

## Benefits of using call material and web 2.0 tools to promote more exposure to spoken language in an EFL context for a group of eight grade students at Caldas School

### Abstract

The present study deals with English language learning and technology in an EFL setting. It aims at defining the benefits of using CALL material and web 2.0 tools on the Internet in order to provide more exposure to spoken language for a group of eighth grade students, who study in a private school in Bucaramanga-Colombia. Through my teaching experience I have seen that most language teachers are interested in connecting their students with technology to help them learn English. However, computers and technology are still sources of fears and insecurity for many of them. In addition, despite the last advances that are applicable to language learning and the fact that many students love computers and are very receptive to any learning activities that involve the computer, I have seen how learners of English do not take advantage of technology in order to increase their language exposure and interactive opportunities. Firstly, this paper focuses on the justification and objectives; secondly, it provides the theoretical background behind this research; thirdly, it explains the methodology used to carry out this research followed by a description of the research paradigm and the research tools. Finally, it concludes presenting the results and limitations found in this study. I hope this study will provide a better understanding on how students might benefit from using CALL activities and Internet tools in order to improve their English listening skills.

**Keywords:** CALL (Computer-assisted language learning), Web 2.0 tools, Technology, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), Exposure, Listening.

### Resumen

El presente estudio trata el aprendizaje de idioma Inglés y la tecnología en un escenario de Inglés como lengua extranjera. Su objetivo es la definición de los beneficios del uso de material CALL (Computer-assisted language learning) y las herramientas de la web 2.0; con el fin de proporcionar una mayor exposición a la lengua hablada por parte de un grupo de estudiantes de octavo grado, que estudian en un colegio privado de Bucaramanga- Colombia. A través de mi experiencia docente he visto que la mayoría de los profesores de idiomas están interesados en conectar a sus estudiantes con la tecnología para ayudarles a aprender Inglés. Sin embargo, las computadoras y la tecnología siguen siendo fuentes de temor e inseguridad para muchos de ellos. Además, a pesar de los últimos avances que se aplican al aprendizaje de idiomas y el hecho de que muchos estudiantes aman las computadoras y son muy receptivos a las actividades de aprendizaje que impliquen el uso del computador, he visto cómo los alumnos de Inglés no aprovechan la tecnología con el fin de aumentar su exposición al lenguaje y las oportunidades interactivas. En primer lugar, este artículo se centra en la justificación y objetivos, en segundo lugar, proporciona la base teórica detrás de esta investigación, en tercer lugar, se explica la metodología utilizada para llevar a cabo esta investigación, seguida de una descripción del paradigma de la investigación y las herramientas de investigación. Por último, concluye con la presentación de los resultados y las limitaciones encontradas en este estudio. Espero que este estudio proporcione una mejor comprensión de cómo los estudiantes pueden beneficiarse del uso de actividades CALL y las herramientas de Internet con el fin de mejorar sus habilidades para escuchar inglés.

**Artículo:** Recibido en junio-2013 y aprobado octubre-2013

**Autor:** Fredy Augusto López Rueda: Licenciado en Filosofía de la Universidad Santo Tomás. Especialista en la Enseñanza del Inglés de la Universidad Industrial de Santander. Master in Teaching English as a Foreign Language de la Universidad Internacional Iberoamericana. Master en Lingüística Aplicada de la Universidad de Jaen (España) flopez6@unab.edu.co

## Benefits of using call material and web 2.0 tools to promote more exposure to spoken language in an EFL context for a group of eight grade students at Caldas School

Fredy Augusto López Rueda

### Justification

Many students complain that listening is difficult for them because they have little exposure to spoken English but to develop listening skills they are required to have extensive practice both inside and outside the classroom. This situation creates anxiety and frustration among students. It is very discouraging for them when they encounter a listening task different from the ones provided by their course book.

Due to their limited exposure to English, listening is a continual challenge for most students in an EFL context, especially where there are no native speakers. One of the main obstacles may be the lack of time they dedicate inside and outside the class to English learning. Typically in the classroom students can listen to a variety spoken language sources such as the teachers, other students, recordings, and movies. At home, they barely listen to any listening material unless they have to do it as homework. Furthermore, most students are not aware of the software and technological tools that are easily accessible for language learning. For example, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) material, which is an alternative that can provide more opportunities for students to improve their listening skills. Unlike readers, listeners cannot go back to review or look ahead to preview the material they

are dealing with. In real life, listeners cannot visualize speech or the spaces between words. In addition, they cannot stop the linguistic information or slow it down. They have to deal with it in real time.

