

EAP Students' Perceptions of Extensive Listening

Dwi Yulianto Nugroho

Universitas Pelita Harapan, Jl. MH. Thamrin Boulevard, Karawaci,
Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia, 15811
dwi.nugroho@uph.edu

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Abstract

Compared to other language skills, listening is a language skill that is often ignored and forgotten in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes. Thus, there should be more room for teaching listening in EAP classes. Extensive listening (EL) could be one alternative that English teachers can do to give more room for teaching listening. This descriptive study investigated 19 EAP students' perceptions of an EL program. Research data showed that most students have positive perceptions of EL. EL provides a fun but meaningful activity for students. Most of the students agree that EL can improve their listening fluency and vocabulary and expose them to various English accents. In addition, they state that EL helps them become more confident to talk to other people in English and they want to do EL in the future although nobody asks them. Therefore, EL is a promising program to be implemented in EAP classes.

Keywords: EAP, Extensive Listening, Listening, Students' Perceptions

Introduction

In oral communication, understanding what our interlocutor is trying to say to us or vice versa is difficult. It usually leads us to a misunderstanding which makes the message of the communication cannot be conveyed successfully. This indicates that mastering language skills is important to support the process of communication and to anticipate misunderstanding. If our listening skill is weak, responding to our interlocutor will become a challenge. According to Rost (2011), listening is important in second language acquisition because processing language in real time happens through listening. However, to be fluent in listening is not easy. That means listening should be trained, and language teachers should help students develop their listening fluency.

Although many teachers believe that developing all four language skills is essential for students, the attempt to teach all four language skills in the classroom does not always happen equally. Compared to the other language skills, listening is often neglected by language teachers in the second or foreign language teaching context. Nunan (1997) describes listening as "Cinderella skill" in second language learning because listening is often neglected or forgotten by many language teachers. Speaking and the other language skills are considered more important than



listening. Thus, there is only a small room for teaching listening in language classrooms. Meanwhile, Nunan (1997) states that listening is the foundation of speaking. In other words, if a speaker is weak in listening, she/he might not be able to respond to her/his interlocutor or she/he might misinterpret the message conveyed by her/his interlocutor. Spear-Swerling (2016) asserts that listening comprehension has a big impact on students' success in formal schooling. It means that being able to listen is important and it is necessary to give more room towards listening in the context of language teaching and learning. Therefore, communication can be done well because the message is successfully conveyed and understood by the persons involved in the communication.

Based on my informal discussion with my students, some of them mentioned that they rarely learned to listen in their previous English classes. If there was an attempt to learn listening in their classroom, sometimes the recordings were too easy or too difficult for them. They felt that there was no learning process when the recordings were too easy, and they would not be motivated to learn listening if the recordings were too difficult. As a result, they considered that learning listening was not meaningful, and they could not enjoy the process of learning English. Renandya and Farrell (2011) in their article have also pointed this experience when Jing Erl (a pseudonym) stated that she could not understand the recording being played by her teacher because it was too fast and difficult for her. This indicates that the recordings do not match the learners' language proficiency level and it can demotivate them to learn listening. Thus, they find it difficult to understand others in their real-world communication. As a result, many language learners will think that learning English is difficult, and thus their listening fluency does not improve as what is expected.

To overcome the problem discussed above, it is necessary to teach listening in a fun but meaningful way. Extensive listening (EL) is believed as one promising alternative that language teachers can employ in their classroom to give more room for learning and teaching listening in that way. According to Ivone & Renandya (2019, p.237), EL is "a language teaching and learning approach that encourages language learners to be exposed to a large amount of easily comprehensible and enjoyable materials presented in the target language over an extended period". Extensive Reading Central (2019) on their website adds that when someone is doing an extensive listening activity, it means that he/she listens to a lot of comprehension texts smoothly. In addition, there will be no tasks which follow EL. Through EL, the listeners will get both linguistics inputs (such as grammar and vocabulary) and non-linguistics inputs (such as the knowledge or information) from the texts she/he has listened to. Furthermore, Chang (2012) points out that EL can promote autonomy in listening. This is beneficial for language learners as they can be involved in an extensive listening program both inside (while the class is running) and outside the classroom (after the class has finished, for example at home). Therefore, extensive listening is a promising program which makes listening not a "Cinderella skill" anymore. In addition, EL will also be a promising program to help language students learn listening because listening is not an easy process and should be trained.



