implications for teaching. Rost (2002) "Teaching and Researching Listening". Rost provides an overview of listening as a skill, discussing both teaching methodologies and research findings in the field. Field (2008) "Listening in the Language Classroom". This book offers insights into effective listening practices and how to incorporate them into language teaching. Gilakjani, & Ahmadi (2011) "The Importance of Listening Comprehension in English Language Teaching". The authors highlight the significance of listening comprehension and its impact on language acquisition. Thompson, G. (2013) "Listening Skills in Language Learning: A Review of Literature".

This review synthesizes existing literature on listening skills and identifies key themes and gaps in research.

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Materials and methods

To carry out this research as well as to determine the inner structure of the skill of speaking English as a foreign language learner of the Cuban Language School it was used the methodology established by González (2023, p. 41) for the determination of generalized skills

However, there are various materials and methods used to teach listening skills in language learning. The combination of the inner structure with advanced methods in teaching would guarantee the development of general listening skills. Some of the main materials and methods include:

When it comes to language learning, the "Materials and Methods" section typically outlines the resources and techniques used to facilitate the acquisition of a new language. Here's a breakdown of common materials and methods employed in language learning:

Materials

Textbooks: structured courses covering grammar, vocabulary, and exercises, and often include audio components for listening practice.



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Workbooks: supplementary exercises for practice, and focus on specific skills such as writing or grammar.

Audio Resources: podcasts, audiobooks, and language learning apps (e.g., Duolingo, Babbel), and help improve listening skills and pronunciation.

Visual Aids: flashcards for vocabulary building, and charts and infographics for grammar rules.

Video Content: movies, TV shows, and YouTube channels in the target language, and useful for understanding cultural context and conversational language.

Online Platforms: language exchange websites (e.g., Tandem, HelloTalk) for real-life practice, and online courses or MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) that offer structured learning.

Mobile Apps: tools that provide interactive learning experiences (e.g., Memrise, Rosetta Stone).

Social Media and Forums: groups or pages dedicated to language learning where learners can interact with others.

Methods

Immersion: surrounding oneself with the target language through travel or living in a country where it is spoken, and engaging in daily conversations with native speakers.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): emphasizes interaction as the primary means of language learning, and focuses on real-life communication rather than rote memorization.

Task-Based Learning: involves completing meaningful tasks using the target language (e.g., planning a trip, cooking a recipe), and encourages practical use of language skills.

Grammar-Translation Method: focuses on translating texts and understanding grammar rules, and is often used in academic settings but can be less engaging.

Total Physical Response (TPR): combines language learning with physical movement, and is particularly effective for beginners and young learners.

Content-Based Instruction: integrates language learning with subject matter (e.g., science, history), and helps learners acquire vocabulary and concepts simultaneously.

Flipped Classroom: learners study new content at home (e.g., through videos) and practice in class, and facilitate more interactive and communicative practices during class time.

Socratic Method: uses questioning to stimulate critical thinking and discussion in the target language, and encourages learners to express their thoughts and opinions.

Combining various materials and methods can create a comprehensive language learning experience that caters to different learning styles. The effectiveness of these approaches often depends on the learner's goals, preferences, and the specific language being studied. By utilizing

a diverse set of resources and techniques, learners can enhance their proficiency and confidence in using the target language.

Results and discussion

Before delving into the skills involved in the speaking process, it is necessary to deal with the methodology established by González (2023, p. 41) for the determination of a generalized skill. It is significant to note that this methodology not only allows the identification of one generalized skill per subject, as the author states but that the determination of the number of generalized skills depends on the dynamics of the subject and the characteristics of the content. Thus, for example, in the subject of Integrated English Practice, four generalized skills are considered: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. In this work, the generalized skill of speaking, its generalized operations, and operations for Language school education, which are shown in Figure 1, are specified.

This theory is based on the conception of skill invariant, the referred conception is taken because:

- it allows structuring the skills in the form of a system;
- it is a didactic model for the improvement of skill formation and development;
- It makes possible the determination of generalized skills and therefore it is possible to apply them in a context other than the university context.
- In the theory proposed by González (2023, p. 41) he alludes, among others, to the following procedures for determining generalized skills:
 - the logic of the science to which the subject is related is analyzed;
 - the objectives of the level and grades are analyzed;
 - The logic of science is analyzed in the teaching-learning process of the subject;
 - based on the logic of the subject, the generalized ability is specified.

When analyzing the logic of the science to which the discipline is related, in Cuban Language Schools and how, according to the conception with the invariant of ability, the relation problem - object - the objective of teaching is reiterated at the level of discipline and subject, the general objectives and those of each grade are analyzed. From the analysis of the objectives of the level and each level and of the methodological guidance, the logic of the discipline is specified (in this case, both the objectives of the level and of each level are functions of the development of listening skills). With the foundation of the logic of the process, an assessment is made of which of the skills has the greatest correspondence with it, which constitutes the skill with the highest level of generalization and must also have the characteristic of integrating within itself the system of skills that the discipline contributes to developing in the students.

