

PLES AS CATALYSTS FOR BOOSTING LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

A Research Project

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ABSTRACT

A PLE is originally conceived as an online system that any person can create to respond to their own learning needs and those of other learners when properly integrated into a Personal learning network. In this occasion, a very customizable PLE was created through a blog and a padlet which were used as the interface to advance the listening skills of a small group of selected participants who could not otherwise have made much sense of the vast amount of information people are constantly bombarded with on the internet if they were to embark on honing their language skills from a purely individual perspective without the expertise of a guiding tutor. In this way, upon having manifested that it was the listening skill the one they needed the most help with, this group of learners was able to periodically download and upload via the interface created a series of personalized tasks specially designed to tackle that particular need, as well as receive proper feedback on their performance for four consecutive months marked by initial and final exams to demonstrate their progress while making part of this project. Put simply, through full engagement in the formation of an online collection of resources to advance listening comprehension skills, significant improvements were obtained when these students gradually developed intrinsic motivation through the autonomous exploration of materials.

Keywords: self-regulated learning, customizable, catalyst, online collection, intrinsic motivation, and autonomy.

DEDICATION

Although it was an unusually long journey for me to get to my graduation day,

you patiently supported me all along the way

you simply sacrificed your life to see me succeed

Thanks a lot dear mother of mine, Chiquinquira Villabona

Your son, Marco Tulio Ospina Villabona

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This research project report has also been the product of collaboration among the 16 project participants whose arduous work was deployed along the four months while this project was being implemented.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of Web 2.0 tools has made it easier for modern language teachers to seize the opportunity to engage their students in PLEs or Personal Learning Environments in order to maximize online language learning beyond the classroom in a more effective and integrated way. Then, in understanding the potential posed by technology-enhanced learning in general, PLEs are seen as an excellent strategy to promote autonomy and 21st century skills or the 4C's (Collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity) when used as a complement of formal subjects or a part of any particular course.

Throughout this project, we will be working with the concept of Personal Learning Environments which entails the use of critical strategies to build the capacity for self-regulated learning. A PLE is basically an online content repository or system that we can create from a personal perspective to respond to our own learning needs and the needs of others when shared with a community of learners to help them make sense of the vast amount of information found on the internet. It is said that whenever we engage in learning something, we have to create our own PLE which is in accordance with what Loertscher (2011) has stated "We all have a personal learning environment, whether we have consciously constructed it or not" (p. 22).

Put simply, a PLE is an online collection of resources to advance lifelong learning through the autonomous exploration of informally created learning spaces. So, after conducting a

key survey to identify a widely-felt need among 35 randomly chosen English language learners at Centro Colombo Americano, Bucaramanga, I set out to build the PLE displayed on this paper and proceeded to test it as a powerful catalyst for boosting listening comprehension skills due to the fact that among the 35 survey respondents, listening was perceived as one of the hardest skills to develop for most of them.

Therefore, this present action research attempts to document how PLEs can be implemented in English Language Teaching to accelerate the development of listening skills through the integration of a series of asynchronous learning tools, especially web 2.0 tools, thus, giving students the opportunity to learn from anywhere, at any time and at their own pace.

Significance of the Study

In today's world, it is very easy for any teacher in any field to set up his own PLE to access relevant content that can be shared via the internet with a given community of learners, and for this reason, the data produced from this study will be used to promote the implementation of personal learning environments or PLEs in order to support traditional language courses with out-of-class activities in that, if developed on the web, a PLE could easily be used to reach out to a wide number of users from home while favoring the inclusion of marginalized students with poor academic performance as it should be our purpose as educators and the main objective of an inclusive society.

Showing others the way to access key information in areas of their interest is greatly appreciated by the users of a PLE. It is clear that everyone knows something that might be useful to other people and there is nothing more practical than a PLE to reach a community of learners and to create the perfect space to learn collaboratively.

Besides, by using a PLE, a whole lot of good habits can be fostered in our students, for example, the habit of creating inner motivation and curiosity, the habit of careful observation and perseverance, the habit of having empathy for others, but above all, the habit of building autonomy, which is key to using a PLE successfully.

Therefore, through this particular PLE and for a period of 18 consecutive weeks, a group of 18 learners will engage in exploring new and more practical alternatives to advance their listening comprehension skills than those currently offered through conventional classroom interaction.

Statement of the Problem

Since ICTs have allowed the deinstitutionalization or the gradual relocation of different types of services that previously demanded in-situ support and assistance, there's also been an educational change driven by these rapidly changing technologies that can help build and promote networked communities of learners as a key feature of today's trend in education. Brown, S. (2010).

On the one hand, PLEs pose an extraordinary new approach that is not intended to substitute or complement the existing traditional systems. PLEs show us how we can incorporate ICT-based strategies into the learning process whether at the beginning or all along the lifespan of a given individual. Adell Segura, J. & Castañeda Quintero, L. (2010).

On the other hand, as we all know, social interaction is present in all kinds of learning and technology has had a tremendous impact on all areas of society, so to speak. Then, social interaction certainly becomes a booster of our knowledge of literacy in our daily lives as well as it is necessary for developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Hurst, B., Wallace, R., & Nixon, S. B. (2013).

So, as a response to this, PLEs come as a combination of tools and resources chosen by the learners to support their own learning experience in conjunction with the social elements of participating in an ecosystem that fosters collaboration, autonomy and lifelong learning.

Reinders, H. (2015).

In our particular context, even though English and most of the romance languages share the common linguistic influence of Latin to one extent or another, listening is still one of the hardest skills to develop for most Spanish-speaking learners of English as foreign language.

This particular weakness was confirmed when it was actually found at the local level through an online **google survey** conducted among 35 randomly chosen adult learners of English who were taking evening classes at Centro Colombo Americano de Bucaramanga (survey available on the link provided in the references) that a large number of them (**54.3%**) express having difficulties with their aural comprehension of spoken English.

This is partly due to the fact that they don't usually get enough exposure to authentic aural contexts just by using the educational aids offered during a regular course besides the fact that English in and of itself contains sounds that are new for them and not commonly produced in Spanish, not to mention other factors such as pitch, rhythm, accent, intonation patterns and stress, so in this order of ideas, it was considered that finding strategies to boost listening comprehension skills should be the focus of the PLE that would be developed for this particular research in response to the fact that despite today's free access to all sorts of online resources, the vast amount of information found on the internet makes it utterly bewildering for the average language learners to correctly spot the materials that would best suit their particular needs let alone receive the proper feedback on their academic output if not confined to a traditional classroom.

Consequently, according to the OECD (2015), the number of today's students with access to the internet in Latin America, especially in Colombia, has lately increased, thus producing a large number of home-based learners who need to be guided into creating their own digital identities in their own learning environments where they can access, organize, filter and reuse contents according to their own needs and in control of their language-learning process through different tools for synchronous and asynchronous learning.

It is for the aforementioned situation that I would like to find out if there is **a correlation** between **self-regulated access** to online practice materials and **the improvement** of listening skills among adult learners of English as a second language **through the use** of a PLE since PLEs can easily become that source of high motivation behind the compilation of material of personal interest.

Finally, it is expected that a small group of learners chosen as participants of this research project can develop enough autonomy to work from a distance in the development of their listening comprehension skills and to this end, the participants are supposed to learn to manage their own time and study environment, set their own intrinsic and extrinsic goals and effectively self-regulate the influx of information they want to receive over a time span of 18 weeks.

Objectives

General Objective

To identify the effectiveness of using PLEs in the ELT field to enhance listening comprehension skills through the implementation of a 17-week online strategy in a pilot group of students from Centro Colombo-Americano Bucaramanga.