By providing more opportunities and increasing the number of CALL activities as well as using the web 2.0 tools, we can slow down the process, capture oral language in a text and show word boundaries. As an EFL teacher, I have seen that my students need more opportunities to develop, practice, and improve their listening abilities.

Morley (1984:38) says that "*listening is the most frequently employed language skill - people listen twice as much as they speak, over three times more than they read, and over five times more than they write,*" which clearly demonstrates the importance of listening in language acquisition Chapelle & Joan (2008) state that for some teachers, listening can be seen as a receptive process. For others, it can be seen as a constructive process and last but not least, listening can be seen as a transformative process, because meaning is only acquired through imagination, empathy and involvement.

No matter what point of view we consider, here there is a challenge for most ESL and EFL teachers, because developing listening skills require extensive practice in decoding and trying to make sense of what is heard.



I am quite positive that a great amount of teachers will find this study very useful; because they are highly interested in connecting their students with technological application for the sake of learning English as well as for promoting English outside the classroom in an interactive manner.

### Theoretical background

The main aim of this chapter is to provide the areas of knowledge which will sustain the project. Likewise, it will include the contributions of different authors related to the field. This review contains the following areas: CALL (Computer-assisted language learning); the skill of Listening; Materials and Resources in EFL; Individual factors and Web 2.0 tools on the Internet, and finally, Input.

#### **CALL "Computer-assisted language learning"**

Nowadays, EFL and ESL teachers are being challenged by the fact that many English language learners are computer users. Therefore, a subject named CALL will provide some techniques and tips for listening activities that help students grow in their listening skills, especially outside the classroom. In addition, it will help me in my role as a researcher and framer in order to guide my students through the material that must match their level of proficiency in order to reinforce and improve their English levels. In other words it will provide clues on how the computer and the internet fit into the challenge of improving students' listening skills both inside and outside the classroom. In short, CALL is basically a tool that can provide additional support or supplementary material to reinforce what learners have already learned in the classroom.

It is also important to say, that CALL has been used to improve oral skills and to address pronunciation problems among others. For

example, Lambacher (1999) used a CALL tool named "Electronic visual feedback" (EVF) which is a type of computerized training for accent reduction that has received a great deal of attention because it has helped Japanese learners to improve their pronunciation problems especially with English vowels. Users can record their own voices and perform an acoustic analysis of their speech. They can see and measure their intonation, intensity, and duration and frequency range. The main benefit of EVF is that provides an objective measurement by which students and teachers can evaluate and assess learners' mistakes and progress.

There was another previous study done by McDougald (2009) and the main purpose of the study was to explore the use of ICT (information & communication technology) in learning English among undergraduate students in a private university in Northern Bogota, Colombia. It was found that ICT is definitely a complement to conventional teaching, especially when developing reading, writing and listening skills in English.

#### **The skill of listening**

*"This is not an easy undertaking, because listening is the least explicit of the four skills"* Hulstijn (2003:16). I could not agree with this statement more, in the sense that becoming a good listener in another language requires a lot of time and practice. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to quantify. On the other hand, as Rost (2002:512) points out, *"some teachers and students perceive listening as a receptive process that involves decoding, comprehension, and interpretation, all influenced by memory and background knowledge. Others perceive listening as constructive, because it entails constructing and interpreting meaning."* Still others define listening as transformative because meaning is created through involvement, empathy and imagination.

#### **Web 2.0 tools**

The Internet is a valuable source to get material for learning English, especially for students who need practice in listening. Web 2.0 tools offer a new experience in a virtual world that can provide learning opportunities inside and outside school. Web 2.0 is changing the way information is created, used, shared and manipulated.

Some of the web 2.0 resources that were used for listening activities in this project work are:

#### **Podcasts**

Podcasts are audio files that are automatically delivered directly to your desktop computer, and can be transferred to your iPod or other MP3 player. Normally, you need permission to use them because they are copyrighted material, unless they are used for educational purposes.

