

EXTENSIVE LISTENING AS A TOOL FOR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IMPROVEMENT: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT FEEDBACK

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ABSTRACT

A key component of learning a language is listening, which is necessary for the growth of receptive and productive language skills. Extensive Listening (EL), which involves engaging with a wide range of audio materials in the target language, has emerged as a significant pedagogical tool for enhancing listening skills. This study investigates the effectiveness of EL in improving language proficiency through a 13-week program involving three undergraduate students in an English language course. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the study explores students' perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and overall impact of EL on their English language skills. The findings indicate that students perceive EL as beneficial for vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. However, challenges such as difficulties in finding relevant content and understanding diverse accents were also identified. The study provides valuable insights into optimizing EL programs, emphasizing the need for curated content and structured syllabi to better support learners. These results contribute to the existing literature on EL by highlighting its role in language learning and offering practical recommendations for educators to enhance instructional practices. The study underscores the importance of fostering an effective learning environment tailored to the needs and preferences of language learners. Future research is suggested to see the influence of various listening materials, the effectiveness of certain techniques, and to examine the long-term impact of EL across a broader learner demographic to further validate its effectiveness as a language acquisition tool.

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INTRODUCTION

Listening is a fundamental skill in language acquisition, playing a crucial role in the development of both receptive and productive language abilities. It serves as a gateway through which learners internalize new vocabulary, grasp grammatical structures, and develop an intuitive sense of the target language's rhythm and pronunciation. As such,

listening is not merely a passive activity but a dynamic process that requires cognitive engagement and active interpretation of auditory input (Rost, 2011; Brownell, 2012; Feyten, 1991). Gonulal (2020) emphasizes that the best way to improve listening skills is through consistent practice; the more a learner engages in listening activities, the more proficient they become. This highlights the importance of incorporating diverse and frequent listening exercises into language learning curricula.

Among various approaches to enhancing listening skills, Extensive Listening (EL) has emerged as a prominent pedagogical tool aimed at exposing learners to a large amount of comprehensible input in the target language. EL involves engaging with a wide range of audio materials, such as podcasts, films, and native speaker dialogues (Ivone and Renandya, 2019), to improve learners' listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and overall language proficiency (Ozturk and Tekin, 2020). Unlike intensive listening, which often focuses on short, carefully selected texts and involves detailed analysis (Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Field, 2008; Harmer, 2007), EL encourages learners to listen to longer passages and a variety of content for general understanding (Rost, 2011; Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Nation & Newton, 2009; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Field, 2008). This approach is less about scrutinizing every word or phrase and more about getting a feel for the language as it is naturally spoken. The practice of EL also facilitates students with listening to English speaking without burden (free from pressure) (Gavenila, et al, 2021). The theoretical underpinnings of EL are grounded in the Input Hypothesis, which posits that exposure to comprehensible input is essential for language acquisition (Krashen, 1985).

The current study investigates the effectiveness of Extensive Listening as a tool for improving language proficiency, based on qualitative feedback from students who participated in a 13-week EL program in an English language course as it is known that empirical research consistently supports the benefits of EL in enhancing language proficiency. For instance, a study by Chang and Millett (2014) showed significant improvements in listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition among learners who engaged in regular EL activities. Similarly, Matsui and Noro (2010) found that learners exposed to a variety of audio materials, including dialogues, podcasts, and films, displayed notable gains in their listening skills and a better grasp of pronunciation nuances. These studies underscore the potential of EL to serve as a powerful tool in language learning, particularly in contexts where access to native speakers is limited.

Another study by Stanley (2005) highlighted that EL helps in the internalization of language structures and phonological patterns, which leads to improved fluency and

accuracy in language use. These benefits align with the findings of Rodrigo, Krashen, and Gribbons (2004), who observed enhanced language retention among learners exposed to extensive listening exercises. Moreover, Yeh (2013) identified EL as a crucial strategy for fostering autonomous learning, as it encourages learners to actively seek out and engage with materials that suit their proficiency levels and interests. This autonomy is particularly beneficial in language learning, as it aligns with principles of self-directed learning and motivation theory, suggesting that learners who have control over their learning process are more likely to be motivated and engaged.