Specific Objectives

- To design and implement the initial and final listening examinations on an online testing

platform as measuring instruments to determine the effectiveness of PLEs.

- To generate a functional user interface for a PLE in order to compile different online resources to advance listening comprehension skills at different levels.
- To develop a 17-week online strategy to engage the pilot group into active listening based tasks through PLEs.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will refresh basic concepts and principles behind the implementation of this project. For example, the evolution of e-learning, the relevance of listening in the language acquisition process, and task-based learning as a learner-centered methodology quite related to the use of PLEs.

Listening as the most critical means for acquiring an L2

For quite a long time in the evolution of ELT much attention was given to the written and spoken aspects of language basically ignoring the active role that listening plays in language learning. So, long ago, Language professionals used to pay more attention to reading and grammar, and therefore, teaching listening was left behind and barely accepted as a significant feature of language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). For instance, according to Larsen-Freeman (2000), in the early Grammar-translation method, teaching listening wasn't even considered.

Later, when the Direct Method (DM) was in vogue, the development of the listening skill, as part of a more natural process, received special attention above any of the other language skills but without the planning of specific strategies to promote the target language during the lessons.

Lately, with the rise of communicative approach, the importance of teaching listening has increased and Language educators know that the development of the listening skill is the result of a **complex process** of decoding spoken language that is intricately intertwined with the other 3 language skills. Rost, M. (2001). For this reason, despite being the most critical means for acquiring a second language, and for the sake of this project, listening comprehension is going to be assessed through the integration of listening with writing in a series of follow-up tasks meant to be reported weekly on Padlet. These active learning strategy will encourage learners to stay not only active but focused in order to respond to Yes/No questions, “Wh” questions, True/False questions, choose the correct answer type questions, or any other questions, especially those meant for critical thinking such as How, What if, and Why.

Focusing on language rather than on form

Assigning tasks is currently considered to be the most effective means of promoting second language acquisition (SLA) in traditional classroom settings and it is my purpose to take the benefits of Task-based language teaching beyond the classroom through my PLE worksheets because according to Richards and Rodgers (2004), “engaging learners in task work provides a better context for the activation of learning processes” (p. 223).

On the other hand, In spite of the fact that a task is generally described as something unpleasant because according to the Cambridge Online dictionary a task is “a piece of especially hard work; a duty that must be done”, in academic contexts, it is meant to generate engagement.

Besides, there are certainly numerous ways to define what a task is, but within the pedagogical field and specially from an ELT perspective, Nunan (2004) has defined what a task is supposed to be in this way:

My own definition is that a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the attention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end.

(p.4)

In this order of ideas, Task-based language teaching is an approach to teaching that is typically based on three stages, the first of these is the **pre-task stage**, during which the teacher introduces and defines the topic and the learners engage in activities that either help them to recall words and phrases that will be useful during the performance of the main task or to learn new words and phrases that are essential to the task. This stage is followed by what Willis (1996) calls the "**task cycle**". Here the learners perform the task (typically a reading, a listening exercise or a problem-solving exercise) in pairs or small groups.

They then prepare **a report** for the whole class on how they did the task and what conclusions they reached. After that, Students present their findings to the class in spoken or written form while the teacher might take notes by categories on a clipboard or a piece of paper.

The **final stage** is the **language focus** stage, It is during this stage when feedback on the learners' performance at the reporting stage is given, so it is when language features from the task are highlighted.

Therefore, Task-based learning focuses on language rather than form by giving learners meaningful tasks to do before talking about grammar. It is after a whole cycle of tasks that the

teacher may ask learners to reflect upon the language they have used while completing the tasks, but the main focus for learners should be, in and of itself, the completion of the tasks.

From VLEs to PLEs

It has been more than 4 decades since computers made their first foray into the field of education technology, and since then computers have been there in a constant quest for improving the way we learn, and especially during the last 20 years there's been rapid development and integration of ICTs in ELT through smartphones, tablets, and all sorts of multimedia devices causing a dramatic turn in the role of English Educators and learners, but despite this whole lot of isolated achievements, ICT-supported instruction hasn't been able to fully revolutionize education and the learning processes partly due to the fact that most of today's language management systems are initiatives that still take a very centralized perspective at the service of educational institutions rather than individuals and their particular needs.

Panagiotidis, P. (2012)

In this order of ideas, it is clearly seen that computers were key in the creation of virtual learning environments or VLEs, which with the advent of the internet have paved the way for more personalized models of learning that currently employ technology to enable people to study anywhere and at any time. Palmer, S. R., and Bray, S. L. (2001).

This new way of learning is called e-learning and even though it has become one of the fastest trends in education in the last 2 decades, it has also come with a set of drawbacks such as the lack of a strong pedagogy to bolster the formation of intrinsic motivation that may respond to the lack of direct interaction with others or an overload of information that makes it so difficult to choose from.

With that being said, we have seen the emergence of a new approach to the use of online technologies for learning or Personal Learning Environments also referred to as PLE's, which have come to bend the reality posed by the dominant curricula of traditional educational systems that are basically disconnected from today's global ecosystem of Internet services that make it possible for anyone to create content and provide PLE users with a service specially tailored to their individual needs. Wilson, S., Liber, O., Johnson, M., Beauvoir, P., Sharples, P. & Milligan, C. (2007).

In defining PLEs, as the result of the advent of the Web 2.0 and its whole range of applications and social networks, Alharbi, Talal & Platt, Amelia & Al-Bayatti, Ali. (2013) remind us of the following:

PLEs are considered to be an evolved form of VLE, providing a student-centric approach to learning and supporting lifelong learning. It is argued that a PLE has a wider scope in that it can be used to provide the platform with a diverse range of user activities, including formal learning support. (p. 287)

These PLE's can be used to assist all kinds of informal learning processes. Consequently, they are commonly used as a learner-controlled or self-regulated environment for language learning through a combination of digital tools and materials chosen by the learners to support different aspects of their language skills. Reinders, H. (2015).

A whole lot of research has been directed towards adapting contents to the individual preferences and learning styles of each person, but it's still irrelevant since there's a huge amount of free data available online. Then, It would be nice if learners could create their own learning environments in which they can access, organize and filter contents to personalize their own learning process. Adell Segura, J. & Castañeda Quintero, L. (2013)

Besides, it is said that whenever we engage in learning, we need to create a personal learning system loaded with strategies to respond to our own needs. Therefore, being able to search for and manage autonomously the vast amount of information found on the web has become a fundamental factor of Personal Learning Environments or PLEs which are the result of informally created learning systems mostly originated from the way each person can use the technology at hand. Chatti, M.A., Agustiawan, M.R., Jarke, M., & Specht, M. (2012).

Finally, since I have found that listening comprehension is perceived as the most challenging skill to develop for English language learners in local EFL environments, it is my attempt through this action research to identify those specific PLE's that might address this particular need based on the fact that both computer hardware and internet usage is still rising in Colombia among the middle and lower classes. British Council (2015) Education Intelligence, English in Colombia. So, why not take advantage of this current trend to introduce PLE's to enhance the quality of Language education in our country.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The following study will empirically examine the causal relationship between two variables as to how the implementation of PLE management can predict the improvement of the listening comprehension skills of a selected group of 18 EFL learners whose language skills originally range from A1 to B1 and it is due to the aforementioned reasons that the methodological paradigm that sustains this study is basically **quantitative** as it seeks to interpret the measurement of data gathered through quite structured **research instruments**, in this case, the administration of initial and final examinations. (See Appendix B)

Since PLEs offer their users the valuable opportunity to learn to learn in the digital age, our PLE will be particularly used to support the independent practice of listening skills in English through one of the 3 forms of lifelong learning, informal learning, which is mostly driven by and for, the learners’

Having reviewed all the available literature on the topic of Personal Learning Environments, I proceeded to identify the most widely-felt EFL need in a sample of 35 respondents taken from a population of 156 adult students who were taking evening classes at Centro Colombo Americano de Bucaramanga in the month of February, 2019.

