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The Use of ICTs to Improve Listening Skills in Formal and Informal Settings

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ABSTRACT

In the current society, ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) are developing astoundingly fast, and they have become an important part of individuals' lives, especially for young people; therefore, technologies are opening a whole world of opportunities with regard to teaching and learning. The aim of this MA dissertation is to make readers aware of the importance of technologies and inclusive education within formal settings to boost students' motivation, and to provide some resources, as well as some strategies, which will be greatly helpful for educators and learners to develop listening comprehension skills. The resources are going to be thoroughly explained, so that they can be used in both formal and informal settings.

Keywords: ICTs, Listening comprehension, UDL, App, Learning, Formal settings, Informal settings.

RESUMEN

En la sociedad actual, las TIC (Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación) se desarrollan a una velocidad asombrosa y se han convertido en una parte importante de la vida de las personas, especialmente para los jóvenes; por lo tanto, las tecnologías están abriendo todo un mundo de oportunidades con respecto a la enseñanza y el aprendizaje. El objetivo de este Trabajo de Fin de Máster es concienciar a los lectores sobre la importancia de las tecnologías y la educación inclusiva en los entornos formales para potenciar la motivación de los alumnos, así como proporcionar algunos recursos y estrategias que serán de gran ayuda para que los educadores y los alumnos desarrollen sus habilidades de comprensión auditiva. Los recursos van a ser explicados a fondo, para que puedan ser utilizados tanto en entornos formales como informales.

Palabras clave: TIC, Comprensión auditiva, DUA, App, Aprendizaje, Entornos formales, Entornos informales.

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1. Introduction

The 21st century is bringing about huge changes. The world is witnessing a breakthrough in the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which advances at a staggering rate. This can be easily seen everywhere: it is nearly impossible to find someone without a mobile phone, and the vast majority of homes possesses an Internet connection.

Also, new generations of individuals are adapting perfectly to this increasingly technological world, to the extent that a big deal of kids have portable devices such as phones and tablets; this is something that was unthinkable a decade ago.

However, the field of education, with regard to the subject of English as a Foreign Language, does not develop as quickly as technologies. To this day, most educational centers still rely on the usage of textbooks due to the curriculum, as well as on traditional teaching methods, where educators teach a topic and students limit themselves to doing activities included in those textbooks.

These methods of transmitting knowledge are mostly grammar-based, and do not make use of any technological resources; they are focused on writing and reading skills, and they pay less attention to listening and speaking. While all 4 linguistic skills – now called "reception," "production," "interaction," and "mediation" according to the Council of Europe's *Companion Volume* (2018) – are crucial when learning a language, listening comprehension (included in the reception skill) is one of the most important ones to develop, since it is needed in order to be able to maintain a successful face-to-face conversation.

Including technology in some classroom activities might make a change in English education for both teachers and students, making lessons more dynamic and, therefore, more motivating for learners; furthermore, the use of technology will make it easier to incorporate materials for developing students' listening skills in an effective manner.

However, the inclusion of technologies is not the only necessary requirement to improve the quality of the lessons; teachers also need to know their environment, that is, the characteristics of the students within the classroom. It is fundamental that learners do not feel left apart because, if that were to happen, their motivation and eagerness to learn might drop dramatically.

For this reason, the aim of this dissertation is to raise awareness of the importance of technology in educational contexts, to provide several resources which are useful for both teachers and students to develop listening skills, and to shed light upon the aspect of inclusion within educational contexts. By means of these resources, educators are going to be able to do engaging activities within formal contexts using authentic materials, and students are going to boost their auditory skills, as well as be encouraged to use the resources outside the educational centers.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Millennials

The ICTs, beyond a shadow of a doubt, have completely changed the current society, and the new generations of *Millennials* make for a perfect evidence of that. Nowadays, kids begin to use devices such as mobile phones and tablets at a really early age; previous generations have never imagined that something like this would happen but, since technology advances at such a staggering rate, it has now become a reality.

The Pew Research Center[1] (2010) characterizes *Millennials* as confident, optimistic, more educated than previous generations, liberal, open to change, always connected, steeped in digital technology and social media, and embracing multiple modes of self-expression. The vast majority of people who belong to this category "makes an active use of digital media that has changed their notions of communication, knowledge management, learning, and their personal and social values." (Noguera, 2013, p. 49).

Noguera (2013, p. 45) states that "if society changes education must change, thus, the characteristics of *Millennials* have significant implications on how they learn and how they need to be taught." Since they use digital devices very often, they can be considered as "digital learners." This kind of learners differ from other generations in several aspects, which are the following: firstly, they are able to multitask easily and in an effective way; secondly, according to Hofstetter (in Noguera, 2013), they are multiliterate[2]; another aspect is that they extensively navigate through the web in order to learn or to be entertained; and last but not least, they learn in situated actions, that is, through real-world contexts. From these differences, it can be seen that the evolution of technology is bringing about huge possibilities for the new generations to take advantage of.

With regard to digital media, Tapscott (in Noguera, 2013) lists a series of new ways of thinking about teaching and learning on the part of teachers and pupils: from linear to

[1] "The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world." (Taken from the Pew Research Center website).

[2] Being multiliterate means that a person possesses the ability to be literate in terms of text in media other than paper (Definition extracted from the *YourDictionary* website). *Millennials* are considered as multiliterate because they are literate in both paper and digital media.

hypermedia learning[3], from instruction to construction and discovery, from teacher-centered to learner-centered education, from absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn, from school to lifelong learning, from learning as something difficult to learning as something enjoyable, and from the teacher as transmitter to the teacher as facilitator.

Millennials, as it has been already explained, make a huge use of technology – even many of them employ it for many hours a day –; nevertheless, it does not mean that, as a result of this exaggerated usage, they automatically get the title of being digitally competent, since this competence is not acquired by the mere act of being able to access and use these technologies. Ala-Mutka (2011) explains that, in order for people to be able to boast of being digitally competent, they must fulfill the following requirements: first of all, they must possess instrumental knowledge and skills for digital tool and media usage; the second requirement is that they need to have advanced skills and knowledge for communication and collaboration, information management, learning and problem-solving, and meaningful participation; and finally, they must possess attitudes for strategic skills usage in intercultural, critical, creative, responsible and autonomous ways.

Based on the information that has been aforesaid, it is clearly seen that, thanks to the ICTs, a new way of learning is being developed; however, that evolution in learning leads to a need of a change in the way of teaching. In that regard, there are many aspects which need to be improved and researched on more thoroughly so that education will continue to get better in order to meet the needs of the current and upcoming generations.

In accordance with Pedró (in Noguera, 2013), young people have different expectations with regard to teaching and learning based on several elements: the ICT devices which are available at schools; the frequency of their use; the range of activities that can be carried out; the possibilities of collaborative work and networking; the communication skills involved; the extent of learning personalization; and the standards of digital quality, that is, the interactivity and use of multimedia resources.

Succinctly, *Millennials* have happened to meet with a world which is constantly evolving at a dramatic pace, and they are adapting very well to the needs of such world. Their

[3] Hypermedia consists of the software located within electronic devices. Thus, hypermedia learning is understood as learning by using this kind of devices.

technological skills are sensational, and their way of learning is very different from older generations' ways of learning.

2.2. E-Learning

The huge development of technology – especially of the Internet – has brought, together with it, an increasing interest in learning. Before the appearance of the web, the opportunities of acquiring knowledge were much smaller; education was not affordable for many citizens, and accessing to information was not a simple task – at least, not as simple as it is now –.

Nowadays, it is possible to have all kinds of information in just a click or two. In a matter of seconds, a whole world of knowledge opens up before people's eyes, so it is just natural that individuals have an ever-increasing passion about learning.

Nevertheless, the Internet is not just a source of knowledge, but also of entertainment, and a good number of people spend hours and hours absorbed in an abyss of amusement which will lead them nowhere. Furthermore, since the flow of information running through the web is enormous (and rising by leaps and bounds as this is being written), it is impossible that 100% of those data are completely reliable; because of that, the material included within the Internet is to be handled with care. It is essential that the user is able to be selective, and that they know which pieces of information are the most reliable.

This kind of getting instant knowledge is known as *e-learning* (short from electronic learning). Zhu (2008) defines it as "the network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge," and states that this type of learning has two main functions, the first one being the dispersal of course material, and the second one being the interactive and collaborative learning. From a pedagogical point of view, the first function of e-learning is to deliver information, and the second one is to teach and learn through active and participatory procedures, which is understood as constructive process.