#### **Videos**

Video is the technology of electronically capturing, recording, processing, storing, transmitting, and reconstructing a sequence of still images representing scenes in motion. For example, YouTube videos and other video clip sites (Google video, vimeo, etc.) provide English learners and classes with a new tool to improve listening skills. The real advantage to these sites at least from a language learning point of view is that they offer authentic examples of everyday English used by real people.

#### **VOXOPOP**

It is another learning tool online that is used by many teachers all over the world. It might help my students to develop their listening and speaking skills. Student can listen to the teacher and each other at home at <http://www.voxopop.com/>

#### **Input**

Input will play an important role in this project as long as it meets the following characteristics according to Ellis (1985:128): *High quantity of*

*input directed to the learner; the learner needs the opportunity to listen to and to produce language used for different purposes; exposure to a high amount of directives (commands, orders); exposure to a high quantity of "extending utterances" Opportunities for uninhibited "practice" (which may provide opportunities to experiment using "new" forms).*

### Methodology

#### Description of the research paradigm

Since listening is hard to quantify, data collection and data analysis will be done using a qualitative paradigm. This means that the data will not be the product of measurement or counting, and thus does not result in numerical information (prose descriptions, diaries, and so on). According to Burns (2007) the emphasis of qualitative approaches is on the variety of information about the participants and the contexts in the research. Basically, it provides extensive explanations and details about the theme of the project.

Action research was the method used to carry out this project. *"Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework"* Rapoport (1970: 499).

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), action research follows a dynamic process of planning, action, observation and reflection. The first phase, developing a plan of action, is concerned with improving what is currently happening in the classroom or identifying problems in a teaching context. The second phase, action, is about implementing a plan to improve the issues in the classroom. The third phase, observation, means collecting data analyzing it and decides what changes might be



necessary. The last phase is reflection and it involves reflecting on the effects and making sense of the process used in order to get a better understanding of the area researched.

The following material was suggested to motivate and increase the amount of exposure to the target language.

- <http://flopez6.weebly.com/>: It is a website that allowed students to interact with the language in a functional way.
- <http://www.epals.com/>: It is a global community where students are safely connected with classroom around the world to share projects, resources, web tools and e-mails.
- Material: Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab. The level is for Beginners to Advanced students. This site provides listening material for students at different levels. Web site: <http://www.esl-lab.com/>
- Material: Infosquare.com It provides English listening comprehension exercises based on movie trailers Web site: <http://www.infosquares.com/>
- Material: NTN24. It provides information about the most important news about Latin American and the rest of the world. Website: <http://www.ntn24.com/news/>
- Material: Lingualnet. It is appropriate for Intermediate to Advanced level. It provides short films with subtitles to assist language learning. Website: <http://lingual.net/>
- Material: vyou.com. It provides videos interviews with people all around the world answering different questions. vyou.com
- Material: audiobooks. Learners can listen and read at the same time. <http://www.esl-bits.net/Books/books.html>
- Material: Linguistic Fundland TESL Pen Pal Center: It provides teachers with the chance to pair students with pen pal who are interested in improving their English skills. Students can get engaged in using language

for a communicative purpose with peers. Website: <http://www.tesol.net/penpals/web>

- Material: Planet English. It provides true-false questions together with a video clip to help students check their comprehension. The program tells the students to read the questions, play the video and then click on True or False. Website: <http://www.planetenglish.com>
- Material: Real English. This site is based on the idea of having spontaneous speech with real people on the street. Students can be exposed to a range of grammatical and functional topics embedded in real situations. Website: <http://real-english.com/>

#### Description of the research tools

Gathering data has to do with both quality and quantity. In this study, numeric and textual data were collected as well as different tools or methods of data collection were implemented including video recording, questionnaires, diaries etc. The instruments implemented were defined and the reasons for their application are described below.

#### Audio or video recording of lesson

These instruments provide valuable information for teachers. *"They confront teachers with a mirror-like "objective" view of what is going in class. These powerful instruments give teachers information for later use, in the sense that they can help teachers in their growing experience over the years. However the presence of a recording device could be disruptive because recording devices very often have a limited range; for example they may capture only students seated in the front row or just the teacher explaining something"*. Schratz (1992: 89)

The video recording of a lesson was considered a great source of data because it provided valuable insights concerning students'

behaviors and attitudes during the lessons in the computer lab.