To this end, on February 23rd, 2019, a Google forms survey (See figures 1 to 5) was conducted that would provide key information to limit the scope of this research project to the development of listening skills.

As a result of this survey, out of the 4 language skills, **Question 4** indicated that it was the listening skill the one that the respondents considered needed the most attention. After that, an **initial listening web-based test** was created and launched on the online testing platform called CLASSMARKER (See figure 6), which was key to add reliability to this study as Classmarker features a strict authentication process for test takers to follow.

QUESTION 1 - What generation gap do you belong to ?

34 responses

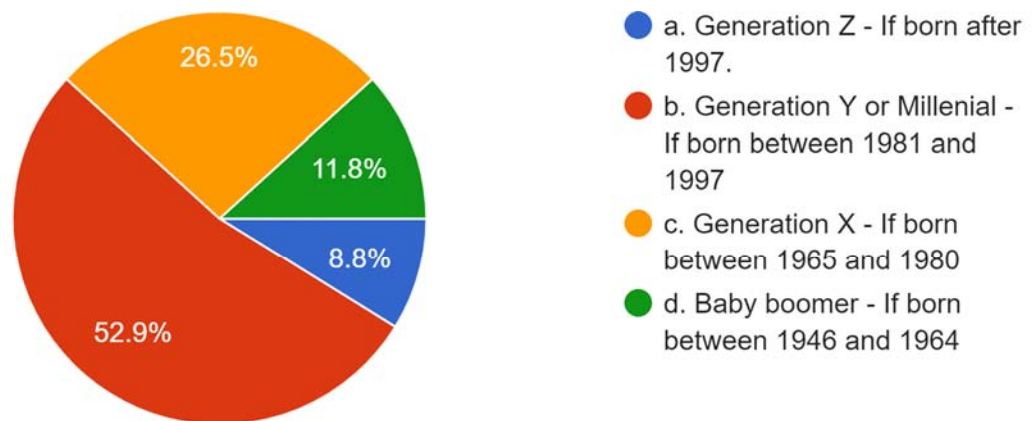


Figure 1. Generational gap among the survey respondents.

QUESTION 3 - Where have you studied English ?

35 responses

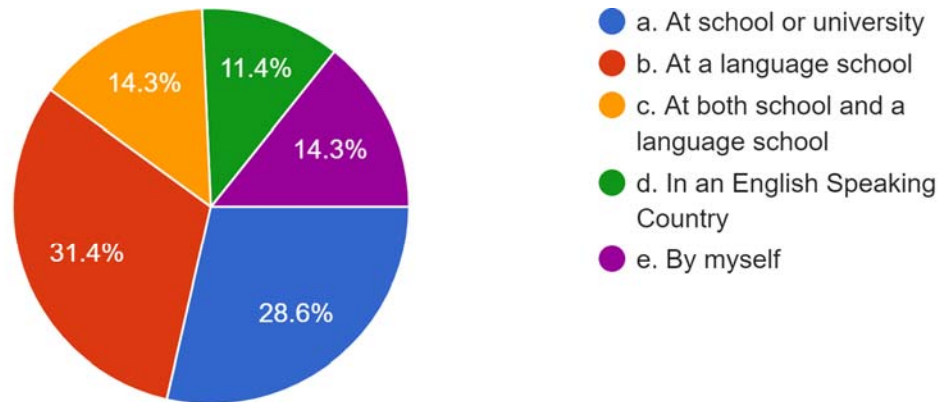


Figure 2. Type of English Language interaction

QUESTION 2 - Have you studied English in the last 3 years ?

34 responses

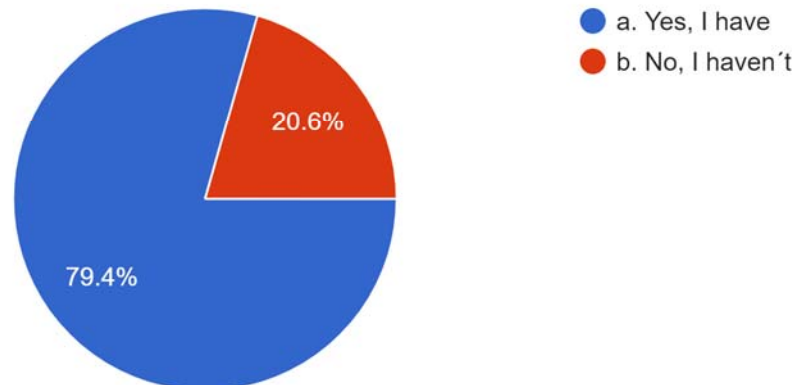


Figure 3. English language learning experience among survey respondents.

QUESTION 4 - What English Language skill has been your greatest weakness or the most difficult for you ?

35 responses

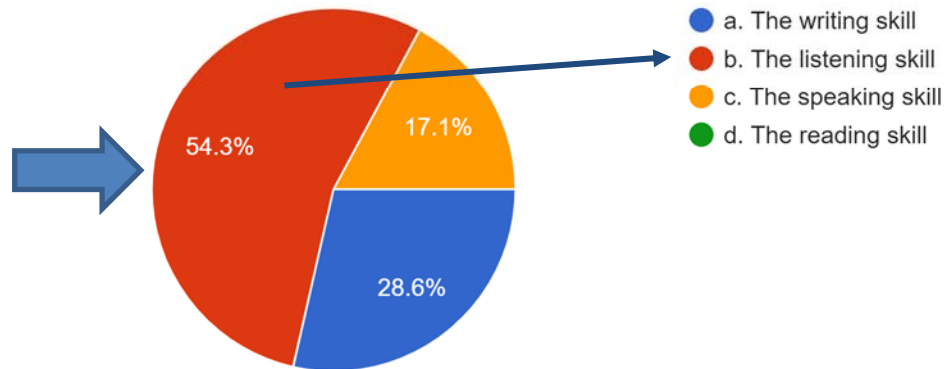


Figure 4. Language skill posing the greatest weakness among survey respondents.

QUESTION 5 - Would you like to join a local online network of English language learners ?

34 responses

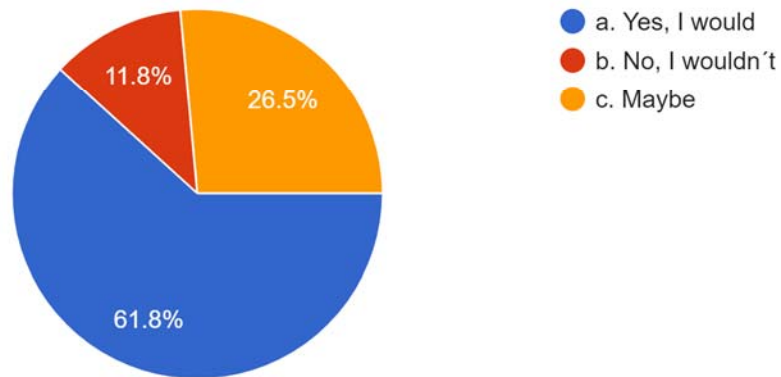


Figure 5. Project engagement willingness.