When learning something, "the instruction and learning process includes a transmission process from the instructor to the learner, an interaction process between the instructor and the learner and among the learners, and a knowledge construction process of the learner." (Zhu, 2008, p. 30).

The same author states several characteristics about e-learning. First of all, in e-learning, learners may develop their knowledge by way of creating, sharing information, and assimilating; secondly, students can produce, receive, and share data with peer learners, educators, and the networked community; and finally, by means of online cooperation, learners are able to work together on assignments, where each of the participants provides with their previous knowledge and experience and, with the combination of all of them – together with some research done on the topic dealt with –, they build up their knowledge within the procedure of online cooperation. To put it briefly, during the e-learning process, the individuals which benefit from it are going to undergo a development in both knowledge and skills.

However, learning using electronic formats in an effective manner is not something that happens magically. Some aspects need to be taken into account, and they are going to be clarified in the following cite by Khan (2002): "Each stage of the e-learning process requires thoughtful analysis and investigation of how to use the Internet's potential in concert with instructional design principles and issues important to various dimensions of the online learning environment" (p. 59). The Internet is a hugely powerful tool and, if used wisely, the experience of acquiring knowledge can be tremendously enhanced, as well as motivating and satisfying for the users. Moreover, Zhang, Zhou, Briggs, and Nunamaker (in Zhu, 2008) explain that prior empirical research have pointed out that using an e-learning system with interactive technologies may aid learners in the endeavor of learning contents, thus attaining a higher level of satisfaction and learning performance.

Khan (2002) created a basic framework for e-learning, with the objective of answering the following question: "what does it take to provide the best and most meaningful open, flexible, and distributed learning environments for learners from all over the world?" This scheme consists of eight dimensions: institutional, pedagogical, technological, interface design, evaluation, management, resource support, and ethical. Those dimensions list many elements which provide a clear response to the previously stated question:

a) The institutional dimension of e-learning is related to administrative matters (e.g. information technology services, media services, accreditation, and budgeting), academic matters (e.g. class size, workload, and aid provided by the faculty and staff), and student services (e.g. advising, financial support, internship and employment, library assistance, and information about courses and programs).

b) The pedagogical dimension alludes to the matter of teaching and learning. It deals with issues about content, organization, aims, design approach, and methods and strategies (e.g. tutorials, games, role-playing, interaction, motivation, discussion, debate, and field trips) of e-learning.
c) The technological dimension of Khan's framework investigates affairs of technology foundation in e-learning environments, such as hardware, software, and infrastructure planning.
d) The interface design is related to the general aspect and working of e-learning programs. This dimension includes content design, page and site design, navigation, and usability testing.
e) The evaluation dimension encompasses the evaluation of learners, and the assessment of the instruction and environment of the learning process.
f) The management of e-learning consists of the preservation of the learning environment, as well as the scattering of information.
g) The framework's dimension of resource support looks into the online assistance (e.g. counseling aid, technical support, career counseling services, among others) and resources, both online and offline, needed to encourage learning environments which are relevant.
h) The ethical dimension makes reference to issues such as geographical, cultural, and social diversity, data accessibility, learner variety, and legal matters like privacy, plagiarism, copyright, and guidelines.

When designing e-learning systems, it is essential to include many of the issues contained within the eight dimensions. For instance, an e-learning system designed for learners from all over the world should be sensitive to ethical matters and cross-cultural communication (Khan, 2002). This is very important because, due to the increased easiness of going to other countries, there is a mix of many cultures in pretty much every country, and nowadays, skills like empathy are especially encouraged in educational contexts, since being able to understand and respect other cultures is becoming of more and more importance with time.

To sum up, e-learning can prove to be very useful if used correctly. The advance in technology is allowing users to get more and more profit on it as time passes, with features such as group work, interaction between educators and learners, and peer learning; but

some previous research and analysis is needed in order to make the most out of electronic learning.

2.2.1. Mobile learning

Mobile devices appeared just a few decades ago, and they brought about a revolution; being able to instantly communicate with other people with a wireless tool was something truly innovative and useful for people, so it is just natural that everyone who could afford them would get them right away.

Nowadays, the use of mobile devices has evolved into something mainstream among all age groups because they have become much more affordable and available than they used to be (Newhouse, Williams, & Pearson, in Baran, 2014). Not only have they become into something that everyone can get in the current age, but they are also developing at a staggering pace, to the extent that current high-end mobile phones can be almost as powerful as a laptop. Because of that, "significant investments have been made to provide infrastructure, content, and resources related to the integration of mobile devices into learning environments." (Johnson, Smith, Willis, Levine, & Haywood, as cited in Baran, 2014); in other words, for years, mobile phones have been considered as having a great potential for getting knowledge.

Mobile learning (or m-learning) can be defined as any type of knowledge acquisition through a portable device (smartphones, netbooks, etc.). It represents a technological development, allowing rich, distributed and contextualized approaches to learning (Crompton, in Khaddage, Müller, & Flintoff, 2016).

Learning by means of mobile phones is the current tendency in the digital learning field, and it aims to facilitate the students' learning process (Jeng, Wu, Huang, Tan, & Yang, 2010). In this day and age, the access to information utilizing a portable tool is an effortless task; it just takes an Internet connection. Moreover, a major potential of portable technologies in the field of learning lies in the capability to provide access to learning in authentic contexts (Herrington et al., in Khaddage et al., 2016).

There is an endless number of apps (short for "applications") for learning available in Google Play Store (for Android users) and the App Store (for *iOS* users), and many of them are free, so it suits all budgets. In addition, some of those learning apps allow users

to employ them without need of a connection to the Internet: people download the lessons' contents into their mobile devices and then they can enjoy those contents anytime, anywhere, which is really convenient and comfortable. Thus, it is not a strange thing that mobile learning is a trend among people of all ages.

Moving on to a more formal context, "the literature on mobile learning and teacher education generally considered mobile learning a beneficial approach in extending teachers' learning experiences and enhancing their mobile technology integration skills." (Baran, 2014, p. 24). Research done on mobile tools' usage in teacher educational contexts mostly gave an account of positive contributions to the results investigated. It was discovered that mobile learning has potential for supporting educators engage in rich language learning contexts (Baran, 2014).

However, not everything is a bed of roses. According to Cochrane (in Baran, 2014), there are drawbacks such as lack of theoretical and pedagogical support, and the insufficiency of teacher support and training. Moreover, educators barely obtained technological and pedagogical support on the part of higher education organizations regarding successful application of mobile learning in teacher education (Cushing, in Baran, 2014).

Another disadvantage is described by Khaddage, Lanham, and Zhou (in Khaddage et al., 2016), which is that many teachers are still unwilling to permit widespread access to mobile technologies in a formal classroom setting, usually because there is a lack of control of learner activities, as well as safety concerns, including issues such as privacy, cyber-bullying, sharing classroom experiences and artifacts, and e-safety; this drawback still can be seen in many educational settings as of today.

Judging by what it has been previously mentioned, despite the drawbacks that it possesses, it can be said that mobile learning has a positive impact; after all, it is impossible that being able to develop knowledge on virtually any topic whenever and wherever it is wanted is a negative aspect. Moreover, Jeng et al. (2010) list four dimensions of mobile learning which give it an add-on impact; those dimensions are mobile learner and coacher, enhanced pedagogical learning process, situated learning environment, and virtual group awareness and strategies.

a) Mobile learner and coacher dimension. Learners can increase their skills and get data at all times effortlessly. In order for mobile applications to improve, students should provide some feedback as they advance through the lessons. This way, the

developers – or mobile coaches – of such applications will be able to personalize the apprentices' learning experiences, as well as giving them some guidance in case that doubts arise.

b) Enhanced pedagogical learning process. Mobile learning is different from the conventional electronic one; as a result, the traditional pedagogical theory should be gone over so that it fits the features of mobile environment. This dimension is employed to make the learning in mobile activities easier; it also facilitates cooperation, and scaffolds several social practices related to learning. Thus, "the traditional pedagogical theory can take advantage of mobile technology and bring more efficient learning process to mobile learners." (Jeng et al., 2010, p. 7).

c) Situated learning environment. Mobile technologies, through discussion, access, and sharing of information via social networks, encourage learners to interact more frequently with their peers. Being able to move and communicate freely thanks to handheld devices enables learners to get knowledge through authentic learning activities by reproducing a situated learning environment. The interaction that happens in this realistic environment is an important feature of the positive impact that mobile learning possesses.

d) Virtual group awareness and strategies. Bringing portability to face-to-face CSCL (Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning) environments when learners are interconnected wirelessly benefits those students, according to several studies (Danesh, Inkpen, Lau, Shu, & Booth; Mandryk, Inkpen, Bilezikjian, Klemmer, & Landay, in Jeng et al., 2010). Also, Uzunboylu, Cavus, and Ercag (in Jeng et al., 2010) researched on the inclusion of cellphones and data services for the encouragement of learners' use of mobile technologies and the development of environmental awareness, and the outcome of that investigation was that pupils' attitudes concerning environmental matters were more positive.