#### Diaries or journals

Even though diaries can be, and probably will be, anecdotal and subjective, they can provide very important clues about what learners feel and about how they process information. The diary technique is thus very useful for exploring the learning strategies that students may use in different situations. This is especially true of situations where students receive metacognitive instruction and we as teachers want to know what kind of effect this might have on student learning.

Here, there is an example of one of the entries that was relevant for this study:

#### Day 2:

Today, students started exploring some of the websites proposed for this study. This lesson took place in the computer lab. Most of them were very receptive to follow instructions about how to use the software. The material used today is called Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab. This site provided listening material for students at different levels. Since my class is a mixed ability class, students found this site very useful. The listening exercises consisted of multiple choice comprehension questions that were scored right away. A topic related to daily routine was given for homework. They were expected to focus on the following questions: What is your daily schedule? What time do you wake up and go to work or school? What do you do when you get home? What time do you go to bed? In addition they were told to do more exercises on their own according to their English levels.

#### Afterthoughts

The good thing about this experience today was that the site provided the different moments for

doing listening activities (before, during and after).

#### Questionnaires and Surveys

Questionnaires were implemented on two occasions throughout the investigation. Students were asked to answer the two questionnaires related to WEB 2.0 tools and CALL activities.

Description of the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation

In this process qualitative data will be mainly collected by keeping diaries, recording opinions and perceptions rather than numerical "facts". Various combinations of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis will be collected during this project. A deductive technique will be used in order to search for evidence to support the selected theme (benefits of using CALL activities and web 2.0 tools to promote more exposure to the target language).

Description of the target group/students who the material was chosen or adopted for

It is important to see the big scenario of students' reality that has an indirect or direct effect on their attitudes towards learning English.

First, it is remarkable to point out that English is considered a foreign Language in our country (Colombia). It means that English is not a local medium of communication. It is also important to mention that Colombian government has started a National bilingual program and, they have decided to borrow a global discourse about "bilingualism", by embracing a European model for teaching and learning English. They have made this decision due to a record of ineffective policies and a scaling external pressure to adopt language policies



appealing to “the international community”. Basically, they have discharged the whole responsibility on representatives of foreign organizations such as the British Council and the Cambridge University, because they are in charge of the implementation and control of standards and tests.

Within this national view, a lot of students feel that success in English language learning is only achieved outside public schools due to many reasons such as lack of resources in schools, lack of training for teachers. Moreover, teachers agreed on saying that the possibility of learning English in public school is almost impossible. Many of these students are our new students who come to our school with that limitation in mind, and with a very low level of English.

The Caldas School in Bucaramanga, Colombia, is a private school where I have been working as an English teacher for seven years. Students come from different socio-economic backgrounds and have had a wide variety of life experiences - attributes that significantly enrich the life of the school. However, newcomers generally have a limited command of English as a Foreign Language regarding the following aspects: not enough guidance on pronunciation, limited vocabulary, poor exposure to authentic material, and lack of communicative skills among others.

Mixed ability classes are a common factor in this educational setting, particularly in 8th grade, which is the grade I teach. This group is comprised of 28 students whose ages range from 13 to 14 years. It is a large class with a total number of 7 hours of English a week. Students are very active and often moody. They are experiencing big changes physically and psychologically. They are eager to learn as long as the activity is connected with their interests or personal qualities. Many are conscious about what others think of them. Their levels of English vary from elementary and basic students to

advanced students who pay attention to both meaning and form in language.

Most of them are auditory and visual learners. They can concentrate for longer periods in comparison to children. They also begin to learn in abstract ways. Learning a foreign language is part of the school curriculum, therefore, it is compulsory for them to learn English. They do not like boring lessons which could be the result of discipline problems. Most of them are beginning to control their own behavior. Some of them are relatively unmotivated and create problems with classroom management through rowdiness and unwillingness to do assigned class work. Motivation played an important role because for the majority of students in this group, there is not a clear connection between working hard to learn English and a direct, an immediate outcome other than avoiding parents’ disapproval. They are not concerned about taking English seriously because, they do not see how this ability could affect them in ten years from now.