Figure 6. Online testing platform.

The audio material was carefully selected before the design and creation of the initial listening test took place. This initial exam was made up of 5 parts. (See table 1). Then, it was assigned to a **pilot group** of 18 research participants who manifested being interested in this project. The test was finally launched on April 1st, 2019, and available online for 4 days.

Classmarker was chosen as the online testing platform to generate the initial and exit listening examinations because it allowed the participants to register and log in by creating their own **user Ids** and passwords in order to authenticate access to the platform. (See table 2)

For the construction of the initial exam, 40 listening questions from different kinds of standardized exams were used such as FLYERS, KET, PET, and MET in order to create a 40-item multiple-choice exam designed for 1 hour of testing time. Figure 7.

INITIAL LISTENING ASSESSMENT**Instructions:**

- Number of questions: **40**
- Has a time limit of: **01:00:00**
- Number of attempts allowed: **1**
- Will allow you to save and finish at a later date.
- Questions displayed per page: **1**
- Will allow you to go back and change your answers.
- Will not let you finish with any questions unattempted.

DEAR PARTICIPANTS,

THE FOLLOWING **DIAGNOSTIC LISTENING TEST** WILL BE USED TO CLASSIFY YOU INTO 1 OF 3 DIFFERENT TIERS OF PERFORMANCE FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH BASED ON THE SCORE YOU GET ON IT.

THEREFORE, YOU ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE THIS TEST **CONSCIENTIOUSLY**.

Marco Tulio Ospina

You can edit this custom **Test Introduction Text** on the *Edit Test* page. x

Figure 7. 40-item online test.

Table 1. Distribution of initial exam

PARTS OF THE TEST	NUMBER QUESTIONS	POINTS	TOTAL WORTH
Part 1	10	x 2	20
Part 2	5	x 2	10
Part 3	10	x 2	20
Part 4	10	x 3	30
Part 5	5	x 4	20
WHOLE TEST	40	-----	100

Table 2. *Registration process.*

#	Participants	Registration Codes	Classmarker status
01	Diego Fernando Becerra Zambrano	9K1637484994G	Registered
02	Edgar Fabian Mantilla Tinoco	HV863748495GC	Registered
03	Edgar Ricardo Pérez Carrillo	DB563748490KH	Registered
04	Edinson Mejia Garcia	4H163748497D6	Registered
05	Liliana Paola Rozo Martínez	VV963748497VH	Registered
06	Claudia Marcela Forero	CG963748492PT	Registered
07	Mauricio Pantoja	Q60637484976M	Registered
08	Oscar Eduardo Prada Lipez	AV763748498VH	Registered
09	Yesenia Yureisy Ríos Anaya	NC163748493YF	Registered
10	Yosimar Rincón	YK063748493FV	Registered
11	Jorge Alberto Goéz	RD463748496KQ	Registered
12	Andrés Felipe Torres Arévalo	9T0637484913K	Registered
13	Brian Steven Serna Méndez	HE263748492HG	Registered
14	Claudia Marcela Flórez Gómez	HC9637484919X	Registered
15	John Jairo Barreneche Martínez	X7463748499CB	Registered
16	Takashi Maeda	HQ663748496RN	Registered
17	Naoyuki Karasawa	B3363748492KB	Registered
18	Elizabeth Teresa Mendoza Mogollón	P6763748493AK	Registered

The exam results obtained in Classmarker allowed for the classification of the project participants in **4 categories** or tiers of academic performance (see table 3).

At the low tier A1 were placed those participants who can barely recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning themselves, their family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak to them slowly and clearly.

On the other hand, at the top tier B 1+, we can find those participants who can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. They can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.

Table 3. Overall classification.

TIERS OF PERFORMANCE

Low tier
1- 40

Middle Tier
41- 60

High Tier
61- 80

Top Tier
81- 100

#	Participants	Initial Score
TOP TIER - B1+		
01	Mauricio Pantoja	89%
02	Edinson Mejia Garcia	83%
03	Andrés Felipe Torres Arévalo	82%
04	Diego Fernando Becerra Zambrano	81%
HIGH TIER - B1		
05	Yosimar Rincón	74%
06	Brian Steven Serna Méndez	74%
07	Elizabeth Teresa Mendoza Mogollón	72%
08	Edgar Ricardo Pérez Carrillo	63%
MIDDLE TIER - A2		
09	Oscar Eduardo Prada Lipez	48%
10	Yesenia Yureisy Ríos Anaya	48%
11	Takashi Maeda	46%
12	Naoyuki Karasawa	45%
13	John Jairo Barreneche Martínez	45%
14	Liliana Paola Roza Martínez	41%
LOW TIER - A1		
15	Claudia Marcela Forero	35%
16	Edgar Fabian Mantilla Tinoco	29%
17	Jorge Alberto Goéz	28%
18	Claudia Marcela Flórez Gómez	20%

Subsequent to the classification, came the construction of a digital PLE, for which, I followed a structure based on the 3 basic elements of a digital PLE. Figure 8.

- **The building of the Portal** – In our case, the blog. Figure 9.
- **The construction of a Personal Learning Network.** – The Blog subscribers. Figure 10.
- **The creation of a private online portfolio** – In our case, the padlet. Figure 11.

It was through the blog and the padlet that a functional interface to virtually communicate from anywhere with the project participants was created and it was used for as long as the project was implemented and it is still available to anyone on the web.