Some other previous research also has highlighted the benefits of EL, such as increased exposure to native pronunciation, improved listening comprehension, and enhanced vocabulary knowledge (Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Day & Robb, 2015). These studies provide a solid foundation for understanding the effectiveness of EL. However, few studies have explored the nuanced experiences and perceptions of learners regarding the challenges and advantages associated with EL. Understanding these learner perspectives is critical for optimizing EL programs and aligning them with students' learning needs and preferences.

The present study aims to fill this gap by providing a qualitative analysis of student feedback on their experiences with EL. Three students participated in a questionnaire that assessed their perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and overall impact of EL on their English language proficiency. The findings reveal that students unanimously agree on the positive impact of EL on their language skills, specifically in areas such as vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. Additionally, the study uncovers specific challenges faced by learners, such as difficulties in finding relevant content and managing the exposure to diverse accents. These challenges, while not diminishing the overall effectiveness of EL, suggest that learners may benefit from additional guidance and support in selecting appropriate materials and strategies for engaging with diverse listening resources.

By analyzing these insights, this study contributes to the existing literature on Extensive Listening by offering a learner-centered perspective on its effectiveness and challenges. The results not only affirm the value of EL in enhancing language proficiency but also provide practical recommendations for educators to refine their EL programs. These insights are particularly relevant in the context of language education, where fostering a positive and effective learning environment is paramount for student success.

Overall, this research seeks to advance our understanding of Extensive Listening as a pedagogical tool and its role in language learning, with the ultimate goal of informing

more effective instructional practices and supporting language learners in their journey towards proficiency. The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate context of English language learning, offering valuable lessons for educators and curriculum developers in a wide range of language education settings.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions and experiences with Extensive Listening (EL) as a tool for improving language proficiency (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the subjective experiences of learners and to understand the perceived benefits and challenges associated with EL (Merriam, 2009). The study utilized an open-ended questionnaire to collect detailed feedback from students, allowing for a rich exploration of their personal reflections and thoughts on the EL program (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Participants

The participants in this study were three undergraduate students enrolled in an English language course at a university. These students participated in a 13-week EL program designed to enhance their listening skills through extensive exposure to native English audio materials, such as podcasts, movies, and online videos. The participants were selected based on their active engagement in the EL activities throughout the course duration. All participants had similar proficiency levels in English, ensuring a relatively homogeneous group for the analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered at the end of the 13-week EL program. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions designed to capture students' experiences, perceptions, and reflections on the EL activities. The closed questions included yes/no statements to gauge general attitudes towards EL, while the open-ended questions provided opportunities for participants to elaborate on specific aspects of their experiences. The questions were developed based on the literature on language learning and extensive listening (Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) and aimed to cover various dimensions of EL, including perceived benefits, challenges, enjoyment, and suggestions for improvement.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns

within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns that reflect participants' perceptions and experiences. In this study, the data were first transcribed verbatim, and initial codes were generated based on the students' responses. These codes were then organized into broader themes that represented commonalities and differences in the students' experiences with EL.

The themes that emerged from the analysis included perceived benefits of EL (e.g., vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation improvement, enjoyment of learning), challenges encountered (e.g., difficulties in understanding multiple accents, finding relevant content), and suggestions for enhancing the EL program (e.g., providing a structured syllabus). The findings were then interpreted in relation to the existing literature on EL and language learning, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the role of EL in language proficiency improvement (Krashen, 1985; Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The qualitative analysis of the questionnaire responses provided by three students revealed several key themes regarding their experiences with Extensive Listening (EL) as a tool for language proficiency improvement. The results are organized into three main categories: perceived benefits of EL, challenges encountered during the EL activities, and suggestions for improvement.