Logic leads to:

- Identify the main idea.
- Identify specific information.
- Discriminate sounds in isolated words and contextualized procedures.



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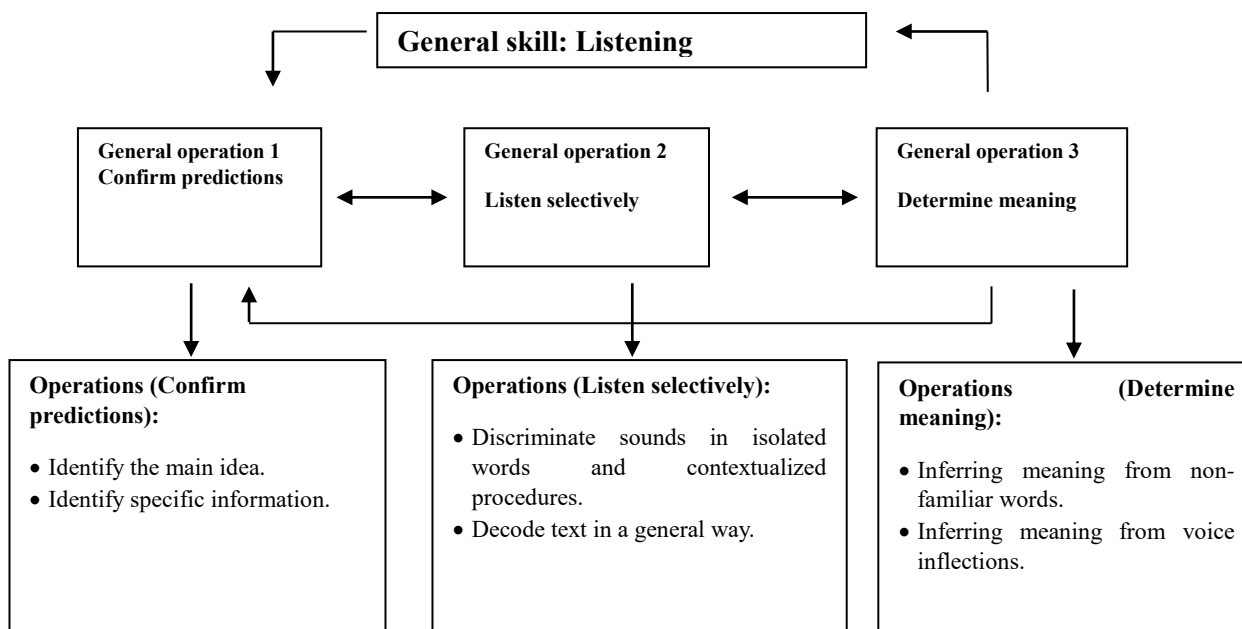
- Decode text in a general way.
- Inferring meaning from non-familiar words.
- Inferring meaning from voice inflections.

As the logic is taken to the teaching-learning process, the objectives of the subject at the level are analyzed, establishing an analogy between the Integrated English Practice of the entire Language School levels. Integrated English Practice is assumed as a discipline and, as they constitute a subject in each level, the parallelism is established according to the curricular conception assumed.

The logic of the teaching-learning process of Integrated English Practice in Language School education allows assuring that one of the generalized skills of the disciplines is listening, which has the characteristic of integrating the system of skills that Integrated English Practice contributes to develop in the students of this education.

The appropriation of general skills leads to the formation of theoretical thinking (Santiesteban, 2021), that is, to operate with theoretical generalizations, concepts, laws, and general principles, with the essence of knowledge. If only specific skills are developed, the type of thinking that is formed is empirical, on the contrary, the mastery of general skills, oriented to the essence, establishing links and relationships, and applying knowledge to new situations.

According to the definition of the concept of generalized ability, the generalized ability to listen in English as a foreign language is constituted by the systematized knowledge and skills that allow the subject/communicator to understand and be understood orally in a common linguistic system between the sender and the receiver, the structure of the skill to LISTEN is as shown below.



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Figure 1. Structure of the generalized listening

To evaluate the indicators, a group of twenty experts was selected based on the effectiveness of their professional work, who made judgments about the following aspects, taking into account the five-rank ordinal scale.

Survey

Full name: _____.

Scientific degree: _____.

Teaching category: _____ Occupation: _____ year of experience: _____.

You have been selected as an expert on the subject of listening skills. Therefore, we need your valuable collaboration in the validation of the indicators of the variable: generalized listening skill.

This skill has three generalized operations: confirm predictions, listen selectively, and Determine meaning. These constitute the dimensions of the aforementioned variable.

Each generalized operation includes a series of operations; these operations constitute the indicators of the target variable.

The indicators for each dimension are shown below. You should give each indicator an individual score on a range of one to five marks. The rating will depend on the value you give to each indicator. Five marks mean that the indicator is essential to evaluate the variable, four marks mean that it is very useful, three marks mean that it is useful, two marks mean that it might be useful to measure the variable, and one mark means that it does not contribute anything to measure the variable.