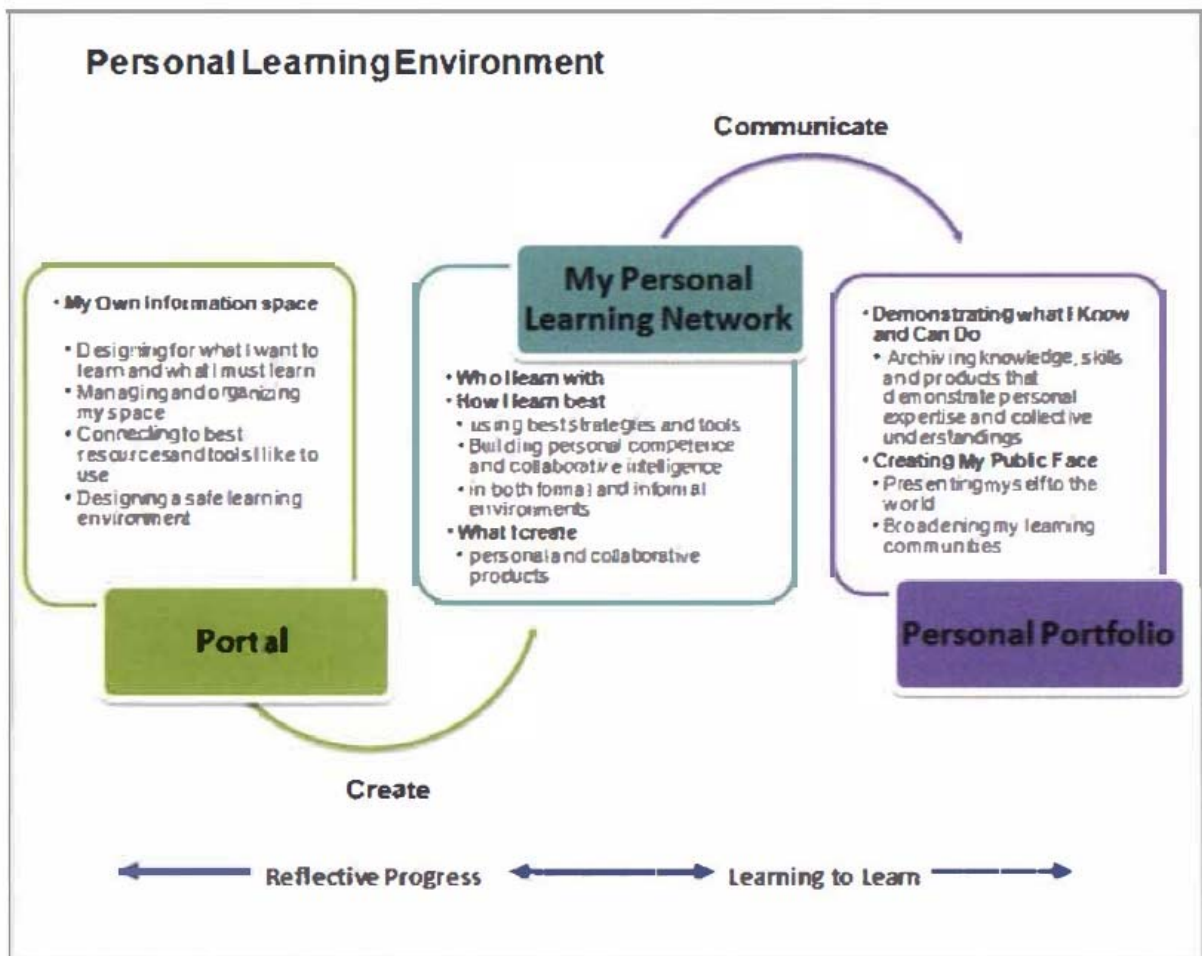


Figure 8. Structure of a digital PLE proposed by Loertscher, D. (2011)

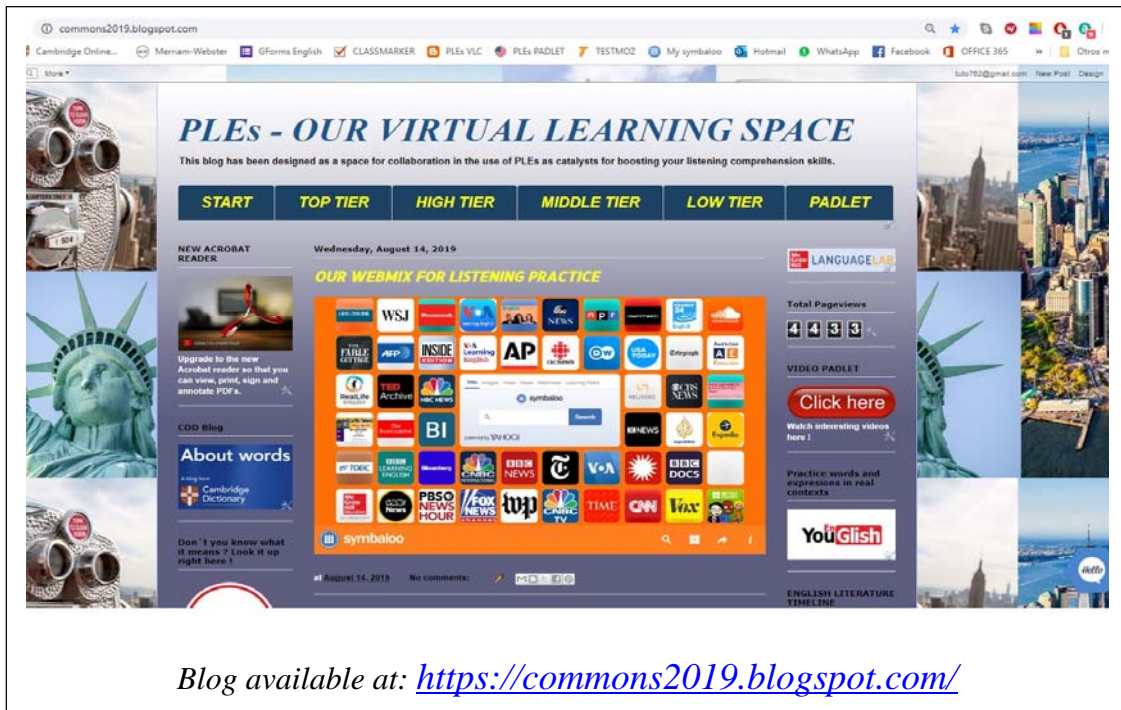


Figure 9. Our virtual learning space.



Figure 10. Personal Learning Network or PLN.

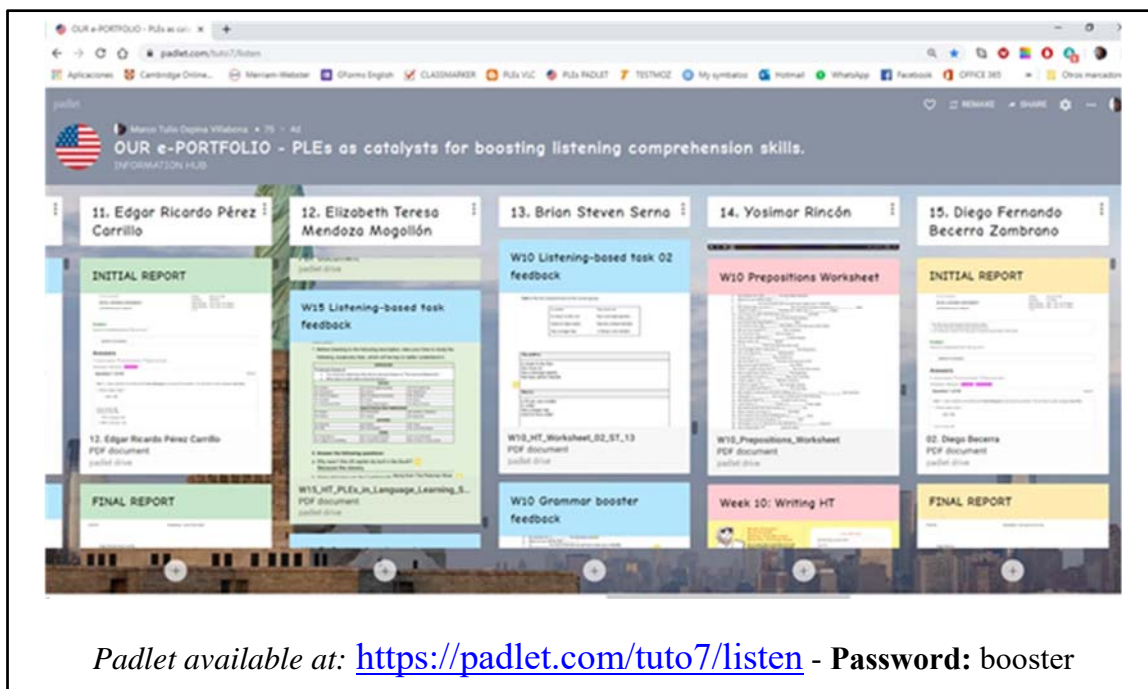


Figure 11. Our online portfolio.

The project participants in each and every tier were instructed to find their corresponding activities within their given tier tab on the blog. The blog was continuously fed on a weekly basis for 17 weeks according to the calendar for this project. (See figure 12). Participants were offered different types of listening activities from specially designed PDF worksheets to periodical simulations tests for them to practice and assess themselves.