Being able to listen to someone's talk does not mean that someone can listen to the sound of the talk. Listening should go beyond that. A listener should have good listening fluency in which the listener can comprehend what his/her interlocutor is saying fast, accurately, and without spending much effort (Rost, 2011). In other words, a language learner must develop his/her listening fluency. Brown (2000, p.29) emphasized that:

“Communicative goals are best achieved by giving attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to the students' eventual need to apply classroom learning to unrehearsed contexts in the real world”.

Looking at the necessity of developing listening fluency, English language teachers should give more room for listening in English teaching and learning. Renandya and Farrell (2011, p.56) state that “listening is best learnt through listening”. According to Harmer (2003), students should be given English exposures if they want to learn English. Renandya and Jacobs (2016) present research results that students' vocabulary, students' ability to comprehend both spoken and written communication, and students' general language proficiency increase while they are given many language exposures. In other words, the input is considered important in second language learning. In the context of developing students' listening fluency, the inputs can be from face-to-face communication, cassette recordings, television, or radio. Nowadays, teachers and students can take advantage of technology development to access listening sources through the internet. This means that students can access them anytime and anywhere. Moreover, developing students' listening fluency can be extended outside the classroom wall.

However, listening is difficult. Renandya and Farrell (2011) mention several reasons which make listening difficult, namely speech speed, speech variety, the blurriness of word boundaries, and the fact that listening must be processed in the real time. Moreover, each student might have different listening proficiency level. If a teacher plays a recording in the classroom, for example, some students might consider that the recording is too easy, while some might think that the recording is too difficult. In other words, the recording played in the classroom will not always be suitable for the students' language proficiency level. Wulanjani (2019) asserts that students might feel worried when joining a listening class. To respond to this case, extensive listening (EL) appears to be a good alternative to facilitate students to develop their listening fluency. When students are doing extensive listening, they listen to listening input for pleasure but meaningful (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). According to Renandya and Jacobs (2016), extensive listening encourages students to listen to a lot of listening materials that are motivating and match students' abilities linguistically, by focusing on meaning rather than sentence formula. Moreover, Waring (2008) emphasizes that the main purpose of extensive listening is to improve listening fluency. Renandya and Jacobs (2016) state that extensive listening can help students increase their speaking speed, know the oral vocabulary, and speaking, reading, and confidence in using language. Additionally, Takaesu (2013) argues that extensive listening can improve students' listening fluency and encourage them to become autonomous listeners through authentic materials which can be accessed easily in the real world. Thus, it is justifiable to again says that



extensive listening seems promising to facilitate students to develop their listening fluency and it is confirmed by some research results.

Some studies revealed positive results of the implementation of extensive listening in language classes. A study conducted by Lee and Cha (2017) showed that extensive listening using a listening log can increase students' confidence while they have to listen to their interlocutors in communication. Moreover, Chang and Millett (2014) found that extensive listening helps students develop their listening fluency. Takaesu's study (2013) also revealed the fact that extensive listening is advantageous for students. After conducting a survey to 468 university freshmen, Takaesu (2013) found out that extensive listening can increase students' listening skills and make the students be accustomed to various English accents after they did extensive listening using TED Talks. More recently, a study conducted by Chang, Millett, and Renandya (2018) revealed that supportive extensive listening practice helps learners comprehend a text in faster speech rates. They employed three modes of intervention, namely listening only (LO), reading only (RO), and reading while listening plus listening only (RLL). However, the students who conducted an extensive listening practice by reading while listening plus listening only (RLL) had a better listening fluency than the students who did an extensive listening practice by listening only (LO) and reading only (RO). In line with the studies conducted outside Indonesia, several studies conducted in an Indonesian context revealed that extensive listening is surely beneficial to be employed in a language classroom (Mahmudah, 2015; Fauzanna, 2017; Saputra & Fatimah, 2018; Setyowati & Kuswahono, 2018). Those studies indicate that extensive listening can be a promising activity to develop students' listening skills and fluency. Considering that extensive listening has been proven as an activity which can help students develop their listening skills, this present study tries to see students' perceptions of EL as one instrument to evaluate a program in an EAP class.

Method

This descriptive study investigates the participants' perceptions of extensive listening (EL) activities they had ever done and the usefulness of EL for their listening fluency development. The participants of this study were 19 students of Academic Listening-Speaking class where English is taught as a second language in an intermediate level. They took the class to prepare themselves before studying in an international undergraduate study program. They had to achieve a certain TOEFL score in order to be accepted in the study program of the university. Table 1 presents the demographic data of the participants.