In short, these four dimensions, if successfully fulfilled, provide effective mobile learning environments. Jeng et al. (2010, p. 8) explain that "many currently available mobile learning applications highlight the mobility, ubiquitous computing, and portability features to facilitate learning process by utilizing those features."

Mobile learning can be incredibly useful for students, making people's process of knowledge acquisition much easier and convenient by having the possibility of learning anytime and anywhere through authentic materials. After having clarified what mobile

learning is and how it is positive for learners, it is important to take into account that this type of learning can be carried out in two different settings: the formal and the informal.

Lai, Khaddage, and Knezek (in Grant, 2015) describe formal learning as "learning in a physical environment in a classroom setting" and informal learning as the one that "occurs outside a formal classroom setting." Nevertheless, Eshach (in Grant, 2015) states that relying only in features related to the physical environment might not be enough to make a distinction between formal and informal learning environments. It is preferable and forward thinking to distinguish both types of learning with regard to their origins and the motivations of the students (Grant, 2015). In addition, Looi et al. (in Khaddage et al., 2016) argue that the difference between them can be observed in the existence or dearth of a formal curriculum.

In the following sections, more details about both learning types are going to be given.

2.2.1.1. Mobile learning in formal settings

Formal learning is understood as the one where learners are engaged with software developed by teachers, trainers, or faculty members which are going to be used throughout a teaching program in an educational context (Halliday-Wynes & Beddie, in Grant, 2015). Eshach (in Grant, 2015) explains that formal learning is structured and prearranged, and learners' motivation towards it is extrinsic, that is, students are encouraged to do something so as to get an external reward, such as good grades.

Grant (2015) argues that, if an instructor needs to ask learners to gather, produce, analyze, or review something outside the classrooms, this still would be considered as formal learning. This is an important reason of saying that formal learning should not solely depend on characteristics associated with the physical environment.

2.2.1.2. Mobile learning in informal settings

On the other hand, informal learning is defined as the learning that individuals do independently (Hrimech, in Grant, 2015), and learners' motivation towards this type of learning is intrinsic, which means that they acquire knowledge because they want to, and because it is satisfying for them. Activities such as Internet searches, reading, going to

local events, and visiting community resources like museums and libraries are deemed informal learning (Grant, 2015).

Apart from the previously mentioned examples, it is of great significance to add a few more to the list, which are downloading and learning through mobile applications, listening to podcasts, and watching movies and series. Those instances are important because of several reasons: they are massively used worldwide, they are a great source of English learning in an informal setting, and there are a great number of podcasts and apps about pretty much everything, as well as myriad movies in English.

Barron (2006) affirms that mandatory formal learning may bring about an interest in informal learning on the part of the students. For instance, a pupil loves the English language, as well as the English lessons given in the educational center they attend. They do their homework at home and feel that it is not enough; there, informal learning comes into play. This student, driven by their intrinsic motivation, decides to read a book in English, to download an English learning application, or to listen to a podcast about their favorite topic in English – or all of them –, in order to get a deeper knowledge of the language.

3. Contextualization

3.1. Listening comprehension skill

"Listening is an active, complex process of constructing meaning by applying linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge to the incoming sounds." (Chang, 2012, p. 166). Listening is an active skill because the interpretation of the text is constructed by the recipient by giving a meaning to the information received. The linguistic knowledge consists of a wide array of variables such as lexis, semantics, phonology, discourse, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics, while the non-linguistic one includes background knowledge of what is spoken, as well as general knowledge.

This skill is usually regarded as the most difficult language skill, since the utterances are conveyed in real time and need to be processed at the same time as they are heard (Buck, in Chang, 2012). That is, individuals cannot manage the speed of the spoken text or rewind it to listen to it again (unless that text is recorded). The recipient must understand and make an interpretation messages by using a number of different resources, such as discriminating between sounds, understanding lexicon and grammatical structures as well as stress and intonation, retaining everything done in the previous steps and, eventually, interpreting the spoken message according to the sociocultural context (Buck, in Chang, 2012).

As it can be seen in the previous paragraph, there are many things to be taken into account during the listening comprehension process. As a result, it might be a true challenge to appropriately understand spoken texts. Aspects like the dialectic variations and sociolinguistic characteristics can make comprehension harder, since the recipient might not be familiar with either – or both – of them (Buck, in Chang, 2012). Furthermore, unless the oral text is recorded, it is not possible to control the speed of the utterances or go back to previous parts of the spoken text; thus, unlike with written texts, listeners cannot revise the utterance.

Chang (2012) explains that this can be really frustrating for students due to two reasons: first, they are usually inhibited by their own mental blocks and, when encountering incomprehensible parts, they stop assimilating the information, convincing themselves that they are unable to understand what it is said; and second, there are not any set rules,

like in grammar, so this skill has to be learnt on one's own, by continuous exposure to the language. Because of the listening nature, it is not only really hard to learn, but also to teach, and instructors have a tough time trying to get the most out of their students' listening learning.

Field (2004) divides the listening process into two levels: the recognition level, in which items like phonemes, words, phrases, and intonation take place, and the selection level, where the message units are isolated, for comprehension purposes, without paying attention to single components in a conscious way. Developing the latter proves essential with regard to listening comprehension since it is a must for understanding what it is uttered.

"Despite its critical role in language acquisition and effective communication, listening in educational environments does not get enough emphasis and is generally neglected." (Ciğerci & Gultekin, 2017, p. 252). Listening is one of the most important skills, if not the most important and, within the classrooms, the most dealt with skills are reading and writing. There is great emphasis on grammar, but students need a solid proficiency in both listening and speaking if they are to use a second language in an appropriate way.

This is not a critique to grammar: it is absolutely necessary to get a good language base. However, pupils spend too much time learning it, which leads to a dependency on its use. Students will always think about speaking with the utmost correctness, and that does not help to get fluency whatsoever. Besides, in order to be able to talk with other people, individuals must comprehend what they say; neglecting the listening skill will make learners have a low comprehension level, so having a good grammatical level will barely be of use.

Educational settings, regarding second language teaching, should emphasize the use of listening activities. Ciğerci & Gultekin (2017) argue that those activities should be designed so that students get interested and eager to do them, as well as pay attention to them; furthermore, students need to be motivated towards listening tasks, so teaching techniques should be employed to encourage pupils to do them in order to improve their skills. Technologies are really useful for that purpose, so integrating them in educational settings may give a boost to both teachers' and students' motivation.

3.1.1. Listening strategies

As it has been aforementioned, listening skill is something that is difficult to learn and teach. Chang and Read (2006) explain that "students of English in a foreign language environment have difficulty comprehending the spoken language, especially in one-way listening situations where they do not have the opportunity to see – let alone interact with – the speaker" (p. 375).