On top of that, they were given a **webmix** with links to the most prominent news websites for them to explore freely while working on different controlled activities based on podcasts, video clips, RSS feeds, movie segments, songs, news reports, fables, folk tale stories and short documentaries, all of which were adapted to their particular levels, LOW TIER, MIDDLE TIER, HIGH TIER and TOP TIER on **customized PDF worksheets** that I created bearing in mind the benefits found in the principles of **Task-Based Language Learning** where

key vocabulary is introduced first, followed by the assignment of meaningful tasks to do before making the learners reflect on key language features such as grammar, more vocabulary, pronunciation, culture, etc.). Figure 13.

PROJECT CALENDAR							
<u>PLEs as catalysts for boosting listening comprehension skills</u>							
APRIL							
Week	Task	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
1	Entrance	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	1	8	9	10	11	12	13
3	2	15	16	17	18	19	20
4	3	22	23	24	25	26	27
MAY							
Week	Task	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
5	4	29	30	1	2	3	4
6	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
7	6	13	14	15	16	17	18
8	7	20	21	22	23	24	25
9	8	27	28	29	30	31	1
JUNE							
Week	Task	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
10	9	3	4	5	6	7	8
11	10	10	11	12	13	14	15
12	11	17	18	19	20	21	22
13	12	24	25	26	27	28	29
JULY / AUGUST							
Week	Task	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
14	13	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	14	8	9	10	11	12	13
16	15	15	16	17	18	19	20
17	16	22	23	24	25	26	27
18	17	29	30	31	1	2	3
Final scores delivery: Sunday, August 4 th , 2019					Exit examination		

Figure 12. Project Calendar.

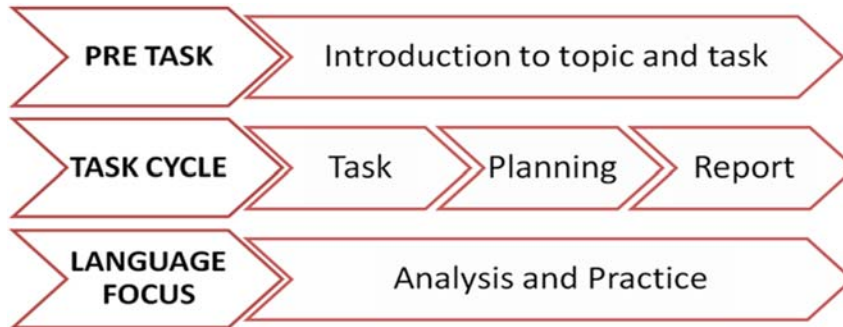


Figure 13. Task-based learning framework by Willis (1996, 2012)

Finally, Just to keep track of their participation throughout the 4 months, they were asked to download some controlled activities, complete them and upload them on padlet, which would become their **online portfolio** (See Figure 14) where they would constantly receive feedback through commentaries, corrections and appraisals mostly left on sticky notes right on the documents they submitted in response to **the content** posted on the blog. See table 4

Figure 14. Feedback samples provided via padlet.

Table 4. *Weekly blog content.*

	TOP TIER	HIGH TIER	MIDDLE TIER	LOW TIER
WEEK 1	TOEFL-based practice listening test	Aptis-based practice listening test	KET-based practice listening test	FLYERS-based practice Listening test
WEEK 2	Phrasal verbs Worksheet 1	Second conditional Worksheet 1	Gerunds & Infinitives Worksheet 1	Basic prepositions Worksheet 1
WEEK 3	Technology Jason Silva Critical thinking task	New smartphones trends documentary	Microplastics Worksheet 2	Beauty & the beast movie segment
WEEK 4	The story of stuff	Conditionals	The power of Grit	Truly madly deeply
WEEK 5	Communism origins	Planes Boing 737	Autonomous cars	Too/enough - Home
WEEK 6	The dangers posed by Nuclear radiation and Critical thinking task	Inside the telecom behemoth, Huawei Critical thinking task	A Cashless society report and Critical thinking task	ESL FAST listening practice worksheets 1,2,3 – 4 & 5
WEEK 7	Toefl ibt listening	Jack & the beanstalk	Cinderella fable	Hansel & Gretel fable
WEEK 8	Phrasal verbs plus past perfect TOEFL-based test on https://testmoz.com/2151445	Indefinite pronouns and quantifiers plus Listening-based task on poison frogs.	Elementary listening tasks 1, 2, 3 & 4 Verb combinations. Worksheet 3	The simple present Vs the present progress. Listening worksheets 6.7.8 & 9
WEEK 9	CAE simulation test	FCE simulation test	PET simulation test	KET simulation test
WEEK 10	Phrasal verbs B1 level listening-based tasks	Prepositional phrases	More verb combinations Elementary listening tasks 5, 6, 7 & 8	Present simple Vs present continuous
WEEK 11	Video-based task: The history of the USA	Video-based task: How mentally strong people achieve success.	Video-based task: Wagyu Beef	Video-based task: History through the eyes of the potato.
WEEK 12	Video-based task: Analyzing patterns in the Savanna Landscape. Grammar booster: Complete the phrasal verbs with the correct preposition.	Conditional Mix Cambridge learning English - CEFR Level B1-B2 Grammar booster: Review on the first, second and third conditionals	Verb combinations Cambridge learning English - CEFR Level A1-A2 Grammar booster: Gerunds & Infinitives: Gerunds after prepositions.	Simple Vs progressive Cambridge learning English - CEFR Level A1-A2 Grammar booster: Final review Simple present vs Present progressive.
WEEK 13	VOA: Highly processed foods. Grammar booster: Provide the correct form of the phrasal verbs given.	VOA: Indian Army Tweets Of 'Yeti' Evidence. Grammar booster: Fill in the correct prepositions	VOA: Mandarin Duck Excites New Yorkers. Grammar booster: Prepositions (for, to, about, on, of) followed by gerunds.	VOA: Pigcasso plus The history of chocolate. Grammar booster: non-progressive verbs
WEEK 14	VOA: What's the U.S. Senate?	VOA: American stories: Paul Bunyan	VOA: US Census Decides How Many Lawmakers to Send to Congress	VOA: American stories: Pecos Bill, An American Folk tale
WEEK 15	VOA: HongKongers flee to Taiwan seeking Democracy	VOA: Washington DC	VOA: As it is: Apple set to move some production outside China	VOA: As it is: Californians Clean Up After Strongest quake in 20 Years.
WEEK 16	VOA: Rocky mountain National Park	VOA: The Grand Canyon	VOA: A Barbecue festival in DC.	VOA: Come over to my place
WEEK 17	Exit simulation tests	Exit Simulation tests	Exit simulation tests	Exit simulation tests

At the end of the 17-week process, the pilot group was requested to take an exit examination on the Classmarker platform. This exit exam was made up of 5 parts as well, just like the initial test and it contained 40 questions for a maximum score of 100 points. However, the points were distributed slightly differently. (See table 5). The test was available from August 1st to August 4th for the participants to be able to take it at their best convenience. The reports on these findings will be depicted in the following section.

Table 5. *Distribution of exit exam.*

PARTS OF THE TEST	NUMBER QUESTIONS	POINTS	TOTAL WORTH
Part 1	5	x 2	10
Part 2	6	x 2	12
Part 3	9	x 2	18
Part 4	10	x 2	20
Part 5	10	x 4	40
WHOLE TEST	40	-----	100

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

After 4 months of intense weekly training with the pilot group, we were able to collect the information necessary to report the following results via the research instruments used, in this case, the initial and exit examinations which were applied by the beginning and the culmination of this project. These results are depicted on table 6.