Table.1 Research Respondents

No	Gender	Total
1.	Female	15
2.	Male	4

All participants were international students who came from several countries, namely China (n=8), Nepal (n=7), India (n=3), and Kenya (n=1). All of them had never had an experience of learning listening through extensive listening before



they came to Indonesia to study in one private institution in Indonesia. Therefore, EL was a new way of learning listening for them. To facilitate the students to develop their listening fluency, they were required to do EL activities for 25 weeks by listening to a TED Talks video one time per week outside the class. TED Talks videos were chosen because the videos consisted of various topics which were spoken by people from around the world. Besides, they were all teenagers which would probably enjoy listening to TED Talks videos with various topics about teenagers and general life. In addition, TED Talks videos represent real-life communication where English is spoken by human beings, not animated, and adjusted. This means that the students were exposed to authentic listening materials with various types of English accents. According to a study conducted by Anggraeni and Indriani (2018), using TED Talks or TED-ED to teach listening is beneficial because there are many authentic videos with various topics presented by speakers from around the world in TED-ED. In addition, it provides illustration which might help students understand the talk better, and it can develop students' critical thinking. In the program, the students could freely choose the topic of the video by themselves. After they listened to a video, they had to summarize the content and share it to their friends in the following week orally. This activity was done to monitor whether the students are doing EL or not. In addition, the teacher also asked one or two students to share the message of the video they had listened to in front of the class.

The objective of this research was to investigate the students' perceptions about the extensive listening program which they have ever joined. Regarding the ethical considerations, an ethical approval to conduct this study was provided by Mochtar Riady Institute for Nanotechnology Ethics Committee (No. 017/MRIN-EC/ECL//X/2018). To gather the data, the researcher employed a simple survey questionnaire consisted of 12 close-ended questions using a Likert scale (*1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree*) approach and 2 open-ended questions. The questions were compiled based on theories about extensive listening mentioning that EL can be a fun and meaningful activity to develop students' listening fluency (Ivone & Renandya, 2019; Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016; Waring, 2008). In addition, the questions in the questionnaire were also composed based on previous studies' results about extensive listening revealing the perceived benefits of extensive listening for students, such as facilitating students to become more autonomous and confident to learn listening and knowing various English accents (Anggraeni & Indriani, 2018; Chang & Millett, 2014; Chang et al., 2018; Lee & Cha, 2017; Takaesu, 2013). The questionnaire was distributed to all students in the class (21 students), but there were only 19 questionnaires returned to the researcher. A descriptive statistical analysis was employed to analyze the data of this study. The data are presented in the next section.

Findings and Discussion

The data of this study were presented in two parts. The first part discussed the students' general perceptions of EL activities they did. Meanwhile, the second part elaborated the students' perceptions of the benefits they gained after they did EL.



1. Students' General Perceptions of EL Activities

As explained above, the students were asked to listen to a TED Talks video once a week for 25 weeks. The data about the students' general perceptions of EL activities they had done are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' General Perceptions of EL Activities

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I like doing extensive listening activities.	0	1 (5.26%)	11 (57.89%)	7 (36.85%)
2.	I am happy about doing extensive listening activities.	0	1 (5.26%)	13 (68.42%)	5 (26.32%)
3.	I think doing extensive listening activities is fun.	0	1 (5.26%)	14 (73.68%)	4 (21.05%)
4.	In the future, I want to continue to do extensive listening activities for English practice, even if nobody asks me to do it.	0	3 (15.80%)	14 (73.68%)	2 (10.52%)
5.	The use of TED Talks can be a good alternative for me to increase my listening ability.	0	1 (5.26%)	14 (73.68%)	4 (21.05%)
6.	Doing extensive listening activities one time per week is enough for me.	0	7 (36.85%)	12 (63.15%)	0

From Table 2, it is revealed that most of the students have favorable perceptions of the implementation of EL. Most students like and happy about doing EL activities and believe that extensive listening is fun that was confirmed by questions 1, 2, and 3. These findings indicate that the students can really find pleasure when listening to recorded exposures in English was what Renandya & Farrell (2011) have stated. In addition, it motivates them to find the joy of learning English, especially listening. This fact is supported by the data that several students stated that they will continue to do EL activities for English practice although they are not required to do it although not all of them want to do it in the future. This means that EL trains them to be autonomous English learners.