Because of that, it is deemed important that learners are taught some strategies in order to make the most out of their listening development. Luca Lampariello, an Italian polyglot and language coach who has learnt 13 languages, has written about strategies to improve listening comprehension on his website; these are as follows:

a) Learners should choose comprehensible input. By "comprehensible input," Lampariello means audio files that individuals understand by a 60-80%. This strategy is essential to boost comprehension since, if people barely understand what is being uttered, they will not get the gist of it, which is going to lead to them getting frustrated and not seeing any improvement.
b) Students should listen to what they enjoy, that is, resources that are entertaining and relevant to them. This one is important because, when individuals are fond of what they listen to, their focus, as well as motivation, will be increased; thus, people should choose the materials carefully, and not listening to everything they find.
c) Students should focus on the big picture, not on the small details. What people tend to do when listening to something is try to understand every single word that is being said; this is a mistake as, when they do not comprehend a few words, they stop listening. Because of this, it is fundamental to get the general meaning of what is listened to: this way, even though individuals do not comprehend some parts of the audio resource, they will know what it is about, thus feeling motivated towards further listening.
d) Learners should listen and re-listen at different speeds. Language spoken at native speed is really quick, so it is a good idea to listen at a slower pace, and making it faster bit by bit, so that people will not get overwhelmed by the speed and fluency of native speaking. In order to do that, individuals must find recordings that can be slowed down; fortunately, most of them have this feature, so it is easy to take advantage of this strategy.

e) Students should learn actively by taking notes. They do not need to do anything to listen to something, so they usually learn in a passive way, just relaxing while watching a movie, or listening to music. However, in order to learn in a productive way, it is essential to listen actively; by doing this, people are going to understand – as well as retain – the content much more effectively. Taking notes during the process of listening is a magnificent way to be active towards learning. Jotting down the gist of what the audio is about, as well as writing down new words that are not understood so that they are looked up later, are methods that will make people learn to comprehend much more effectively; in addition, they are going to get new lexicon that they are going to learn almost unconsciously.
f) Learners should be patient. This is the most important tip for every learner; it takes a great deal of time to develop listening skills. Consistency is the key to making these skills grow so, if individuals are patient enough to follow a daily listening routine for months – or even years –, their effort will definitely bear fruit.

These strategies, if employed effectively, can be extremely helpful not just for students, but also for teachers; both can benefit from them and, furthermore, educators will be able to make use of them for educational purposes within formal settings.

3.2. ICT integration in Secondary School

Young generations, as previously stated, make an over-the-top use of ICTs; but most of that use is for entertainment. Apps like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp are employed by millions of people all over the world. While social networks can be perfectly used for learning – there are a myriad of educational pages of all types within those apps –, most youngsters use them to look aimlessly at their friends and famous people's timelines for hours; this is understood as a social use of ICTs. In order to actually take advantage of what ICTs have to offer, an academic use of those technologies (ICTs used in educational contexts or to learn) should be carried out.

Using technologies in educational contexts is easier said than done, though. Noguera (2013) states that integrating the ICTs in educational centers does not imply a change in methodologies, but a focus on providing tools and access to the Internet. In OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries which, according to its website, is an international organization that promotes equality and prosperity for

everyone, most schools possess a minimum of one computer and Internet connection (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], in Noguera, 2013). However, despite the fact that it is widely encouraged that teachers use ICTs in the classroom, online learning is still not very widespread in Europe and, furthermore, in some countries, computers are not accessible to students in the classroom yet (Eurydice, 2011).

Balanskat, Blamire, and Kefala (in Noguera, 2013) explain that ICTs have a positive impact on educational performance, as well as on learners and learning, and that in e-mature schools (centers which are ICT-friendly) there is a quick increase in performance scores; among the positive aspects that ICTs have over learners, there are the competences, motivation and assessment, adaptation to individual needs, independent learning, teamwork and student-centered learning approach, and critical thinking. Those advantages have not been overlooked by educators all over Europe, who seem to like the new technologies judging by the following cite from Noguera (2013):

"Most European teachers have a positive attitude towards ICTs (the most skeptical are the most experienced teachers) because of its potential to create new dynamics of classroom work, to individualize learning, to promote creativity and to motivate students" (p. 52).

If well used, ICTs have a huge potential to help teachers and students to improve the effectiveness of the lessons. As time goes by, developers create an increasing number of software that may be employed within the classrooms. Motivating students is an essential task, since a motivated student is much more eager to learn; sadly, is it equally important and hard. English is, in some cases, not a loved subject at school, and most pupils start the lesson with zero motivation. If ICTs are integrated in an effective manner, they will most likely give a boost on the students' eagerness to learn, especially because they encourage working in groups. This does not only help students to increase their motivation, but it is also a great way to learn, since pupils will interact with each other in the target language, and they are going to improve their level while having fun.

Even though ICTs are positive if used in educational contexts, providing students with computers does not suffice to exploit those technologies. Obviously, not only students attend the schools, but also teachers, so formal training related to this field is a must for them if ICTs are to be utilized in the educational centers. Most of those centers have followed the same teaching methodology for decades; as a result, the system has become very rigid, so the use of ICTs is low.

Still nowadays, in the majority of schools, the subject of English is carried out through the traditional method of following a book, and it has to be finished by the end of the school year. Finishing a book is difficult even when dedicating 100% of the time to it during the lessons – there are several holidays, and unforeseen events such as demonstrations might happen –, so if ICTs are to be used, it would suppose losing time to dedicate to the book, so it would imply an even greater challenge. Besides, it is much more comfortable for teachers to follow a book where everything is already pre-made and the guidelines are still written down rather than preparing everything for themselves, which requires a great deal of work at home.

To sum up, ICTs have a positive impact in secondary school education, but they are yet to be integrated in many centers.

3.3. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

It is known that not all people are the same and, in educational contexts, this is no exception. Inside the classrooms, there are students of all kinds: smart, hard-working, absent-minded, talkative, and eager to learn, to name a few. Within those kinds of students, there are some which are considered to have educational needs; in other words, they learn at a slower rate than the average.

This diversity of pupils in the same classroom makes learning, as well as teaching, a difficult task. The contents of the curriculum are required to be fulfilled by the end of the school year, so educators cannot slow down their teaching pace; in addition, the curricula's objectives and resources are elaborated for a big number of average students (Alba Pastor, Sánchez Serrano, & Zubillaga del Río, 2016). This results in the learners with educational needs to fall behind the rest of their classmates, which in turn might lead to a reduction of those students' motivation and eagerness to learn, since the objectives of the curriculum are, in most cases, out of reach for them.

Inclusive education has become a goal for educational systems from all over the world (Katz, in Katz, 2013). If equity in education is to be achieved, obstacles like the aforesaid one must be overcome; thus, it proves essential to give a response to the educational diversity that exists in the classrooms, making sure that each and every student is provided with everything they need to learn effectively (Alba Pastor et al., 2016). Inclusive

education must establish elevated standards for all learners and, at the same time, aiding those students to reach them (Katz, 2013).

However, this is not a simple thing to carry out, so the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)[4] created an approach under the name of Universal Design of Learning (UDL), which has been designed so that the contents of the curriculum will be accessible to all learners, regardless of their traits.

The UDL was originated in 1990 by David H. Rose and Anne Meyer. In the CAST website, a definition for this approach is provided, which is the following: "Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn." At the beginning, the UDL focused on the use of technologies in order to make accessibility easier; nevertheless, Burgstahler (2008) argues that further development of the approach acknowledges instructional pedagogies to ease that accessibility. Therefore, UDL is not just about the usage of technology in education (Rose & Meyer, in King-Sears, 2009), but also about the pedagogy utilized for all students (King-Sears, 2009).

According to Ayuso del Puerto (2017), the Universal Design of Learning is presented as a flexible, innovative proposal that allows to meet the students' needs. It is innovative in the sense that it does not only benefit all students, but also allows them to choose the most convenient and comfortable option for them (Alba Pastor et al., 2016); thus, this approach enables learners to develop their knowledge, skills, motivation, and eagerness to learn.

Researchers from the CAST found out that the technologies which they designed were used by students of all kinds, even though they were destined to be utilized by students with diverse needs. The most common choice for students is the use of technologies, since they have grown up using them, and they usually find them more interesting than textbooks; therefore, the use of the latter, having the option of picking ICTs, is not a particularly attractive idea to them.

The UDL is very beneficial for all students, and especially for students with learning difficulties or disabilities. This group of students reveal increased academic results (e.g. literacy and general knowledge) when put into inclusive environments, in comparison with peers with the same disability level located in segregated settings (Ruijs & Peetsma,

[4] CAST is a non-profit-making organization related with the field of education that works to increase learning opportunities for everyone by means of UDL. (Definition extracted from the CAST website).

in Katz, 2013). Furthermore, Alba Pastor et al. (2016) state that those students show better outcomes when using technological means rather than the traditional printed materials, and research indicates that employing UDL in lesson planning and evaluation may improve student achievement (Dolan, Hall, Banerjee, Chun, & Strangman, in Hunt & Andreasen, 2011).