Table 6. *Initial and Final scores contrast.*

PLEs as catalysts for boosting listening comprehension skills			
#	Participants	Initial Score	Final Score
TOP TIER - B1 +			
01	Mauricio Pantoja	89	92
02	Edinson Mejia Garcia	83	-----
03	Andrés Felipe Torres Arévalo	82	86
04	Diego Fernando Becerra Zambrano	81	86
HIGH TIER - B1			
05	Yosimar Rincón	74	70
06	Brian Steven Serna Méndez	74	84
07	Elizabeth Teresa Mendoza Mogollón	72	86
08	Edgar Ricardo Pérez Carrillo	63	44
MIDDLE TIER - A2			
09	Oscar Eduardo Prada Lipez	48	64
10	Yesenia Yureisy Ríos Anaya	48	68
11	Takashi Maeda	46	84
12	Naoyuki Karasawa	45	60
13	John Jairo Barreneche Martínez	45	66
14	Liliana Paola Roza Martínez	41	52

LOW TIER - A1			
15	Claudia Marcela Forero	35	62
16	Edgar Fabian Mantilla Tinoco	29	52
17	Jorge Alberto Góez	28	-----
18	Claudia Marcela Flórez Gómez	20	56

On the following table, we can observe the variation between the two measurements made by the beginning of April and the beginning of August, 2019. See table 7.

Table 7. *Differential score variation.*

PLEs as catalysts for boosting listening comprehension skills		
#	Participants	Differential variation
TOP TIER - B1 +		
01	Mauricio Pantoja	3
02	Edinson Mejia Garcia	-----
03	Andrés Felipe Torres Arévalo	4
04	Diego Fernando Becerra Zambrano	5
HIGH TIER - B1		
05	Yosimar Rincón	-4
06	Brian Steven Serna Méndez	10
07	Elizabeth Teresa Mendoza Mogollón	14
08	Edgar Ricardo Pérez Carrillo	-19
MIDDLE TIER - A2		
09	Oscar Eduardo Prada Lipez	16
10	Yesenia Yureisy Ríos Anaya	20
11	Takashi Maeda	38
12	Naoyuki Karasawa	15
13	John Jairo Barreneche Martínez	21
14	Liliana Paola Roza Martínez	11

LOW TIER - A1		
15	Claudia Marcela Forero	27
16	Edgar Fabian Mantilla Tinoco	23
17	Jorge Alberto Góez	-----
18	Claudia Marcela Flórez Gómez	36

The following are the most outstanding variations observed between the initial and final scores by the end of the process. (see table 8)

Table 8. *Negative and positive variations.*

Participants with a negative variation				
	Origin	Exit score	Initial score	variation
Yosimar Rincón	High	70	74	- 4
Edgar Ricardo Pérez Carrillo	High	44	63	-19
Participants with a positive variation				
	Origin	Exit score	Initial score	variation
Takashi Maeda	Middle	84	46	38
Claudia Marcela Flórez Gómez	Low	56	20	36
Claudia Marcela Forero	Low	62	35	27
Edgar Fabian Mantilla Tinoco	Low	52	29	23
John Jairo Barreneche Martínez	Middle	66	45	21
Yesenia Yureisy Ríos Anaya	Middle	68	48	20
Oscar Eduardo Prada Lipez	Middle	64	48	16
Naoyuki Karasawa	Middle	60	45	15
Elizabeth Teresa Mendoza Mogollón	High	86	72	14
Liliana Paola Rozo Martínez	Middle	52	41	11
Brian Steven Serna Méndez	High	84	74	10
Diego Fernando Becerra Z.	Top	86	81	5
Andrés Felipe Torres A.	Top	86	82	4
Mauricio Pantoja	Top	92	89	3

Next, to calculate the percentage variation, we will proceed with the following calculation: Increase = New Measurement - Original Measurement, then, divide the Increase by the original number and multiply the answer by 100. By following this formula, Positive values indicate a percentage increase while negative values indicate a percentage decrease. See table 9.

Table 9. *Increase & decrease percentages.*

Participants with a negative variation				
	Origin	Exit score	Initial score	Percentage decrease
Yosimar Rincón	High	- 4	74	-5.4%
Edgar Ricardo Pérez Carrillo	High	-19	63	-30.2%
Participants with a positive variation				
	Origin	Variation	Initial score	Percentage increase
Takashi Maeda	Middle	38	46	82.6 %
Claudia Marcela Flórez Gómez	Low	36	20	180.0%
Claudia Marcela Forero	Low	27	35	77.1 %
Edgar Fabian Mantilla Tinoco	Low	23	29	79.3 %
John Jairo Barreneche Martínez	Middle	21	45	46.7 %
Yesenia Yureisy Ríos Anaya	Middle	20	48	41.7%
Oscar Eduardo Prada Lipez	Middle	16	48	33.3 %
Naoyuki Karasawa	Middle	15	45	33.3 %
Elizabeth Teresa Mendoza M.	High	14	72	19.4 %
Liliana Paola Roza Martínez	Middle	11	41	26.8%
Brian Steven Serna Méndez	High	10	74	13.5%
Diego Fernando Becerra Z.	Top	5	81	6.2%
Andrés Felipe Torres A.	Top	4	82	4.9%
Mauricio Pantoja	Top	3	89	3.4%

Now, let's calculate the different measures of center and spread of the ordered data set based on the percentage increase found. The measures of central tendency are: The mode, the median and the mean while the measure of spread are: The standard deviation or SD and the range.

Table 10. *Data set of percentage increase.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
180	82.6	79.3	77.1	46.7	41.7	33.3	33.3
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
26.8	19.4	13.5	6.2	4.9	3.4	-5.4	-30.2

- The mode refers to the data value that is most frequently observed.
- The median refers to the data value that is positioned in the middle of an ordered data set.
- The mean is just the **arithmetic average** whose formula is:

$$\text{MEAN} = \frac{\sum x_i}{n} \quad \text{or} \quad \bar{x} = \frac{\sum x_i}{n}$$

Therefore,

- The mode of this data set is **33.3**
- The median whose position is $(n + 1) / 2$ is **30.05**
- The mean is **38.29**

As for the measures of spread, we have the range and the standard deviation. Table 10.

- The range is the Max value - the minimum value. The range is $[180 - (-30.2)] = \mathbf{210}$
- The standard deviation is a statistic that measures **the dispersion** of a **data set** relative to its mean and its formula is:

STANDARD DEVIATION

$$s = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})^2}{n - 1}}$$

Table 11. *Calculation of the SD.*

STANDARD DEVIATION				
x_i	$x_i - \bar{x}$		$(x_i - \bar{x})^2$	$s = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})^2}{n - 1}}$
180	180 - 38.29	141.71	20081.72	Square root of 2428.69 for a SD of 49.28
82.6	82.6 - 38.29	44.31	1963.38	
79.3	79.3 - 38.29	41.01	1681.82	
77.1	77.1 - 38.29	38.81	1506.22	
46.7	46.7 - 38.29	8.41	70.73	
41.7	41.7 - 38.29	3.41	11.63	
33.3	33.3 - 38.29	-4.99	24.90	
33.3	33.3 - 38.29	-4.99	24.90	
26.8	26.8 - 38.29	-11.49	132.02	
19.4	19.4 - 38.29	-18.89	356.83	
13.5	13.5 - 38.29	-24.79	614.54	
6.2	6.2 - 38.29	-32.09	1029.77	
4.9	4.9 - 38.29	-33.39	1114.89	
3.4	3.4 - 38.29	-34.89	1217.31	
-5.4	-5.4 - 38.29	-43.69	1908.82	
-30.2	-30.2 - 38.29	-68.49	4690.88	
$\sum (x_i - \bar{x})^2$			36430.36 / (16 - 1)	

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Based on the results obtained from the pilot group involved in this study, it is clearly seen that their individual achievements, though quite differentiated among the different tiers, were consistent to the expectations in that **87.5%** of the 16 remaining participants certainly evidenced considerable improvements reflected in an increase of **13.8%** in the group average (see appendix A) after having learned to self-regulate in the management of the web-based activities supplied throughout this project. On the other hand, the fact that we have a standard deviation higher than the mean ($SD = 49.28 > \text{mean of } 38.29$) indicates the presence of a couple of atypical cases that certainly deviate from the average achievements made in that one student went from an initial score of 20 to 56 and another student whose initial score was 63 and went down to 44.