Therefore, the key to helping to improve their listening skills was to convince them, that understanding a language requires an attitude adjustment more than anything else. For example; study habits; they did not see the importance of spending time improving pronunciation or working on their own at home.

Limitations

One of the main limitations throughout this study was how to deal with new students at school, because they had mental blocks. For example, they very often decided to tune out or get caught in an internal conversation trying to translate word for word. As a result, some students were convinced that they were not able to understand spoken English no matter what strategies or technological materials were available.

Another limitation has to do with the use of Facebook and social networking websites while working in the computer lab. Initially, they appeared to be a distraction to students' learning abilities. This happened when students were expected to be working on a CALL activity or on a web tool and they got distracted signing into their Facebook account or using Twitter or another social networking website. It was hard work but fortunately, I took advantage of social media websites and encouraged the students to find what we used to call a pen pal, and write to them on a regular basis. This activity allowed them to practice the grammatical structures taught in class. In addition, they could develop a relationship with the pen pal over a period of time and report back to the class, sharing the ups and downs of their relationships with their new buddies.

Having little information regarding listening and CALL activities in Colombia was another shortcoming. I only found one Colombian research which was presented in the theoretical section. This lack of literature did not allow me to get a good understanding of how students can benefit from using technological tools. However,

the research done by other teachers outside Colombia helped me to better understand how students can benefit using web tools in similar settings. Dealing with a mixed ability class was a real challenge. I had to offer extra help for weaker students and offered extension activities for stronger students while using the same material. This way the time involved for me was drastically higher. I did remember that all students will get something out of the class, but not necessarily the same things. Lastly, technical problems arouse such as a crash or users not having a compatible browser with the needed website or when the power went off during a rainstorm. This led to loss of information and a waste of time. In order to deal with this difficulty, it was good to take a piece of advice given in a conference, which says: “never plan a class you could not do with just a piece of chalk”.

Results

Summing up, it was determined by this study that through the use of web 2.0 tools and CALL activities the amount of exposure to English was increased.

Question # 9 from the questionnaire :  
How useful did you find the following webtools and CALL activities ?

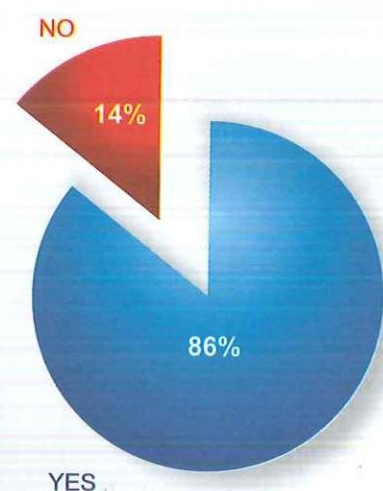
	Not useful				Very useful
	1	2	3	4	5
voxopop.com	4	7	8	6	3
esl-lab.com	5	7	6	3	7
real-english.com	1	7	4	8	8
lingual.net/lingualproductitems	9	5	5	6	3
Listen-and-write.com	10	6	4	6	2
podcast	6	7	4	8	3
youtube.com	0		1	1	26
infosquares.com	0	8	2	3	15



It was found that students, who were reluctant or displayed little interest in listening activities at first, became more eager and motivated to use technological resources. Additionally, it was revealed through this study that music found on "You Tube" is the most useful website for students, because it provides a break from the usual class or textbook activities. Basically, they say that learning English is more enjoyable by listening to songs on "You Tube".

The results obtained from this study revealed that: the amount of exposure to spoken language was increased by the use of CALL material and web 2.0 tools; secondly, it was evident that by selecting appropriate technological material students were able to interact with the language both inside and outside the classroom; last but not least, it was found that students received great benefits when they were given the strategies for listening to online material that fit their needs.