3.3.1. Principles to make the most out of UDL

Connell et al. (in King-Sears, 2009) explain that, universally, there are seven principles that make products and environments more accessible for people and, applied to the educational needs of learners with disabilities, these principles are developed in technological and pedagogical manners. The principles are the following: flexibility in use, equitable use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use (Connell et al., in King-Sears, 2009).

a) The *flexibility in use* is seen when teachers give lessons that accommodate a wide array of students' priorities and skills. For instance, educators can teach how to discern between the present simple and the present continuous tenses by using physical and virtual tools. Nevertheless, this is not enough to convey the information that is wanted to be transferred to the students; they also need to use the appropriate pedagogical strategies to clarify that information.
b) *Equitable use* of educational materials can be attained by means of technologies like virtual texts for learners with learning disabilities. However, those technologies are not always at hand, so in many cases, physical textbooks are utilized (Jitendra, Deatline-Buchman, & Sczesniak, in King-Sears, 2009). When concrete materials are used, the focus should fall to pedagogical ways that boost the accessibility of the contents for students. For example, when taking a UDL approach to the use of textbooks, their features are redesigned previous to the instruction procedure; this way, key facts are highlighted and related to other facts.
c) *Perceptible information* is understood as the usage of several different ways to introduce and practice the content of the curriculum (e.g. pictures, tactile experiences, and accurate and clear language). Current software that combine visual and written content, as well as clear verbal explanations and directions

provided by the instructors, are powerful methods to effectively include students with learning disabilities in the education received by all.

d) The principle of *tolerance for error* is best explained through software that "teach" students by means of trial and error. There are two types of programs with regard to tolerance for error: the first one has a simple design, which just tells students to "try again," while the other type of software provides learners with steps on how to answer correctly. However, this principle is not just based on technology; teachers also have their place. When pupils make mistakes, they may give immediate feedback, which will be a beneficial pedagogical experience for them (Dihoff, Brosvic, Epstein, & Cook, in King-Sears, 2009).
e) The content that has a *simple and intuitive use* is presented in a straightforward manner, and it takes into account the learners' knowledge, language skills, and concentration levels.
f) As the name implies, *low physical effort* makes reference to creating or providing materials that are practical, so that students can focus more on what is taught in class. An example of this would be giving pupils with low fine-motor skills an adapted keyboard.
g) In order for the principle of *size and space for approach and use* to be effective, teachers must make sure that, when using programs like Microsoft PowerPoint, the content shown is large enough for all students to see it, regardless of where they are seated in the classroom, and that the content is presented in a tidy format in order for the students to be able to focus on it.

3.3.2. Essential principles of the UDL

The Universal Design of Learning is based on three principles created to overcome the obstacles that exist in educational contexts; they have become essential in the UDL field due to their usefulness, so virtually all research around this field includes a section about these principles (Alba Pastor et al., 2016). They are representation, action and expression, and engagement (CAST, 2014).

3.3.2.1. Representation

The principle of *representation* alludes to changes that can be made to instructional materials which may make them accessible to students with diverse needs. Pupils are different from each other in what represents the way of perceiving and understanding the information presented to them (Alba Pastor et al., 2016). For example, students with learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia), sensory disabilities (e.g. blindness or deafness), or linguistic differences, might need diverse ways to approach the content given.

If these modifications are to be carried out, teachers must learn to present other materials beyond the oral and print ones. Because of that, adding resources such as videos, pictures, or websites within the classrooms is essential to make an effective inclusion of all students.

These means of representation are going to give learners several ways of getting information and knowledge, as well as make sure that they comprehend and acquire that information more easily. Alba Pastor et al. (2016) provide some guidelines so that this principle is as effective as possible, namely:

- Provide different options to perceive the information given. The aim of this guideline is to provide the same content by means of different methods, such as visual, auditory, or audiovisual.
- Provide multiple options for language and symbols. An image, symbol, or lexicon that has a specific meaning for one pupil might have a completely different one for another, depending on the cultural and social background. Using multiple systems at the same time (e.g. words and images) will give a boost to the quality of the students' understanding.
- Provide options for comprehension. Teachers must support students during the process of learning, guaranteeing them the access of information and the acquisition of knowledge.

3.3.2.2. Action and expression

This principle deals with alternative communication techniques destined to learners with different needs. Alba Pastor et al. (2016) explain that there are students who are able to communicate using written texts, but not in an oral way, and vice versa, sometimes because of a mere matter of preference, and sometimes due to disorders such as brain

paralysis, difficulties with strategic and organizational skills, or problems caused by possessing a limited competence of the language.

There is not a perfect way of performing a task or expressing what has been learnt. For this reason, the Universal Design for Learning demands teachers to supply pupils with multiple options to transmit and demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired, going beyond conventional exams and including options which are going to exploit the special skills of the students (Baldiris Navarro, Zervas, Fabregat Gesa, & Sampson, 2016).

In order to include this principle into educational contexts, the UDL defines several guidelines, which are the following (Alba Pastor et al., 2016):

- Provide multiple physical means of action. Printed textbooks and workbooks, as well as some educational multimedia programs, offer limited options for interaction. Because of that, it is important that curricular resources are designed so that they will be compatible with support technologies; for example, allowing the interaction with voice-activated commutators will make up for the learners' motor and visual disabilities.
- Provide options for expression and attain a fluent communication. In order to carry out this guideline properly, three steps must be followed. First of all, different means of communication must be used, catering for interactive tools and communication programs, as well as composing through several means (e.g. text, voice, music, visual art); this will foster the students' usage of alternative tools to express themselves. Secondly, multiple tools for composition must be utilized, including tools such as orthographical and grammatical correctors; this will give students an important support when performing a composition task. Finally, support during the learning process must be given, such as constructive feedback; this will aid students to reach as high level as possible in different competences.

3.3.2.3. Engagement

"Getting students excited about learning can be a challenge, especially in middle school." (Hunt & Andreasen, 2011, p. 169). This quote is painfully true, and thousands of teachers around the world might agree with it. Teenagers' priorities, in general, are all about having fun with their friends, and acquiring academic knowledge is not something they

are interested in. However, they are forced to attend school 5 times a week – or even 6 in countries like Japan – for many hours, so educators are most likely to find bored, unmotivated students in the classrooms who just care about the time that is left to leave school.

Apart from the students' priorities, there is an emotional component that deals with how they prefer to learn, and it is essential for educators to know the learning preferences of the students. For example, there are pupils who prefer working on their own, while there are others who feel more comfortable when working in groups (Alba Pastor et al., 2016).

The principle of *engagement* makes reference to the usage of strategies that take into account the needs of each and every student during the process of learning. These strategies, if well executed, will boost students' motivation to learn and, as a result, their learning experience is going to be much better, and they are going to acquire academic knowledge more easily.

Alba Pastor et al. (2016), as in the two previous principles, give a number of UDL guidelines to incorporate it into the teaching processes. Those are the following:

- Provide options to get the students' attention. The contents to which attention is not paid become inaccessible, since the information goes unnoticed and is not acquired. Because of that, teachers do their best to try to catch the learners' attention, as well as making them participate in class; nevertheless, that is a difficult task, since every student is different with regard to topics of their interest. Their preferences may even change with time; as a result, it is important to have several different ways to get attention at hand, such as offering options to practice decision making, making them feel satisfied with their achievements.
- Provide choices to keep students' efforts and perseverance. The action of learning requires continuous effort and attention by part of students. Teachers should help them in that endeavor and, for that, it is useful to follow some recommendations, like regularly reminding students of the importance of learning, with the purpose of getting them to keep working hard and be concentrated, and forming flexible groups that foster cooperation and teamwork.

4. Design

Myriad apps and websites that deal with English language learning have been developed in recent years. However, not many of them are reliable and comfortable enough to guarantee individuals a good learning experience.

Regarding apps and websites, what is understood as reliable and comfortable? A reliable app or site is one that is developed by experts on language learning. Those people have the knowledge needed to understand what is the best way for learners to become competent in a foreign language; thus, they develop the material so that they advance through that language in an effective way, learning the most important lexicon, including it in sentences that are of common use, and even having the chance of uttering and listening to them through the phone's or computer's built-in speakers.

