

## EXTENSIVE LISTENING FOR EFL STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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### Abstract

*Assisting students to develop their listening fluency has been always a particularly difficult of foreign language teaching. Extensive listening, similar to extensive reading, focuses on meaning rather than form. The purpose is to provide students with as much target language input as possible. This study describes the teaching of extensive listening to English Department students of Muhammadiyah University of Malang. This paper highlights the difficulties found and the strategies applied by the students during the learning process. Questionnaires with close and open-ended questions were used as the research instrument as well as interview to gain the students' opinion while the data to identify the strategies used by the students were gathered from interview. The subject of this study was 12 students who join Basic Listening subject. The result of the study shows that the problems are related with listening materials, students' performance, and listening equipment. Regarding the strategy, this study reveals that students applied five tactics to comprehend the listening materials better. Those strategies are: giving pause and replay, guessing unknown words, finding difficult words in the dictionary, predict the content by using background knowledge, making notes or rewrite the text.*

**Keywords:** extensive listening, listening comprehension

### Introduction

Listening has always been assumed as a difficult skill for many foreign language learners. Listening seems to be difficult to learn compared with other skills. Learners need a lot of practice to master reading and writing. To speak, learners need courage. To deal with listening, it is quite hard to know what should be arranged. Like other skills, reading and writing, listening requires practice.

However, to get more practice, doing listening in-class looks is difficult for several practical reason. Moreover, classroom is not always a suitable place to make students get engaged with the language. In terms of learning duration, in-class activities seem to be very limited. In

addition, extensive listening offers wider opportunity for students to improve their listening skills. Having activities out of class, they will get a lot of meaningful practice (Renandya, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the implementation of Extensive Listening as well as the difficulties found in Extensive Listening.

### Extensive Listening

Extensive listening can be conducted as an in-class or out of class activities, but the important thing to remember is that students get to do a lot of meaningful listening practice. In order for the students to be willing to engage in sustained listening practice, the language must be comprehensive, and the contents of the

materials should be interesting and enjoyable. It is believed that this kind of sustained practice can provide learners with a cognitive map, i.e., a network of linguistic information from which learners can “build up the necessary knowledge for using the language” (Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 38, as cited in Renandya, 2012).

In sum, extensive listening is a way to improve listening fluency. Improving fluency means building listening speed, at the level of our ability. A beginner level student may listen to something with very few unknown words and the simplest of grammar. An intermediate level listener may choose a listening text that had a wider range of vocabulary and grammar, but, importantly it is still quite easy. So the important point here is that ‘difficulty’ is not merely a property of a text, but of the listener. A given text may be easy for one person, but the same text may not be easy for another. Therefore one’s ability level decides whether a given listening text is easy or not.

### **Macro and Micro Skills of Listening**

Yagang (as cited in Hien, 2015) mentions that the problem in listening was accompanied with the four following factors: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting. Moreover, numbers of research have been conducted to pick out the problem in listening. Brown (2007), constructing from aural skill’s taxonomy developed by Richards (1983) simplifies macro and micro skill in listening in order to guide learners to deal with the objective of listening.

Learners are expected to develop their macro and micro skill to deal with the objectives of communication. Micro skills deal with:

- Retain chunks of language of different lengths in short-term memory

- Discriminate among the distinctive sounds of English
- Recognize English stress patterns, words in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, intonational contours, and their role in signaling information.
- Recognize reduced forms of words.
- Distinguish word boundaries, recognize a core of words, and interpret word order patterns and their significance.
- Process speech containing pauses, errors, corrections, and other performance variables.
- Process speech at different rates of delivery.
- Recognize grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, rules, and elliptical forms.
- Detect sentence constituents and distinguish between major and minor constituents.
- Recognize that a particular meaning may be expressed in different grammatical forms.

Moreover, Brown's (2007) macro-skills cover:

- Recognize cohesive devices in spoken discourse.
- Recognize the communicative functions of utterances, according to situations, participants, goals.
- Infer situations, participants, goals using real-world knowledge. (Pragmatic competence)
- From events, ideas, etc., described, predict outcomes, infer links and connections between events, deduce causes and effects, and detect such relations such as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification.

- Distinguish between literal and implied meanings.
- Use facial, kinetic, body language, and other nonverbal cues to decipher meanings.
- Develop and use a battery of listening strategies, such as detecting key words, guessing the meaning of words from context, appealing for help, and signaling comprehension or lack thereof.

**Research Method**

In terms of research method, this study employs mixed method. Mixed method covers both collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data.

Qualitative data consisted of open-ended information that the researcher gathered through interviews with participants. Open-ended questions were asked to the participants in order to gain information in their own words.

