

EXTENSIVE LISTENING: LISTEN TO THE EFL TEACHER'S VOICES

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Abstract:

This study aims at investigating teachers' perceptions on the role of listening skill in EFL context and the integration of extensive listening. This is a kind of qualitative research with interview as the main instrument. A semi-structured interview consisting of eight questions was conducted to gain detailed information from the teachers about their perspectives. Four teachers of English Department of Universitas Islam Malang experiencing in teaching listening course ranging from one to six years participated in this research. The data collected from all participants were then triangulated to finally be interpreted and concluded. The result of this research revealed that all the five listening teachers are in one voice to consider listening course as a paramount of importance in acquiring English since this skill supports other skills. Therefore, they make hard efforts to provide the students with various classroom activities. Another crucial finding is that they all agree that students need to expose themselves with a more authentic listening input outside the class with the teacher's guidance. In other words, the implementation of what so-called extensive listening is absolutely in great demand for listening teachers to help students optimize their listening skill.

Keywords: listening skill, teachers' perception, extensive listening

INTRODUCTION

Listening skill cannot absolutely be neglected in English language learning. It is based on the fact that to produce a language through speaking, for example, one is required to listen as well. In other words, people cannot speak without listening. It is also undeniable that in a communication, people spend more their time to listen than to do the other three skills. Brown (2004) confirms the importance of listening skill by stating that this aural skill is much greater in use of time, words, effort, and attention than the oral counterpart whether in workplace, school, or home. It is in line with a survey made by Lake (2015), who reports that people spend most of their time (between 70 and 80%) to communicate, and interestingly about 55% of the time is used for listening activity. More specifically, Janusik and Wolvin (2009) found that 24% of students' time is devoted to listening, 20% speaking, 13% using the Internet, 9% writing, and 8% reading. The facts above obviously indicate how critical listening is to specifically support other English skills and generally to achieve mastery in language learning.

Unlike other skills especially speaking, which grabs a wider attention in English as a foreign language (EFL) context, listening is somehow considered underestimated. Brown (2004) even states, "Listening has often played second fiddle to its counterpart, speaking". Moreover, there is a stereotype that the success in learning a foreign language is measured by only the fluency in speaking, not listening. This view might relate to the notion that listening is a receptive skill, which tends to be passive (Call, 1985 as cited in Cahyono & Widiatai, 2011).

In addition, listening also faces its greatest challenge due to insufficient exposure to comprehensible input. In EFL context, it is not easy to get a chance to listen to English native speakers naturally. They have the opportunity to get listening input mainly from the limited classroom hour. It is in contrast to Krashen's input hypothesis theory stating that exposure to comprehensible input is the only way to acquire a language (Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

Li and Renandya (2012) proposed five factors that might affect students' listening comprehension. Text factor: variables related to the aural text characteristics, such as the type of text, vocabulary and picture cue access; Processing factor: factors associated with short-term listening input processing, such as missing some information because of trying to catch the previous listening part and inability to memorize what is heard; Listener factor: variables related to the listener's internal factor, such as the state of anxiety, interest and intensity of listening practice; Task factor: variables mainly associated with the task instruction to be done by the students whether to answer multiple-choice questions, blank-filling questions, text completion, and so forth; and External environment factor: variables associated with

the EFL learning environment, such as the availability of listening materials and the sufficiency of classroom listening instruction.