From my personal observation, the project worked out quite well. Unfortunately, two of the 18 original participants had to abandon the project at an early stage. They are Jorge Alberto Góez (Low tier) and Edinson Mejia Garcia (Top tier). It was also evident that not all of the participants were able to work at the same pace; for example, those who worked as instructed, that is, those participants who managed to work constantly on a weekly basis were better prepared to tackle the exit examination while others who only worked intermittently, that is, leaving gaps in between the assignments or who just did not complete the total amount of activities consequently failed to sustain their initial level.

However, the full completion of the activities is not a determining factor because there were others who were successful without completing a 100% of the controlled activities. Thus, it is quite probable that they may have explored some of the resources offered in an uncontrolled way. Interestingly, if we analyze the results by tiers as they were initially organized, we can see that those participants in the lower tiers (Low and middle tier) were the ones with the most outstanding improvements mostly due to their commitment to overcome their weaknesses, but it doesn't mean that the upper tier participants haven't signaled any significant improvements, on the contrary, they worked pretty hard to solve the most demanding activities in this project.

Finally, it was found, based on conversations held with the upper tier participants, that the exit test was even more rigorous than the initial one, and it seems to be partly true, due to the fact that the distribution of points per section was slightly different between the two exams which may have affected the final scores bearing in mind that the hardest questions were placed in parts 4 & 5 equivalent in the exit exam to 60 points out of 100. (See table 12)

Table 12. *Point allotment contrast between initial and exit tests.*

PARTS OF THE TEST	INITIAL TEST QUESTIONS & POINTS	EXIT TEST QUESTIONS & POINTS	INITIAL EXAM TOTAL WORTH	EXIT EXAM TOTAL WORTH
Part 1	10 x 2	5 x 2	20	10
Part 2	5 x 2	6 x 2	10	12
Part 3	10 x 2	9 x 2	20	18
Part 4	10 x 3	10 x 2	30	20
Part 5	5 x 4	10 x 4	20	40
WHOLE TEST	40	40	100	100

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The benefits of using a PLE to advance learning in any area of knowledge are undeniable if there is commitment, motivation and autonomy. Even though PLEs are a relatively new concept that still lacks more robust research and documentation, I strongly support their use because after completing the implementation of a PLE to boost listening comprehension skills with my pilot group, most of the participants in the project manifested their intention to keep learning more about English by doing independent research which materializes one of the main goals of a PLE, The development of lifelong learning skills.

The previous research project has demonstrated the potential of personal learning environments in ELT. It was evidenced that most participants in this project were able to make significant progress with their basic listening skills after having trained by themselves for a period of 4 months with a series of tools that encompass different types of online content and the assignment of controlled activities that they had to report to their tutor on a weekly basis via the interface associated with the particular PLE developed for this study.

The use of a BLOG and a PADLET proved to be very effective tools as a standard asynchronous management system for a PLE that any educator can easily set up to condense and deliver his expertise in favor of a small network of students, especially failing learners who may

need assistance to develop the capacity to learn to learn on their own through the free exploration of more significant resources usually available online.

Chances are that PLEs may become more and more popular in the near future to engage students who idly browse the web in academic plans more connected with the global ecology of web 2.0 services. Consequently, PLEs offer teachers a great opportunity to improve current course designs in an attempt to challenge the dominant role played by institutional Learning management systems allowing for a more personalized approach to teaching.

Finally, after having been through this laborious but rewarding experience of creating a PLE from scratch, I strongly recommend its use to help high school & college students in public institutions who don't usually know what to search for on the internet when it comes to looking for materials to further enhance their listening skills.

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APPENDIX A: GROUP AVERAGE TEST SCORES

4/4/2019 ClassMarker - Group Test results

ClassMarker 

Results Tests Groups Links

INITIAL LISTENING ASSESSMENT **Settings**
LISTENING PILOT GROUP Pass Mark: Not set
Time Limit: 01:00:00
[Edit](#)

Statistics by Category

All dates Any status & score Any duration

Name	Percentage	Score	Duration	Date	
Average	55.7%	55.7/100	00:51:21		
John Barreneche	45%	45/100	00:51:34	Tue 2 Apr '19 12:42pm	Answers
Diego Becerra	81%	81/100	01:00:02	Mon 1 Apr '19 10:48pm	Answers
Claudia Florez	20%	20/100	01:00:01	Mon 1 Apr '19 9:27pm	Answers
Jorge Goetz	28%	28/100	00:59:18	Wed 3 Apr '19 10:05pm	Answers
Naoyuki Karasawa	45%	45/100	00:33:59	Tue 2 Apr '19 4:23am	Answers
Takashi Maeda	48%	46/100	00:46:43	Tue 2 Apr '19 9:14am	Answers
Edgar Mantilla Tinoco	29%	29/100	00:38:35	Tue 2 Apr '19 9:49pm	Answers
Claudia Maroela	35%	35/100	00:39:52	Thu 4 Apr '19 10:28pm	Answers
Edinson Mejia Garcia	83%	83/100	00:48:34	Wed 3 Apr '19 5:03pm	Answers
Elizabeth Teresa Mendoza Mogollón	72%	72/100	00:43:39	Tue 2 Apr '19 1:24pm	Answers
Mauricio Pantoja	89%	89/100	00:58:10	Mon 1 Apr '19 11:41am	Answers

https://www.classmarker.com/ia/results/tests/test/rqusers/?test_id=1063579&rg_id=418217 1/2

Group average test results available for online viewing at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MrSgubPWfsvQUI3sgCJOcebHYJTpZokB/view?usp=sharing>

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

2/4/2019 ClassMarker - Group Test results

<p>Claudia Florez ftopoclaudiaman@hotmail.com IP: 181.236.192.3</p> <p>INITIAL LISTENING ASSESSMENT LISTENING PILOT GROUP</p>	<p>20%</p> <p>Points: 20 out of 100 Duration: 01:00:01 Date started: Mon 1 Apr '19 9:27pm Date finished: Mon 1 Apr '19 10:27pm <small>o Let</small></p>
---	--

Feedback
 Thanks for completing this test ! See you soon !

Statistics by Category

Answers

✓ Correctly answered
 ✗ Incorrectly answered
 ➔ Missed correct option

All Questions | 10 Correct | **30 Incorrect**

Question 1 of 40 Generic

Part 1 – Listen carefully to the following 10 mini-dialogues and answer the questions. You will listen to each passage only twice.

1. What's today's date ?

0:00 / 0:08

Correct answer: B)
 Selected answer: B)

A) It's January 13th
 B) It's February 13th
 C) It's January 15th
 D) It's February 15th

Points: 2 out of 2

Question 2 of 40 Generic

2. What is Alex Romero like?

0:00 / 0:22

Correct answer: D)
 Selected answer: B)

A) He's shy

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All individual exams available for online viewing at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AKRGUC4Hnhwu4AGHhLbOIRZxnhAFQQnw/view?usp=sharing>