A comfortable app or site is understood as being user-friendly and free of ads. Some of the sites are designed in a strange, not-straightforward manner and, what's more, there is not any tutorial, so people who begin using them might be lost, even discouraged if they feel that they do not know how to use the app straight away. Also, there are some apps which are ad-packed; having to watch an advert every time a user finishes a lesson can be truly annoying, and there are people who are not patient enough to put up with that situation and, as a result, they end up abandoning their language-learning endeavor.

Even though it might be obvious, it is important to remark that most of the apps and sites that fulfill both of those features are not free of charge, and they require either a subscription or a one-time-only payment in order for people to benefit from them. Creating this kind of resources is incredibly time-consuming, and developers are usually people with extensive experience in the field; it is normal that they want something in return for all the work done. Some examples of this kind of apps and sites are *Babbel* (59,40€ yearly; 9,95€ monthly), *LingQ* (11,50€ monthly), and *Busuu* (8,90€ monthly; 62,10€ yearly). They are interesting, but hard-up people will not be able to enjoy them; furthermore, few of those resources are useful enough for listening skills improvement so, in most cases, if the aim is just getting to understand what people say, investing this amount of money is not worth it whatsoever.

Because of that, there are other apps and sites which have premium features, but they can be enjoyed almost at its fullest without having to pay anything for them; in this case, people can become premium users to unlock special activities that deepen their learning

experience. This kind of apps are scarce, and a few instances of them are *Duolingo* and *Memrise*. Even though they are well-made apps, they are not particularly useful for the purpose of this project, that is improving the learners' listening comprehension skills, since the listening exercises that both contain always consist in recognizing a single word or sentence and include robot recordings instead of audio recorded by natives. In addition, their use is mainly useful in informal settings; their usefulness in formal ones is little.

Next up, some apps which are particularly helpful for getting learners' auditory comprehension skills to the next level are going to be analyzed. All of them possess magnificent contents fit to use in both formal and informal settings, and these apps are going to help students transfer from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation.

4.1. BBC Learning English

This app, as the name implies, has been developed by the British Broadcasting Corporation, well known as the BBC. It is a multimillion company, and it is known worldwide, so before downloading it, one can expect to find a complete learning resource, and not only it is magnificent, but also free of charge and without any kind of annoying adverts, so this app will live up to every learner's expectations. What's more, it is incredibly useful for the purpose of this project. Of course, all this cannot be stated without giving any reasons, so now this amazing resource is going to be analyzed thoroughly, explaining the motives of its brilliance.

To begin with, *BBC Learning English* is a very user-friendly app with a simple interface, so it is truly simple to navigate through the app; furthermore, users do not need to sign up in order to begin using the tool, so they just need to download and enjoy.

The app basically consists of a huge number of varied lessons, dealing with many different topics that will delight each and every student of English. Besides, the lesson database is updated on a daily basis, so it is almost impossible for people to run out of learning materials. Those lessons comprise an audio file – some of them even include a video file together with it –, a synopsis of the chapter, a lesson tab, and a transcript of what is uttered in a transcript tab. They are very complete, providing everything needed to make the most out of every lesson.

- In the lesson tab, users are going to find everything related to the lesson: what it is about, what is going to be learnt, the most relevant lexicon together with its definition and, in some cases, quizzes to be answered by the learners after having completed the session, which are going to help them interiorize the content in a more effective way.
- It is likely that some students do not fully comprehend what is spoken in the audio file. Some of the files do not include subtitles, but that will not pose any problems due to the fact that each and every lesson has a transcript of the audio text, so in case of having a hard time understanding it, users just need to go to the transcript tab, which will definitely come in handy for learners to not get lost. Moreover, the important lexicon appears written in bold, so people will always know which the most useful words or sentences are to learn.

Lessons are divided into levels, from lower-intermediate to advanced. This app is not fit for absolute beginners but, in order to use it, users do not necessarily need to have a minimum level of lower-intermediate since, as it has been aforesaid, all BBC Learning English's lessons contain explanations and transcripts, which makes them effortless to follow. Moreover, it is possible to pause the audio file at any moment so, in case people do not understand some parts of the file, they can go over it as many times as they need; that is going to help students boost their aural skills, since they are going to learn common intonation and rhythm patterns of English sentences through repetition.

All the lessons included in the app are not only divided into levels, but also into 6 different categories, which are the following: Business English, Everyday English, Grammar, Learn with the News, Pronunciation, and Vocabulary. Those divisions make it much easier for users to look for a specific lesson depending on their learning aim; for instance, if an individual wants to work in an important company and needs to be competent in business English, they just have to go to the "Business English" category, choose a lesson fitting their level, and improve their proficiency in that field of English, as well as their listening skills.

Another interesting feature of the lessons included within the app is that they are very short. They last from 1 to 10 minutes, and most of them last 6 minutes or less, so even busy learners will not have any problem clearing their schedule to go through a lesson or two. There are some that last more than 6 minutes, but they are the ones that belong to

the Grammar category so, taking into account that each lesson deals with a specific aspect of grammar (e.g. countable and uncountable nouns, reported speech, and question tags), it is a more than reasonable time.

The app's lessons belong to different programs from the BBC, namely "6 Minute English," "6 Minute Grammar," "6 Minute Vocabulary," "Bad Dates," "English in a Minute," "English at Work," "The English we Speak," "Grammar Gameshow," "How to," "Lingohack," "News Review," "Phrase Frenzy," "Small Talk," "Sounds of English," "This is Where," "Tim's Pronunciation Workshop," and "We Say – You Say." This is a very varied number of programs, so users will have many options to choose from. As a result, they will be less likely to get bored and more likely to keep a high level of motivation towards English learning.

Upon entering the app, users are going to see 3 tabs on the bottom part of the screen: "home," "programmes,"[5] and "my learning."

- Home. This is the tab that shows the first when getting into *BBC Learning English*. Here, a small number of lessons appear, which are the ones that have been uploaded the latest, regardless of the category they belong to. This tab is particularly helpful for learners who are not demanding with relation to lesson choosing because, in order to begin learning, they just have to enter the app and select any of the lessons there, without having to make a thorough search.
- Programmes. This is the tab that appears on the right from the "home" one. Here, people will find all the lessons included within the app. At the upper side of the screen, they will be able to choose between looking for them by category[6] and by programs. In the former, the lessons from each category are sorted in chronological order, from the latest to the oldest, and in the latter, programs are sorted in alphabetical order. As a result, it is easy for users to find the lessons they like to learn from.
- My learning. Here, two sub-tabs show in the upper part of the screen: following and history.
    - Following. In this sub-tab, a big "+" icon is going to come into view, together with a message that goes "you're not following any programmes.

[5] This dissertation is written in American English; however, *BBC Learning English* uses British English. That is why "programmes" is written instead of "programs."
[6] See previous page to look for the categories into which the app's lessons are divided.

Tap the + icon when on a programme to keep up with the latest episodes." As the message says, people will be able to follow a program they are interested in, so that they are notified in case a new chapter belonging to that program is uploaded. In order to follow a program, users just need to go to the "programmes" tab, select any chapter included within a program, and click on "+ follow…", located just below the synopsis for the episode. After doing that, they need to go back to "my learning," and that chapter will appear. This sub-tab makes it very comfortable for users to learn, since it helps them to not lose track of the chapters from their favorite programs and, furthermore, they are notified of lessons' updates, so they do not even need to get into the app to check whether there are new chapters.

- History. In this sub-tab, users will be able to see which lessons they have already learnt, including the title of the chapter, the program it belongs to, and the date in which they have last watched it. It is particularly useful for learners to remember if they have gone over a lesson or not, or in case they want to review it another time.

This app looks perfect so far but, as everything, it has a few drawbacks which might hinder the users' learning experience through this app. The first one is that, in order to make use of this resource, an Internet connection is needed at all times. There is not any possibility to download the lessons on the phone, so learners who want to study English and happen to lack a connection to the Internet will not be able to do so. In addition, a second disadvantage consists in the app not having any search bar; therefore, if people desire to find a specific lesson (to recommend or share it, for instance), they will have to remember where it is.

The first disadvantage could be solved by adding a feature that enables users to download the lessons on their phones, so that they can learn despite not having online connection. The second one, though, can be easily solved; normally, users who want to find a specific lesson will have already gone over it, so if they enjoy it, they just have to follow the program where that lesson is, and look for it afterwards.