Some difficulties appear from the listening input and generally hamper the students in understanding the meaning. The problems are summarized by Ducker (2013) from some experts in the following. The speed of the native speaker in the audio/video cannot be controlled (Brown, 2011). Often students complain that the speakers talk too fast; therefore, they find it hard to understand. It is not possible to revisit the input (Brown, 2011). In listening classroom, the lecturer is the one who takes control of the audio/video. Sometimes the audio/video is only played once, twice, or three times; whereas, some students need more than that. Some words are spoken incompletely because native speakers naturally reduce, blend, and omit some sounds, and so on, while no change in the written spelling (Rost, 2002). This can lead the students to confusion. The language is grammatically non-standard and in the form of colloquial (Brown, 2011). This will be a big problem for students if their knowledge of informal and colloquial expression is insufficient. Body language/gestures involved in the input become distraction (Brown, 2011). Speaker's body language/gestures sometimes break the students' focus whether to listen or to see the movements. Sounds such as stress and intonation can modify the input (Rost, 2002). Different stress and intonation will give different meaning. If students do not recognize this, it will result in misunderstanding. Volume, clarity, and background noise can interfere the input quality (Anderson & Lynch, 1988). In authentic listening input, those problems frequently appear and these make listening breakdown. Distinctive mode of pronunciation (accents) can result in confusion (Ur, 1984). Often students fail to understand listening input because they only know certain accent (e.g. British) and are not familiar with others (e.g. American/Australian).

In addition, Renandya and Farrel (2010) point out that when listening to a tape, it is impossible for EFL students to catch the speaker's body language or gesture, and it makes listening even much harder because the students not only get lost in understanding the words produced but also fail to guess the meaning from the non-verbal cues. Furthermore, Hamouda (2013) confirms some crucial problems encountered by EFL learners in listening such as pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, different accent of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, and bad quality of recording. With those complexities, no wonder if listening skill becomes problematic for many EFL students, and it becomes a challenge for listening teachers to assist their students to cope with the problems and to enhance their listening skill.

In Indonesian context, listening skill at university level is actually a compulsory course; however, very limited time is provided for this receptive skill. Mostly it has only two credits or 100 minutes once a week and is offered in two or three semester hours. At Universitas Islam Malang, for example, listening skill is offered in three semester hours with two credits for each semester. In semester one, the focus of listening is on the basic skill, in semester two the focus is shifted on daily conversation and short monologue, and listening for TOEFL preparation is offered in semester three. It is different from speaking, which is served in four credits. Not only time limitation, the availability of learning media is also a crucial issue. Listening course is usually done in the language laboratory, and students are mostly assigned to listen to audio played by the lecturer and to do exercises provided in the worksheet. With the very short time and limited materials, it is not easy to explore classroom activities.

Based on some studies, several problems in listening course in the context of Indonesia are identified. Hapsari and Ratri (2013) consider voices, accents, dialects, and the speed of the recording as the factors causing listening breakdown. Further, Nurhidayah and Ma'mun (2016) reveal some problems in terms of mental representation, recognition of new vocabulary, lack of understanding of implied meaning, the fast speed of the input, and lack of focus because of missing the previous part. Those problems are considered worse due to lack of awareness to expose themselves with practice out of the classroom hours and to self-evaluate their progress in learning. In addition, Qodir, Baihaqi, and Miftah (2016) find that lack of vocabulary and weak grammar competence because of inappropriate course-book are the problems in listening. Dealing with those kinds of difficulties, listening lecturers in Indonesia are critically required to actively seek an appropriate solution to provide the students with a more creative and innovative listening atmosphere.

In EFL setting, inadequate exposure to authentic listening input might explain the core reason why this skill is regarded as something problematic. It is of course not easy for EFL students to seek for opportunities to listen to English native speakers talking naturally in daily life. Moreover, they must deal with insufficient classroom hour and limited listening materials. Consequently, the need of self-learning outside the classroom hour or what so-called extensive listening (EL) becomes a critical issue.

The characteristics of extensive listening are mainly derived from the principles of extensive reading proposed by Day dan Bamford (1998). The following are the details. Listening takes place outside the class, and students decide when and where to listen. Learners obtain as much as oral or visual because they are able to do that. Both level and content of the input are determined by each individual. Students can select suitable material. The materials are from various genres to enhance listening skill with different goals and ways. The materials should be matched with the students' oral mastery level; easier is better. Ideally, students can catch more than 70% from the text they listen. The goals of the listening skill is determined by the materials and students' interest closely related to the preference, information collection, and general comprehension. No assignment to be submitted. Learning outside the classroom should be done individually in a quite atmosphere and at the student's own pace.