Note: you can incorporate any other indicator that you may consider necessary to evaluate the variable.

Confirm predictions:

1. Identify the main idea.
2. Identify specific information.

Listen selectively:

1. Discriminate sounds in isolated words and contextualized procedures.
2. Decode text in a general way.

Determine meaning:



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1. Inferring meaning from non-familiar words.
2. Inferring meaning from voice inflections.

The selected group is made up as follows:

Exp ert	years of experie nce.	Occupation	Scientific degree
<i>1</i>	<i>18</i>	Professor at Princeton University	PhD.
<i>2</i>	<i>24</i>	Professor at the University of Chicago	PhD.
<i>3</i>	<i>36</i>	Professor at the University of Montreal	PhD.
<i>4</i>	<i>15</i>	Professor at the University of Barcelona	PhD.
<i>5</i>	<i>31</i>	Professor at Oxford University	PhD.
<i>6</i>	<i>24</i>	Professor at Oxford University	PhD.
<i>7</i>	<i>20</i>	Professor at Harvard University	PhD.
<i>8</i>	<i>18</i>	Professor at the University of British Columbia	PhD.
<i>9</i>	<i>28</i>	Professor at the University of London	PhD.
<i>10</i>	<i>15</i>	Professor at the University of British Columbia	PhD.
<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	Professor at the University of London	PhD.
<i>12</i>	<i>19</i>	Professor at the University of Montreal	PhD.
<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	Professor at Princeton University	PhD.
<i>14</i>	<i>27</i>	Professor at the University of Chicago	PhD.
<i>15</i>	<i>27</i>	Professor at the University of Montreal	PhD.
<i>16</i>	<i>27</i>	Professor at Princeton University	PhD.
<i>17</i>	<i>14</i>	Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology	PhD.
<i>18</i>	<i>16</i>	Professor at the University of Chicago	PhD.
<i>19</i>	<i>15</i>	Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology	PhD.



20	18	Professor at the University of British Columbia	PhD.
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The consultation carried out with them to collect the level of satisfaction with the proposed indicators was carried out based on the instrument shown above, of which those statistically located in the categories of essential and very useful to measure the dependent variable are accepted to evaluate it.

The model proposed by H. Brito to evaluate the levels of mastery of the functional invariants of any ability in high, medium, or low (which in this research coincide with the so-called generalized operations) was used for the confirmation of the aforementioned instrument that allows the evaluation of the indicators of the dependent variable. The statistical processing of this instrument is shown below and at the end of it the construction of the scale for the location of the indicators in the different categories, mentioned above.

Expert Criterion (FREQUENCY MATRIX)

Indicators	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
1	11	6	1	1	1
2	12	5	1	1	1
3	12	5	1	1	1
4	14	2	1	2	1
5	1	1	3	12	3
6	16	1	1	1	1
Total	61	20	8	18	8

(CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY MATRIX)

Indicadors	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
1	11	17	18	19	20
2	12	17	18	19	20
3	12	17	18	19	20
4	14	16	17	19	20



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5	1	12	5	17	20
6	16	17	18	19	20
Total	66	96	94	112	120

(CUMULATIVE RELATIVE FREQUENCY MATRIX)

Indicadors	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
1	0.5500	0.8500	0.9000	0.9500	1.0000
2	0.6000	0.8500	0.9000	0.8500	1.0000
3	0.6000	0.8500	0.9000	0.9500	1.0000
4	0.7000	0.8000	0.8500	0.9500	1.0000
5	0.0500	0.1000	0.2500	0.9500	1.0000
6	0.8000	0.8500	0.9000	0.9500	1.0000

(ABSCISSA VALUE MATRIX)

Indicadors	C1	C2	C3	C4	Suma	Promedio	Escala
1	0.13	1.04	1.28	1.64	4.09	1.022	-0.33
2	0.25	1.04	1.28	1.64	4.22	1.054	-0.36
3	0.25	1.04	1.28	1.64	4.22	1.054	-0.36
4	0.52	0.84	1.04	1.64	4.05	1.012	-0.32
5	-1.64	-1.28	-0.67	1.04	-2.56	-0.641	1.34
6	0.84	1.04	1.28	1.64	4.80	1.201	-0.51
SUM	3.45	8.89	11.90	17.48	41.72	_____	_____
LIMITS	0.23	0.59	0.79	1.17	2.98	0.70	_____

Since the evaluation of the indicators, carried out by the experts, satisfies from the statistical point of view the limits accepted in the categories to evaluate the dependent variable, this group of researchers did not consider it necessary to repeat the instrument for the determination of the indicators, given the reliability of the experts consulted.

Conclusions

The structuring of the generalized skill of listening makes it possible to organize the skills involved in the listening process into a system.

The group of experts validated the inner structure of the generalized skill of listening.



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