The research subjects of this study were 12 students. This study applied two instruments to gather the data: questionnaire and interview. The scope of questions included listening in general, problems in listening, students’ opinion about listening class, and students’ strategy in listening activity. This research employed semi-structured interviews which enables the interviewer to modify the interview process.

**Findings**

Problems deal with listening materials, students’ performance, and students’ physical limits, and supporting equipment. Each topic is presented in the following description.

First, concerning with listening materials, some issues were covered. They were about different unfamiliar words, complex grammatical structures, long spoken text,

phonological system, predicting incoming speech, colloquial language, reduced form, recognizing familiar pronunciation, inferring meaning from unknown words, listening text without script, unclear pronunciation, and unrepeated text . The complete result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Students’ Problems Related to Listening Materials

N o.		Prot	Rar	Someti	Oft	Neve
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1	Unfamiliar words	0		75%	25%	0
2	Complex grammatical structures	0		83%	17%	0
3	Long spoken text	0		92%	8%	0
4	Different phonological system	17%		42%	42%	0
5	Predicting incoming speech	17%		42%	25%	17%
6	Colloquial language	0		67%	33%	0
7	Reduced form	17%		67%	17%	0
8	Familiar pronunciation but cannot recognize the word	8%		67%	33%	0
9	Inferring meaning from unknown words	0		84%	8%	8%
10	Too-fast speaking text	16%		42%	42%	0
11	Listening text without script	42%		33%	8%	17%
12	Unclear pronunciation	0		58%	42%	0
13	Unrepeated text	0		83%	17%	0
14	Unfamiliar topics	0		83%	17%	0

The next problems deal with students’ performance. The entire class mentioned that they feel difficult with unfamiliar words. Moreover, by using background knowledge, most of the students (83%)

agreed that it can help them to comprehend the text (Table 4).

The time-consuming text made almost all (92%) said that it made them lose their focus. The questions given also distracted students' comprehension (91%). It came when they have to think to answer the questions. The same result was also found in terms of poor recording quality that made students lose their concentration.

Table 2 Students' Problems Related to Students' Performance

No	Problems	Rarely	Some times	Often	Never
1	Losing concentration because of too-long text	0	50%	42%	8%
2	Losing focus when thinking about another question	8%	58%	33%	0
3	Losing focus when the quality of the recording is poor	8%	58%	33%	0

The last, concerning with supporting equipment, noises, and poor equipment contribute considerably to students' listening activity. In this case, all of the students had profound troubles concerning to the equipment.

Table 3 Problems Related to Supporting Equipment

No	Problems	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	Noises	0	25%	75%	0
2	Poor CD player quality	0	50%	50%	0
3	Poor sound quality of equipment	0	42%	58%	0

The data to identify the strategies used by the students are gathered from interview. Regarding the materials, the students

prefer listen to English songs (83%) and watching English movies (42%). In this case, they may choose both materials. In terms of frequency of doing self-study, all of them said that they sometimes conduct self-study.

Table 4 Students Strategy Dealing with Listening Problems

No.	Problems	Rarely	Some times	Often	Never
1	Making prediction	8%	67%	17%	8%
2	Using background knowledge	17%	25%	58%	0%

Based on the interviews, students applied some tactics to comprehend the listening materials better. It can be summarized in the following parts:

### 1. Give pause and replay

To face difficulty in identifying unknown or unfamiliar words, the students applied abovementioned strategy. They play the text several times, mostly more than four times, and pause the challenging words. Then, they tried to predict the meaning.

"I play it five times with pause and repeat," said AM. Student PSA, who listened to a longer text, said that she replayed her video for ten times.

"I need ten times for unclear words. Sometime the text sound too fast," she admitted.

### 2. Guessing unknown words

To comprehend the text, both selected by the lecturer and student, the students tried to guess the words. Some of the subjects (17%) applied this technique to ease them in comprehending the spoken text. In this case several words seem unfamiliar and are used for specific field of knowledge.

“I guessed what the text is about. In the second hearing, I can understand better,” said GA.

“...I don’t catch the words. I repeated the videos. I opened the dictionary. If I didn’t know (the meaning), I give up or guess the words. Some left unidentified,” student AM clarified her ways to survive in listening.

### **3. Finding difficult words in the dictionary**

To deal with the unknown words, the students often felt doubtful. They tried to guess but did not really think it is the correct word. In this case, they reassure their idea by using the dictionary.

“I hear *hers*, but it is actually *hearse*. I heard *fret*, but it is *pervert*,” said PSA in an interview.

“Some of them (the words) are unfamiliar. I tried to find in dictionary,” said TM, explaining her problems in listening “The Food You Should never Keep in the Refrigerator” In this case, she could not figure out the words *air tight*, *airless*, *tint*, etc.