Extensive listening is reported to be able to bridge the gap between the need of exposure and inadequate classroom hours. The first proof is from Chang and Millet (2014) who find that the integration of extensive listening program offers a positive result and "the use of simultaneous reading and listening before focusing on listening only is the most effective approach in improving L2 listening fluency". A similar result is found by Mayora (2017), who states that the implementation of extensive listening is able to expose the intermediate learners of English as a foreign language in a Colombian with longer time to access authentic listening materials. Along the same line, Ducker (2013) reveals that extensive listening can promote students' motivation to learn. Bozan (2015) provides supporting evidence that extensive listening program contributes to the students' overall language skill and level of proficiency. Interestingly, it is also found that there is a positive correlation between extensive listening and proficiency level. It means that the more students expose themselves with extensive listening, the better improvement of global language skills they obtain. Another important finding is that extensive listening can improve the students' motivation to participate in sustainable listening activities.

Rationale of the Study

As discussed earlier in the previous sessions, listening in EFL context has its own great challenges, and teachers as one of the actors in teaching and learning process have big responsibility to pick up the students' listening skill. One of the ways is by incorporating extensive listening program to optimize their students' learning. However, the way listening teachers take an action to face their classroom problems depends on how they perceive the listening skill and extensive listening. This research is then carried out to describe the perspective of four experienced listening lecturers of English Department of Universitas Islam Malang on the role of listening skill in EFL context and the integration of extensive listening.

Research Question

Given the review above, this research was conducted with an attempt to answer the following question: "How do listening teachers perceive the role of listening skill in EFL learning and the implementation of extensive listening activity in EFL context?"

METHOD

Since this research dealt with the listening teachers' perspectives on the role of listening skill and the implementation of extensive listening activity in EFL context, a qualitative design was then applied. Quantitative approach in this case is not appropriate as it cannot sufficiently capture the participants' thought and experience. Thus, in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted to elicit deep information about the participants' perceptions.

This research was intended to describe the perceptions of listening teachers at English Department, Universitas Islam Malang. Four listening teachers were selected to be the participants with the main consideration that they have at least one-year experience in teaching independent listening course (the participants' experience ranging from two to six years). Moreover, two teachers were the graduates from overseas universities, while the other two were local university graduates. Detailed participants' background is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' Background

	Name	Gender	Experience in listening course	University	Major	Student population
1	Mawar	F	6	Overseas	TESOL	English majors

2	Melati	F	6	Overseas	English Language Education	English majors
3	Jasmine	F	5	Local	English education	Both English and non-English majors
4	Galang	M	2	Local	English education	Both English and non-English majors

Note: To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms are used in this study.

The data were collected by conducting a semi-structured interview comprising nine questions. Five questions mainly focused on the teachers' perspectives on the role of listening skill in English language learning in EFL context, and the other five were about the implementation of extensive listening. The interview lasted about 30 to 50 minutes and was audiotaped.

The data obtained from the interview transcript were analysed by the authors. The result of the analysis was then matched to get the summary. To ensure the validity of the interpretation, the summary was sent to the participants via Whatsapp. One participant gave minor revisions of her responses; however, overall all of them confirmed that the interpretation was valid.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As it is stated earlier, this current research posed two questions related to the role of listening skill in EFL learning setting and the implementation of extensive listening activity in listening course. Based on the data analysis, the findings are presented descriptively in the following.

The role of listening in language learning in EFL context

Discussion on this issue are related to the role of listening skill in English as a foreign language context, major problems encountered by students, strategies to deal with those problems, challenges in teaching listening skill, the use of instructional media.

When asked about the role of listening skill in EFL learning setting, the four participants shared the same perspectives that the role of listening skill must not be underestimated. They stated that listening is the first skill to be acquired, and they believe that mastery of this skill will lead to improvement on the other skills, particularly speaking. The following is the example of the participant's response.