1. Perceived Benefits of Extensive Listening

All three participants unanimously agreed that Extensive Listening significantly contributed to their English language proficiency. The primary benefits identified were:

- 1.1 Improvement in Vocabulary and Pronunciation: Students reported gaining new vocabulary and learning correct pronunciation through exposure to native speakers. One participant noted, "I get more vocabularies with correct pronunciation at the same time. After that, I get new phrases to try." This aligns with the findings of Renandya and Farrell (2011), who highlighted the role of EL in facilitating vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation improvement. Additionally, the exposure to various contexts in authentic listening materials helped learners understand how vocabulary is used pragmatically, further enhancing their communicative competence. This exposure allows learners to internalize new vocabulary and pronunciation patterns naturally, making their language use more fluent and accurate over

time.

1.2 Enhanced Listening Comprehension and Speaking Skills: Students also indicated that EL made conversation and speaking easier by improving their listening comprehension. As one student stated, "Yes, improve pronunciation makes conversation and speaking easier." This is consistent with Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) assertion that listening practice enhances overall communicative competence by improving both comprehension and speaking abilities. Moreover, participants reported feeling more confident when speaking in English, attributing this confidence to their improved ability to understand spoken language in different contexts. This finding underscores the importance of listening comprehension as a foundation for effective communication in a second language.

1.3 Increased Enjoyment and Motivation to Learn English: Another benefit reported was the increased enjoyment and motivation to learn English. One student mentioned, "Make me enjoy learning English," suggesting that EL activities were not only effective in improving skills but also engaging and motivating for learners. This is supported by Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of engaging and meaningful input in language learning. The enjoyment derived from listening to varied and interesting content appears to reduce the anxiety often associated with language learning, thereby fostering a more positive attitude toward learning and encouraging consistent practice.

2. Challenges Encountered During Extensive Listening

Despite the overall positive feedback, one participant reported difficulties associated with the EL activities:

2.1 Difficulty in Finding Relevant Content: A challenge mentioned was the difficulty in finding content that was both detailed and relevant to the topics of interest. As one student expressed, "Difficult to find content in detail with related topics." This indicates a need for more curated or guided resources that align with the course objectives and student interests. The lack of suitable materials can hinder the effectiveness of EL by reducing learner engagement and motivation, suggesting that more effort is needed to provide content that is both pedagogically valuable and engaging for students.

2.2 Understanding Multiple Accents: Another challenge identified was the difficulty in understanding content that included multiple accents in one

conversation. One participant noted, "Hard to understand when it used more than one accent in the speaking." This challenge is echoed in previous research by Vandergrift and Goh (2012), which suggests that exposure to varied accents can be beneficial but may require scaffolding to prevent cognitive overload for learners. Such difficulties highlight the need for gradual exposure to diverse accents, possibly starting with more familiar ones and progressively introducing more varied accents to build confidence and listening skills.

3. Suggestions for Improvement

Students also provided valuable suggestions for enhancing the EL program, that is provision of a structured syllabus or plan. One participant suggested that having a structured syllabus or plan for EL would make it easier to study and track progress. The student stated, "I think we can provide a syllabus or plans for EL so that we study much easier." This recommendation aligns with best practices in instructional design, which advocate for structured learning plans to guide learners and ensure systematic progression (Renandya & Farrell, 2011).

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that Extensive Listening is an effective tool for enhancing various aspects of language proficiency, including vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. The positive perceptions reported by students are consistent with previous literature on the benefits of EL (Alshaikhi & Madini, 2016; Saputra & Fatimah, 2018; Fauzanna, 2017; Nguyen, 2023), which emphasizes its role in providing abundant and diverse input that is critical for language acquisition (Krashen, 1985; Renandya & Farrell, 2011.).

However, the study also highlights specific challenges associated with EL, particularly related to content relevance and understanding diverse accents. These challenges suggest that while EL is beneficial, it requires careful implementation and support from educators to maximize its effectiveness. Educators should consider providing a curated list of listening materials tailored to the students' proficiency levels and interests, as well as scaffolding activities that gradually introduce multiple accents to build confidence and comprehension skills.