### **4. Predict the content by using background knowledge**

This strategy was carried out by students to cope with the problems found in comprehending the text. 58% of them frequently applied this tactic. Additionally, student’ experience or background knowledge contribute significantly in their listening comprehension.

“I loved the topic about shopping,” student AM presented her understanding about her text “Women Have to Pay More in Shops”. Another student explained her experience about her topic on movie review *Troll*.

“I know how the story runs and the characters. The movie is booming. I watched the movie and am interested to find the review.”

“I love topic about food. Then I find the appropriate text,” said TM.

### **5. Making notes or rewrite the text**

To have better comprehension, the students make notes to the listening materials. They noted the unfamiliar words and rewrite the text to get better comprehension.

“I make notes to recheck the result,” said student AM when she finished her listening task. The similar way was also conducted by RF.

“I rearrange the sentences two times,” he described his way to comprehend his text better.

“... However, in rewriting the text, I needed the slower (one). So, I paused and repeated the text,” student AM explained in an interview.

### **Discussion**

In line with the result of the study, some issues were addressed. The problems are related to listening materials, students’ performance, and supporting equipment. The first problem is about students’ problem in listening materials (unfamiliar words, complex grammatical structures, long spoken text, phonological system, predicting incoming speech, colloquial language, reduced form, recognizing familiar pronunciation, inferring meaning from unknown words, listening text without script, unclear pronunciation, and unrepeatable text). In this case, unfamiliar words, too fast speaking text, too long text and unclear pronunciation contribute to students’ difficulty in understanding the text.

Those problems are related to macro and micro skill in listening comprehension. Micro skills covers of recall the pieces of

language in a short-term memory, distinguish among the distinctive sounds in the new language, identify stress and rhythm patterns, tone patterns, modulation (intonation) contours, recognize reduced forms of words, distinguish word boundaries, recognize characteristic word-order patterns, identify vocabulary, discover key words, such as those identifying topics and ideas, guess meaning from context, and detect sentence components such as subject, verb, object, prepositions, and the like (Brown: 2007). These difficulties were also addressed by Brown (2007) related to the characteristic of listening performances.

The second problem dealt with students' performance. Based on the study, factors, such as the length of text, poor quality of tape, and effect students' concentration. Too-long text made the students spend their energy to comprehend and analyze the text. This time-consuming activity cause exhaustion which in turn hinder students' comprehension. Poor quality of audio text may also impact students' attention. The noise that sometimes appear was somewhat disturb the listening activity. It is so frustrating when we need to hear essential information, but the clatter seems to cover the words. The last, when the students are faced with some question related to the text, they are pushed to be able to answer the questions. Thinking about the answer and concentrating on what is being listened is a truly hard work.

The third, related to equipment, were similar to aforementioned explanation. Poor quality of the sound, which may be caused by the quality of CD or the tools may be distressing. It may occur when the students are conducting the learning activity in the class or laboratory. In this case, they may carry out the listening activity outside the class. So, the students

are able to select the media which have fine quality. The various materials provided in Internet ease them to have a better learning activity.

Other issue includes the strategies which can assist the students for their listening activity. The students apply the following ways: give pause and replay, guessing unknown words, finding difficult words in dictionary, predict the content by using background knowledge, and making notes or rewrite the text. First, the students are free to pause and replay the audio since they conduct the listening activity independently. Knowing their capacity, they may repeat the text several time depend on their needs. Secondly, guessing unknown words are frequently done when they find the words are unrecognizable. Based on the context, they predict the words. The third, they tried to find the predicted words in the dictionary. It may helpful, since they need to know what exactly the word is. Fourth method applied is predicting the words based on their background knowledge. When the students are exposed to text whose topic is familiar to them, it is easier to expect the unknown words. The last, the students make note or rewrite the text. While listening to the text, they quickly note important detail and then rewrite the text. It is possible that they rearrange the spoken based on their knowledge.

The strategies applied are in line with the concept suggested by Oxford, Chamot, and O'Malley (as cited in Wilson, 2009). Effective learners may employ many strategies at the same time. Learners can use cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies during the learning. When they are listening to a video broadcast, they are developing their metacognitive skill. When they took notes to what they listened, they develop their cognitive points. Socio-affective strategies was not found in this

study since the students worked individually in completing their listening activities.

All in all, those efforts worth doing for the improvement. Doing the listening activity independently allow the students to create their own technique to make better development. Moreover, they are free to select their preferred topics that fit their favorable theme.

### Conclusions

The results of the investigation indicated that several problems occurred in the teaching and learning of listening. The problems are related to listening materials, students' performance, and supporting equipment.

Regarding strategy applied, the students implement the following ways: give pause and replay, guessing unknown words, finding difficult words in dictionary, predict the content by using background knowledge, and making notes or rewrite the text. Those strategies are proven successfully support the students to have a better comprehension to the text.

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