"Well, in my opinion listening is absolutely important ... yeah because before speaking, we must listen at first, right? How can we have good communication without listening?" (Mawar)

Given the second question about the difficulties encountered by their students in learning listening skill, they varied in response. Two lecturers identified new vocabulary, unfamiliar pronunciation, fast speed, background knowledge, and inability to catch main idea as the major problems. In addition, background noise, no repetition, low concentration, and dependence were also considered impeding students' listening comprehension. Below is one of the teacher's responses.

"I think that my students find it difficult to catch the main idea of long conversation or monologue because of insufficient vocabulary, especially when dealing with filling the blanks or summary. Also, they often say that the recording is too fast. ... In fact, ... it is impossible for us to speak with other people very slowly. I guess that's the normal speed, but perhaps because they are not accustomed to listen to English audio...so, it becomes problem. Unfamiliar topic is also problem for them." (Melati)

Since the participants provided various answers with regard to students' learning difficulties, they surely had different ways to cope with those problems. Based on their responses, cooperative learning was found to be the most preferred and suitable learning model training the students to get main idea and to be familiar with English expressions and idioms. In other words, the teachers focus more on meaning rather than on the form. Furthermore, they provided follow up activities that engaged the students with other skill such as retelling story. Below is typical activities done by one of the teachers.

"I prefer to provide my students with various activities done in group or in pair such as watching advertisement containing a lot of expressions and idioms, retelling story, and guessing." (Mawar)

The next question was related to the use of instructional media for effective listening class. Two participants preferred to use video, as they believe that it offers the students with a visual help to understand the listening text based on the context. One participant chose to use audio and video in balance to cover students' different learning styles. Moreover, some videos are completed with subtitles that can be discussed further. Interestingly, one participant stated that audio is better with the following reasons.

"I prefer audio because it is simple and applicable. It doesn't need room, so can be used anytime anywhere. I think using audio is challenging ... students will get lower pressure because they are not distracted with the picture." (Galang)

The last question in this part was about challenges in teaching listening skill. Based on the responses, it is known that the participants differ in their views. Overall, it implies the need of more completed listening laboratory and more various instructional media. Something interesting was that students' self-awareness also appeared to be challenges for two teachers. For example, Mawar found it hard to build image that listening is important like other skills, and Melati considered the students' dependence on the teacher as the most challenging thing. One teacher said that teaching students listening strategies challenged her the most so far.

The implementation of extensive listening

Questions related to this topic covers the classroom hour for listening skill, the need to integrate extensive listening, the benefits for students, and ways to implement it.

The first question to ask was about whether two credits is enough for listening class. Half of the teachers answered that it is not enough since it is only once in a week and lasts for 100 minutes. Even, one of them said that the time is enough only for checking the students' task. Interestingly, teachers who responded *'not enough'* were those who found that students' self-awareness as their challenge in teaching listening, and both of them are oversea graduates. The other two teachers stated that two credits is sufficient, but they consider additional activities to optimize the learning process. Below is one of the statements.

"I guess it is enough as long as the materials are available and appropriate. But, to be more effective self-learning is needed." (Galang)

The second question was in relation to the need to integrate extensive listening activities in listening course. The four teachers gave the same response – they all agree that extensive listening is significantly needed in English language learning in EFL context like Indonesia since the students have insufficient exposure to the target language. However, they made a compact statement that extensive listening activity must be guided by the teacher to make it more effective. One of the statements is in the following.

"According to me, extensive listening is important in EFL context. In Indonesia, English students do not have wide chance to use the language in a real life. So, it is really needed to improve their listening skill. But, I think it will be effective if the students are given clear guideline and feedback." (Melati)

Further, the teachers were asked about to what extent extensive listening might benefit the students in improving their listening skill. They gave almost the same responses that this activity in general can train the students to comprehend aural texts; specifically, it also leads them to be familiar with pronunciation, to expose them with new vocabulary, and to improve speaking at the same time.