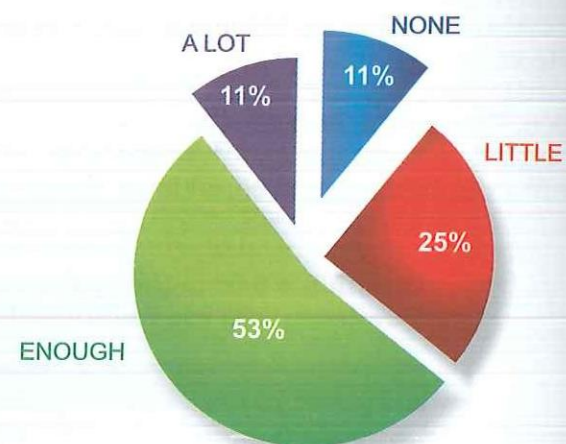
**Question # 8 from the questionnaire: After exploring and using websites and web tools selected by your teacher, would you like to keep on using them to improve your listening skills?**



In addition, it can be inferred from this study that most of the students are motivated and interested in continuing to use technological tools to improve their exposure to the target language. Likewise, web tools and CALL materials were found to be useful supplementary materials that provided additional resources and opportunities to study the topics introduced in class.

Moreover, it is evident that finding the appropriate listening material for students was a challenge because not all the students found the chosen material very interesting or useful. The interest level and the difficulty level were important factors when choosing CALL material in particular.

**Question # 10 from the questionnaire: The exploration and use of Web tools and CALL activities have helped me in my process of being more exposed to the English Language?**



Moreover, a great percentage of students found the suggested web tools and CALL activities very helpful in their process of learning English as a new language.

Taking advantage of electronic resources like the Internet after class or in the computer lab had a positive aspect, because it helped a lot in promoting autonomy among students.

Certainly motivation for listening outside the classroom -at home and in the computer lab-increased significantly, mainly because these technological tools provided individualized interactive instruction different from the one provided in the classroom. Another positive point revealed through this study was the fact that, students or listeners could always have words repeated. Most programs or software provided users with the opportunity to listen to the spoken language as many times as they wanted.

In spite of all the benefits, there is an important issue to be considered-technical problems with equipment and software. Throughout this experience this problem occurred not only on the part of the students but also on the part of the teacher. However, when this happened the teacher knew where to turn for help. Sometimes students' expertise was used and seen as an asset.

Regarding the online material was intended for personal work. Students had to face the material published online on their own. The student was the protagonist of his or her own learning. Here, it is a must for learners to be active participants in the process of learning a new language. Teachers are monitors whose job it is to select the appropriate material, which fulfills the expectations of the learners.

It is recommended to keep on doing research not only on listening skills but on the other skills such as reading, writing, and speaking in order to recognize the great value of the technological resources available for English language teachers and students.

Finally, another study on this matter would be on how to increase the vocabulary among listeners due to the fact that they have a limited vocabulary, especially for those students who are behind or have little experience interacting with the English language. This would make a great contribution in understanding the benefits of using technological tools such as web 2.0 tools

and CALL activities in order to increase the exposure of written and spoken language.

## References

- Burns, A. (2007). International handbook of English Language teaching. *Action research*. Springer International. Handbook of Education.
- Chapelle, C. & Jamieson, J. (2008). *Tips for teaching with CALL. Practical Approaches to computer-Assisted Language Learning*. New York: Pearson. Longman.
- Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding second language acquisition*, pp.127, 128. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hulstijn, J (2003). *Connectionist models of language processing and the training of listening skill with the aid of multimedia software*. Computer Assisted Language Learning.
- Kemmis, S & McTaggart, R (1988). *The action research planner*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Victoria: Deaking Univesrity Press.
- Lambacher, S. (1999). *A CALL Tool for Improving Second Language Acquisition of English Consonants by Japanese Learners*. Retrieved from <http://www.jswl.cn/course/czwyjx/references/Arob3/call12-2.htm>
- Morley, J (1984). *Listening and Language learning in ESL: Developing self-study activities for listening comprehension*. P.38 Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
- Nunan, D (1997). *Listening in Language learning*, p.479 The language teacher. Retrieved from: [http://talk-waseda.net/dialogue/no03\\_2004/2004dialogue03\\_k4.pdf](http://talk-waseda.net/dialogue/no03_2004/2004dialogue03_k4.pdf)
- Rapoport, R.N.(1970) "Three Dilemmas in Action Research," *Human Relations*. pp. 499-513. Retrieved from: <http://hum.sagepub.com/content/23/6/499.extract>
- Richards, Jack (1996). *Reflective Teaching in Second Language classrooms*.p.10 Cambridge University Press.
- Rost, M. (2000). *Teaching and researching listening*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Schatz, M. (1992) *Researching while teaching: an action research in higher education*. Studies in Higher Education.