Moreover, the suggestion to provide a structured syllabus or plan for EL points to the importance of clear instructional guidelines and learning objectives. A well-defined structure can help students navigate their learning journey more effectively and maintain motivation over time (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

In addition to the advantages and challenges identified, it is important to

consider the pedagogical implications of integrating Extensive Listening (EL) into language curricula. To effectively leverage EL as a tool for language development, educators must not only provide a variety of listening materials but also create an environment that encourages active engagement and reflection. This involves guiding students to set personal listening goals and encouraging them to reflect on their progress, which can enhance metacognitive awareness and foster self-directed learning (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). By integrating EL into a broader, student-centered approach, educators can promote a more holistic development of language skills, catering to both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

Furthermore, the study's findings on the challenges of understanding diverse accents underline the need for exposure to a wide range of linguistic inputs. This exposure not only prepares learners for real-world communication but also enhances their ability to adapt to different speaking styles and dialects. Incorporating technology, such as language learning apps and online platforms, can facilitate access to diverse audio materials, allowing for a more comprehensive language experience. These tools can also provide immediate feedback and adaptive learning paths, which are critical for addressing individual learner differences and promoting sustained engagement.

Additionally, the importance of motivation and learner autonomy cannot be overstated. The positive perceptions reported by students in the study suggest that when learners are motivated and find the listening materials engaging and relevant, they are more likely to persist in their listening practice. Educators should therefore focus on creating a balance between providing guidance and allowing autonomy, enabling students to choose materials that align with their interests and goals. This approach not only supports language development but also enhances learner satisfaction and reduces the likelihood of attrition.

In conclusion, while Extensive Listening has proven benefits for language acquisition, its successful implementation requires a thoughtful, well-structured approach. Educators need to consider the specific needs and preferences of their students, provide diverse and engaging content, and create opportunities for reflection and goal-setting. By addressing these factors, the potential of EL as a powerful tool for language learning can be fully realized.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The results of this study demonstrate that Extensive Listening (EL) is a valuable tool for improving English language proficiency among students. The qualitative analysis of questionnaire responses from three students revealed several key benefits of

EL, including enhanced vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and speaking skills. Additionally, EL activities were reported to increase enjoyment and motivation to learn English, supporting the Input Hypothesis of language learning. These findings align with previous research, affirming the role of EL in providing meaningful and engaging input necessary for language acquisition.

However, the study also identified some challenges faced by students during EL activities. The primary difficulties reported were related to finding relevant content and understanding multiple accents within conversations. These challenges highlight the need for educators to carefully select and provide appropriate EL materials that match the students' proficiency levels and interests. Furthermore, understanding multiple accents can be demanding for learners, suggesting that gradual exposure and scaffolding strategies should be implemented to enhance comprehension and prevent cognitive overload.

To address these challenges and improve the effectiveness of EL programs, several suggestions were proposed by the students. A notable recommendation was the provision of a structured syllabus or learning plan, which could help guide students through their EL activities and track their progress more systematically. This structured approach would ensure that learners receive consistent and targeted input, which is crucial for achieving language learning objectives.

Based on the findings, it is evident that while EL is a beneficial method for language proficiency improvement, its implementation requires thoughtful planning and support from educators. Providing a curated list of listening materials, tailored to the learners' interests and proficiency levels, could enhance the relevance and effectiveness of EL activities. Moreover, integrating scaffolding techniques to manage the introduction of diverse accents could improve students' listening comprehension and overall confidence in using the language.

In conclusion, the study suggests that with the appropriate support and structure, Extensive Listening can be a highly effective strategy for language learning. Future research could explore the impact of different types of listening materials and the effectiveness of various scaffolding techniques in overcoming the challenges identified. Educators should consider these findings to refine and optimize EL programs, ensuring they meet the diverse needs of learners and maximize their potential for language development. Upcoming investigations could also expand on this study by exploring the experiences of a larger and more diverse group of learners and investigating the long-term impact of EL on language development.

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