"I think it [extensive listening] can train the students' aural skill especially related to pronunciation, can enrich vocabulary, and train them to find main idea." (Jasmine)

The last question was about ways to integrate extensive listening effectively. But, before giving this question, the teachers were asked about whether they have implemented this activity in their

listening class, and all the four answered the same, not yet. Related to the implementation, they proposed similar ways to implement extensive listening activity; overall, they would integrate the activity as an assignment. Therefore, they would provide the students with specific instruction. However, two teachers explained only at glance. Galang, for example, would ask his students to find audio or video by themselves, to listen to it until they understand the content, and to submit the soft file once in a week. Similarly, Mawar would do the same thing, but she would not ask the students to submit the file, only reporting what they did orally. Different from the two teachers, Jasmine preferred to use extensive listening as a follow up activity. She would divide the students into some groups. They would be asked to find aural texts from Internet based on the topic that has been discussed in the classroom. As the report, they have to make a written or oral summary to integrate other skills in listening course. Similar to Jasmine, Melati gave a more structured instruction for her students as in the following statements.

"I would give a certain topic to listen by my students every week ... one day one video/audio. They must work in-group to discuss the chosen video. To prove that they really discuss every day, they must take their photograph and send it to me. Also, they have to make a kind of listening logbook to report their extensive listening activities and it must be submitted every meeting. In the classroom, they only have quiz based on the given topic." (Melati)

DISCUSSION

Regarding the findings of this study, further discussion is worth to elaborate them in this part. As in the findings, the discussion is explained in two categories: the role of listening skill in English language learning in EFL setting and the implementation of extensive listening.

The role of listening skill in English language learning in EFL setting

As stated in the findings, all the teachers stated that listening skill, like the other skills, plays an important role in language learning. Even it is regarded to be influential factor that affects other skills especially speaking. This perspective is in line with what Brown (2004) states "... *input* in the aural-oral mode accounts for a large proportion of successful language acquisition." (p.119). In addition to Brown, Alshaikhi and Madini (2016) mention that listening skill can expand knowledge.

With regard to the students' difficulties in learning listening, it was found that new vocabulary, unfamiliar pronunciation, fast speed, background knowledge, and inability to catch main idea, background noise, no repetition, low concentration, and students' dependence on the teacher were considered to impede the students' listening comprehension. Regarding the five factors contributing to the L2 listening difficulties posed by Li and Renandya (2012), this finding indicates that students mainly deal with listener factor (low concentration, background knowledge, dependence), text factor (new vocabulary, unfamiliar pronunciation), processing factor (fast speed, background noise, no repetition), and task factor (inability to catch main idea). The result of this study is also in line with what experts (Renandya and Farrel, 2010; Hamouda, 2013; some other experts as cited in Ducker, 2013) have revealed previously. This finding again confirms that learning listening in EFL context is always not easy.

To cope with the students' listening problems, the finding shows that teachers focused more on meaning rather than on the text form. It implies that the teachers highlighted macro skills (starting from the larger parts to the smallest unit of aural text) rather than micro skills (starting from the smaller parts of aural text to the whole text) counterpart. In other words, the teachers tend to apply top-down approach in teaching listening skill. Micro skill (bottom-up) and macro skills (top-down) are theories developed by Brown (2004). Moreover, cooperative learning is selected the most as the learning model as they like to ask the students to work in group or in pair. It concurs with Ducker (2013), who highlights the role of extensive listening in increasing students' motivation to learn in a more sustainable manner. Further, the current research findings of Widodo and Rozak (2016) reveal that collaborative listening activity might lead to self-motivation, self-confidence, self-directed learning, autonomous learning as well as community learning. It is true as in collaborative learning they have a wide chance to discuss problems and share knowledge each other.