BBC Learning English, as it has been explained, has a huge number of engaging materials that are constantly updated, so there are lessons that deal with current issues; as a result, it is interesting to make use of this app in formal settings. A proposal to use this app is

the following: teachers can do activities to improve students' listening comprehension by selecting a video that is appealing to their students, making sure that they select a video which has an appropriate level and length for their learners, so are going to pay attention to the full video without getting bored, as well as understand its general meaning; if there are hearing-impaired students, educators should choose a video which also has subtitles. Next, they play it in class and then ask questions about the gist of the video. Through this kind of tasks, several of the listening strategies aforementioned – comprehensible input, listening to what students enjoy, and focusing on the big picture – are going to be employed, which is going to be helpful in developing students' aural skills; furthermore, the use of a technological resource is likely to motivate learners to keep on increasing their skills, and even use it outside the educational context.

On balance, the positive aspects that the app possesses make up for the negative ones. It is a magnificent, free of charge resource for language learning, and everyone with a mobile phone is able to enjoy it. What's more, the fact that all lessons include an audio file recorded by native speakers makes it a perfect, completely recommended app for improving listening comprehension skills. This tool can be used in both formal and informal settings. Regarding informal settings, users will learn English through an enormous number of varied lessons which provide learners with everything to make them easy to follow and, as a result, users are going to be motivated and more eager to learn. With relation to formal contexts, teachers will be able to create, in an easy manner, countless listening exercises using audio files from this app. Instructors, as well as students, are going to find a great resource in *BBC Learning English*.

4.2. Language Learning with Netflix

Netflix is, if not the most, one of the most popular video streaming services in the world. It includes a wide array of award-winning TV series and movies, as well as documentaries of all sorts. It is available in no more and no less than almost 200 countries, and more than 130 million people are subscribed to this platform.

Netflix is a magnificent streaming service, but it does not come for free. Users must pay a monthly subscription in order to get full access to the software. This subscription amount depends on the plan selected; the gettable plans can be seen in the following table:

Plan	Number of devices at the same time	Video quality	Pricing
Basic	1	SD (Standard Definition)	7,99€ / month
Standard	2	HD (High Definition)	10,99€ / month
Premium	4	HD / Ultra HD	13,99€ / month

Figure 1. Netflix pricing.

As it can be observed, the pricing is quite low considering the quality of the platform. Furthermore, the first month is free of charge, so that users have enough time to think whether it is worth it or not. Millions of people are currently enjoying the contents of Netflix: most of them get the premium plan in groups of 4, since they can make use of Netflix at the same time, as well as watch videos at the best quality, for the meager price of 3,50€ per month.

Previously, it has been mentioned that few resources are worth investing money on them in order to boost learners' aural comprehension abilities; the one that is going to be dealt with next, called "Language Learning with Netflix," or LLN, is one of them. It is an extension[7] for the Google Chrome browser which has been released in 2018. Although the extension in itself does not require any kind of payment, users need a Netflix subscription and access to the Internet in order to use it.

Netflix has been a great language learning resource for years, and it is used for this purpose by many people. Having a huge number of titles available in several different languages (both audio and subtitles) is something that has not been overlooked, and users began watching series and movies in original version with subtitles to sharpen their listening skills and broaden their lexicon.

Language Learning with Netflix takes language learning a step further. It provides the video streaming service with new possibilities for boosting learners' language competence with regard to lexicon learning and listening comprehension skills, having the extension a big number of titles available, and growing with time, as well as having the possibility of choosing among 29 different tongues, from English to exotic ones like Thai. As a result, not only students of English will be able to take advantage of LLN, but also extends to students of many other languages.

[7] An extension is a module that extends the utility of a web browser, adding features and modifying web pages. In this case, LLN modifies Netflix.

To begin utilizing LLN, individuals need to click on the extension, located to the right of the browser's address bar. When this step is done, 4 options will unfold, namely catalogue, help, feedback, and Facebook.

- Catalogue. This is going to be the users' main choice; here, all the available titles are going to be shown. In this new page, the first things to be encountered are two boxes where people will choose the language that they study, as well as the country from where they employ Netflix. Both boxes must be filled because of the following reasons: first, the target language must be chosen since not all the titles are available in every language, especially considering that LLN is relatively new, and second, not all the series and movies are available in all countries, so selecting the actual country is essential; otherwise, it is likely that users will find something to watch that is not available in their own country. After having filled in the boxes (e.g. language you study: English; your Netflix country: Spain), the accessible titles are going to appear below. Currently, the catalogue of English movies and TV shows in Spain compatible with LLN is quite big, with more than 300 in total.
- Help. This section contains the instructions on how to use LLN, together with some study tips to make the most out of the language learning process.
- Feedback. The developers of LLN care a lot about the proper functioning of the extension; that is why they have this section. Here, people can either report any issue that might occur during the video playback or give proposals for new ideas to implement in the extension, with the objective of improving it.
- Facebook. This link is going to lead to the LLN Facebook page. In this page, important information about the resource, such as updates, bug fixes, or new titles available in a certain language, is posted in a regular basis.

In order to make use of LLN, people need to pick up their favorite movie, series, or documentary on Netflix, either through the extension or through Netflix itself. Once selected, they need to click on the red "LLN" icon situated to the bottom left part. It is mandatory that subtitles are on; otherwise, nothing is going to appear in the subtitle part.

Once this is done, two lines of subtitles will show on the bottom part of the screen: on the lower side, the original ones, and on the upper side, the translation into the target language.

Now, users will have many possibilities to benefit from language learning, and they are going to be explained next.

First of all, there is the possibility of pausing the subtitles automatically after they have been uttered; in order to do that, people only need to turn on the "automatic pause" button, located to the bottom right. This is mostly helpful for beginners, since they will not have to be pausing the video manually, which is a big nuisance.

Another useful tool is the keyboard shortcuts for subtitles. Students will normally have many doubts when learning, so these shortcuts will make it more pleasant for them to take full advantage of LLN. The shortcuts are as follows: pressing the upper arrow key allows to pause and reproduce the video file; pushing the left and right keys enables to jump directly to the previous and following subtitle line respectively; and selecting the down arrow makes the current subtitle line to repeat.

The settings option, which is the gear-shaped icon appearing to the right, contains magnificent features to push the users' language proficiency forward. Those features are lexicon highlighting, target language translation, possibility of showing automatic or human translation, and slow down speech segments.

- The lexicon highlighting, despite being in its beta version (experimental phase), is one of the most useful tools for language learners. What it does is emphasize a number of words, which will appear white-colored in the subtitle lines, while the rest of the words will be grayed out. Those words are not randomized, but carefully selected according to the learners' proficiency; what's more, if the cursor is put on any of the highlighted words, a translation for it is going to be put into sight, which is great in case that doubts arise. Users can choose among 8 different levels, each one differing from the others in numbers in number of words: level 1 emphasizes 300 words; level 2, 800; level 3, 1500; level 4, 2500; level 5, 4000; level 6, 6200; level 7, 9500; and level 8 emphasizes each and every word. Due to this level division, users will be able to personalize their learning experience, just focusing on the words that fit their level. As a result, they are going to get a boost in their listening and grammar skills, as well as in their motivation.
- The target language translation can also be useful, since it lets users change the subtitle translation. When choosing a language, many of them appear, but only those available in the title will appear below; for instance, if a title only has

English and Spanish subtitles, LLN will only show the subtitles in those 2 languages, while the other choices will be blank. This feature is particularly useful for students who learn English and speak widespread languages, since most Netflix titles include subtitles in those languages. Being able to have both languages at the same time is going to facilitate users' understanding of the target language, therefore getting more motivated towards learning.

- This extension enables users to choose among profiting from a human or an automatic translation. Automatic translations are very similar to those found on YouTube, for example; in other words, even if they are not completely bad, they are not reliable either. Human translations, on the other hand, are pretty well done, so the most sensible option for learners is to make use of the latter in order to enjoy quality subtitles which, as in the previous feature, are going to make comprehension easier, thus leading to a boost in users' motivation.
- The last feature allows people to slow down speech segments by 20% when a subtitle is active. This is remarkably helpful for learners who are not able to get the grasp of a specific segment, since it will help not just to understand that fragment, but also to improve their listening skills in an unconscious way.

LLN can be used in both formal and informal settings, although it will mostly be used in informal ones. Regarding formal contexts, teachers can make use of fragments of titles to do activities depending on the students' needs, so that they do not always utilize the textbook; and with relation to informal contexts, users can watch anything they like whenever they want and, with all the help provided to learn a language, users do not have any excuses to do so.

Despite all the great things LLN has to offer, it possesses a negative aspect which might back out some people. This aspect is that a huge amount of patience is needed when using this resource. Users will often need to stop the video for the sake of learning (e.g. repeating subtitles, slowing speech down, looking for translations); therefore, a 20-minute chapter from a series would take double the time – or even more – to watch, and the same goes with movies and documentaries. This may lead to not enjoying the title's plot because of the focus on learning the language, so LLN might not be fit for people who are not patient enough to interrupt the video playback frequently.

By means of LLN, hundreds of different activities can be done in formal settings. A proposal for a listening activity using this app would be the following: the teacher may choose one – or several – fragments belonging to a Netflix title, preferably from a series or movie that is popular, so that students will know it and feel engaged. The fragments chosen must serve a purpose; for instance, if the past simple is being learnt, excerpts where instances of that verbal tense should be selected. Also, the fragments should be slightly above the students' level, and human subtitles may be used, especially if there are students with auditory difficulties. Those excerpts are going to be played twice: once at normal speed, and then using the feature of slowing down speech segments. What students have to do is take notes of the instances of past simple that they hear, and then separate them into regular and irregular verbs. In this task, students actively taking notes, listen and re-listen at different speeds, listen to what they enjoy, and listen to comprehensible input; those strategies are going to help develop their aural comprehension skills, as well as encourage them to learn more.

All in all, LLN is an invaluable tool for language learning. It is relatively new, and some features are still in the experimental phase, but it is already a magnificent resource with a huge potential. People enjoy watching series and movies, and having so many titles at hand in several different languages, as well as the added help of the extension, makes them eager to learn a new language. LLN is not free of charge, since users need a Netflix account in order to use it, but it is fairly cheap, completely worth every cent of what it costs, and a perfect resource for the purpose of this project, which is improving users' aural comprehension skills and motivation towards learning.

4.3. Lyrics Training

LyricsTraining is a magnificent app that allows people to rise their auditory skills of a foreign language by means of watching music videos and their lyrics. Music is a fun way to hear different accents, sound patterns, and pronunciations; this is the best method of practicing listening comprehension, since it is what people will hear in real-life contexts. Practicing by hearing perfect pronunciations might not be completely useful, because that is not what individuals are going to hear when going to the foreign country, so this resource is great for boosting listening skills.

What's more, it helps users acquire lexicon, idioms, and grammatical structures through exercises that consist of filling the missing words. It is a free-of-charge app, which just requires the creation of an account in order to make use of it. With *LyricsTraining*, individuals will be able to listen to songs in 13 different languages, where English is included.

LyricsTraining is a user-friendly app with a simple, yet practical interface. It has only one tab, where users will be able to find everything this resource has to offer. First of all, there is the "feature lyrics" section, where students will find the latest, most popular uploaded songs on YouTube, including their lyrics. Just below, the section "top lyrics" appears; in it, the top-rated songs will be found. The third section is that of "genres," where learners will be able to choose songs belonging to their favorite genre; the only thing that they need to do is select the genre, and all the available songs will be shown. Another section is "new lyrics," which is similar to the first one in that it shows the latest YouTube songs uploaded together with their lyrics; however, the difference is that, in this section, not only the most popular songs appear, but also songs of not-so-famous artists. The final section is "now playing," where songs that are played by other users at that moment are put into sight.

Those sections are great for learners to explore and discover new songs while having fun and improving their listening skills; however, there might be users who want to find a specific song, and this does not really help. For those individuals, there is a search bar located on the top-right part of the screen, where they will be able to check if their favorite songs are included within the app.

LyricsTraining also features a leveling-up system, where users build up experience by listening to songs and completing the exercises. This system can be useful to motivate learners, especially if they play among a group of friends. Furthermore, they are given awards when reaching certain levels, which boosts users' motivation even further.

Once a song is chosen, students will be able to choose among two game modes: multiple choice and karaoke.

- In the multiple-choice mode, songs are divided into 4 different levels of difficulty: beginner, intermediate, advanced, and expert. Depending on the level, people will have to fill a determined number of words: the higher the difficulty, the more gaps they will have to complete. Within this mode, there are two filling-gap options: in

one of them, users will have to fill them without any hint, just what they hear; and in the other, they will have four options to choose from. When the song is finished, learners get a score based on how many words they have completed correctly, which may get them eager to aim for the highest score, thus leading to a more effective learning. Each difficulty level also has a leaderboard, where the users are ranked depending on the scores they have gotten, from the highest to the lowest; this will make the most competitive users to do their best to attain the highest score.

- The karaoke mode consists in singing along a music video; it is exactly like going to a karaoke, or to play the popular game *SingStar*. Users are going to learn a language while having a good time on their own, or with their friends.

One of the most interesting features of *LyricsTraining* is that it can be used in the classrooms. If educators tick the "I am a teacher" option in "My account," they will be able to design their own gap-filling activities. It just takes choosing a song and, below the difficulty levels, selecting "New activity." There, they will only have to select the words they want to hide and, once they finish doing that, they will be able to save that activity in their account. This is a great feature to use in formal settings, so that students, by doing music-based activities, feel more motivated towards learning.

LyricsTraining is a gold mine when it comes to listening activities design, with a great repertoire of songs belonging to many different genres which is regularly updated. A proposal for a task for listening development employing this resource in formal settings would be as follows: the teacher will select a song that belongs to a popular artist, so that students know it and feel motivated to listen to it. The song should have an educational goal – learning some lexicon or grammatical structures, for example – and it should not be too hard. In this case, the proposal would be to use a song by Bruno Mars, called "Count on Me," to make students interiorize the first conditional structure more effectively after having learnt it.

The teacher is going to look for the song and create the activity, hiding the words they find appropriate. In this case, they would hide the ones that belong to the first conditional, so that students have to fill the gaps using their previous knowledge of the structure and what they hear. The educator can choose any of the filling-gap options. In case there are learners with auditory difficulties, it is recommendable to select the one with four options

to choose from, since they will be able to fill the gaps from the context. Once the song is over, students are going to give their answers. By means of this activity, students listen to what they enjoy, and they listen to comprehensible input. Even though this task only comprises two listening strategies, students will benefit greatly from it; after all, learning by listening to music is magnificent for fostering learners' eagerness to go deeper into developing aural comprehension skills.

All in all, *LyricsTraining* is an excellent, free resource to improve listening skills in an unconscious way, by having fun listening to their favorite songs, by doing simple activities that will help them boost their knowledge, and by keeping their motivation through the leveling-up, achievements, and leaderboard features. This app, furthermore, can be used in both formal and informal settings.

5. Conclusions

First of all, the advance in technology enables individuals to benefit from them more and more as time goes by. A great number of electronic resources are constantly developed, so e-learning, as well as mobile learning, if used correctly, can be particularly helpful for learners, making people's process of knowledge acquisition much easier and convenient by having the possibility of learning at any time by means of authentic materials.

Another conclusion is that the reception skill, specifically the listening comprehension one, is a very important skill; because of that, activities related with listening comprehension ought to be emphasized in educational settings. Also, listening strategies should be taught within the classrooms, so that individuals develop their listening skills as much as possible.

Thirdly, ICTs, if integrated effectively within formal settings, are positive with regard to educational performance, aiding both educators and learners to increase the lessons' productiveness; in addition, making listening activities using ICTs that are enjoyable for students makes them more engaged and motivated, leading to an increase on their eagerness to boost their aural comprehension skills. This is incredibly helpful to take the students' skills further, as well as making them want to extend their learning in informal settings. Therefore, technologies should be included regularly in educational contexts.

Finally, it is fundamental that all students feel included within the classrooms; having an inclusive education helps greatly on learners' motivation. The UDL (Universal Design for Learning) proves useful in order to provide students with what they need so as to learn effectively; this group of learners show increased academic outcomes when put into inclusive environments and when using technological means. Thus, not only the use of ICTs is useful to motivate learners, but also making feel included in educational settings.

If both requirements are fulfilled, teachers are going to inject a big dose of motivation to their students, which is going to lead them to improve their listening comprehension skills – among others – in formal settings, and take that eagerness outside the classrooms, using their favorite apps to keep on learning in informal settings.

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