Discussing the challenges in teaching listening in EFL context, classical issues on the need of more completed listening laboratory and more various instructional media appear to be the most challenging for the teachers. Something interesting was challenges related to the students' mental state. Melati stated that her students seemed to underestimate the paramount importance of listening as in fact they often come to class with blank mind, no preparation. This fact might be because of the notion that listening is a receptive that does not require the students to produce language (Call, 1985 as cited in Cahyono &

Widiatai, 2011). Moreover, according to the teacher, the students do not show hard effort to learn independently. With regard to the students' dependence, Mawar experienced the same thing. She said that her students rely heavily on the teacher, so learning seems to take place only in the classroom. It is of course contrast to Krashen's input hypothesis theory stating that exposure to comprehensible input is the only way to acquire a language (Lightbown & Spada, 1999), especially in EFL context. Lack of exposure will lead to impediment to listening improvement. Other teachers gave a different opinion that to teach the students listening strategies through strategies-based instruction (SBI) becomes a serious matter to do. She believed that listening strategies play an important role to get ease in comprehending aural text. Her view is based on what Cohen (1996) proposed:

... strategies-based instruction aims to assist learners in becoming more responsible for their efforts in learning and using the target language. It also aims to assist them in becoming more effective learners by allowing them to individualize the language learning experience (p.6)

The implementation of extensive listening

Given a question about the adequacy of classroom hour of listening course, two teachers said that it is enough, but the other two stated that they needed more hours. Interestingly, those who thought enough were local graduates and taught both English and non-English major. Their views might be influenced by their experience; they never live in an English native country, where English is used all the time. So, they might think that two credits is enough to learn listening. Though they differed in opinion related to the classroom hour, they all agreed to integrate extensive listening activity in their listening class with the main consideration that EFL students need more exposure to the target language, and they believed that this activity could help their students deal with that limitation. Moreover, it has been approved by some research results such as Bozan (2015), who found a positive relationship between extensive listening and proficiency level. This research also confirms that extensive listening leads to sustainable learning. Even though the teachers thought that extensive listening is in highly demand in EFL learning, surprisingly they have not yet implemented this activity in their listening class. The agreement of all teachers to implement extensive listening corresponds with their teaching approach, which tends to be top down. It is suitable with Brown's theory that extensive listening is an activity to develop a top-down, global comprehension of oral text (2004).

The last discussion is about how the teachers will implement extensive listening. All of them generally shared the same idea to use this activity as a kind of assignment to find audio/video, but with different instructions. In terms of topic selection, two teachers will free the students to choose the topic; the half teachers prefer to provide the topic related to the classroom discussion. Based on extensive listening principle derived from the principle of extensive reading, the students can select the topic based on their own preference (Day & Bamford, 1998). They also differ in determining whether the assignment is individual or group with their own reasons. Those who prefer individual assignments believed that this would train their students to be independent. It is based on the principle of extensive listening that this activity should be done individually in a quiet situation at the students' own pace (Day & Bamford, 1998). The vice versa, those who decide group activities consider that collaborative learning is more effective since the students could help each other. This belief is like what Widodo and Rozak (2016) found that collaborative listening activity not only promotes community learning but also trains the students to be autonomous learners. To make sure that the students seriously do this activity, all of them are in one voice to ask the report though again they have different ways (written or oral report). Three out of four teachers asked the students to submit their assignment. Actually, it is a bit contrast to the extensive listening principle stating that students do not need to submit the assignment. However, they mentioned that it is done to make it more effective. It is in line with the finding of research conducted by Ducker (2013), who found that students would carry out extensive listening if they were asked to.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the findings and discussion of this research, some conclusions can be drawn. First, listening is a required skill to acquire language proficiency. Therefore, the role of receptive skill must not be neglected, and teachers have to take responsibility to explain the importance of this skill to the students. Recognizing students' difficulties in learning listening becomes a very crucial issue in order to find better methods to be applied in the classroom. With regard to the EFL context, teachers must provide the students with more exposure to the target language by incorporating extensive listening. Specific and

structured instructions are highly required to achieve effective extensive listening. However, the findings of this research cannot be generalized since the study was only participated by four teachers from the same university as the participants. Therefore, future research is suggested to involve more participants with different backgrounds to provide better generalization. In addition, it is worth to recommend that more detailed issues related to bottom-up and top-down approach to the teaching of listening are discussed in the next research.

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