Table 2 also shows that TED Talks could be one good resource for language teachers and learners if they want to engage in extensive listening activities. There was only one student believed that TED Talks is not a good resource for EL. The open-ended questions revealed that TED Talks could be one good resource not only for improving listening skills but also for improving other aspects of lives, as stated by four students below:



Student 7: *“The TED Talk people really encourage me. I’m also motivated by the kids, especially the way they talk boldly. The very important thing is learning from my mistakes. Getting to know where I got wrong motivates me to redo and practice more”.*

Student 11: *“TED Talk is not only useful to develop my English listening skill but also encourages me and motivates me to live a better life.”*

Student 14: *“Besides improving my listening skills, I can also gain some knowledge from it (TED Talks video) or some interesting facts that I would never think about.”*

Student 17: *“I would suggest TED Talks for an extensive listening program. The reason is because of the fun, new information, and other new information that we might get from it. Another reason is because the English Level in Ted Talks is an international Standard English that it will be very good for us to keep in track with a normal English speaker. From the time, I would suggest watching TED Talks 5 to 10 minutes per day is more than enough. As people get bored easily, this is why it would be better if we do it every day rather than start with a lot and ended up with nothing.”*

From the data, it is revealed that TED Talks videos offer many benefits for the students. The videos certainly give a chance for students to develop their listening skills. Furthermore, the speakers in TED Talks open students’ view about the world that they can learn about many new things. In addition, the speakers of TED Talks inspire the students to be a good public speaker. This implies that EL also contributes to the students’ speaking skills, and it is suitable to be implemented in a speaking-listening class. These results are also in line with the findings of a study conducted by Anggraeni and Indriani (2018) that using TED Talks/TED-ED in listening class is beneficial for students.

However, one interesting thing to be considered is the duration of practicing EL. There were 7 students thought that doing EL once a week was not enough. This indicates that the current extensive listening program should be improved in terms of the duration for the students to do the EL. They should do EL for more than one time per week. To conclude, the students generally had positive perceptions of EL, they suggested that everyone engaging in EL do it more than one week, and TED Talks videos could be good resources for EL practice.



2. The Benefits of EL for the Students

This section presents the benefits that the students have got from doing EL for 25 weeks. Table 3 below presents the students' perceived benefits of doing extensive listening activities.

Table 3. The Benefits of EL for the Students

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	Extensive listening activities help me realize that learning listening is meaningful.	1 (5.26%)	0	8 (42.10%)	10 (52.63%)
2.	Extensive listening is a good activity to develop my listening fluency.	0	0	11 (57.89%)	8 (42.10%)
3.	After I did extensive listening activities for two semesters, I could understand what other people are saying better, including in the TOEFL tests.	0	0	10 (52.63%)	9 (47.37%)
4.	I can increase my English vocabulary through extensive listening activities.	0	0	13 (68.42%)	6 (31.58%)
5.	Extensive listening makes me more confident when I communicate with other people in English.	0	2 (10.53%)	10 (52.63%)	7 (36.84%)
6.	I know various English accents through extensive listening activities.	0	2 (10.53%)	9 (47.37%)	8 (42.10%)

Table 3 shows that the majority of the students both agree and even strongly agree that they could take some advantages from doing extensive listening activities. This asserted that the students believe that EL is a fun and meaningful activity to develop English listening skills. More than 95% of the students stated that EL helps them realize that learning listening is meaningful. Furthermore, all of the students believed that EL can develop their English vocabulary and listening fluency showed by the data about their agreement that they could understand what other people are saying better after they did EL activities for 25 weeks. In addition,



the students can be exposed to various English accents through EL activities. It implies that EL can potentially raise students' awareness of world Englishes. As a result, EL not only makes them more confident when they use English to communicate with other people but also will raise understanding between interlocutors because they appreciate others' type of English. The data taken from the open-ended questions which pointed out more on the variety of accents and vocabulary development confirmed those findings.

Student 1: *"We can understand what people are saying even though we have different accents. We can also learn to understand fast. We can improve vocabulary by listening".*

Student 2: *"By doing so (EL), I was able to understand the different accents of English. It also helps me to learn new vocabulary."*

Student 12: *"Extensive listening develops memory by helping me in not only listening just an audio to experience video of people talking in which I learned a lot by visualizing the talks. Also, the redoing of the dialogues listening to it again and again helps me develop in knowing where I got wrong and correct myself."*

Based on what Student 12 stated, it is revealed that EL promotes students' autonomy where they can have listening practice independently and also do a self-reflection regarding their practice. Thus, it is again confirmed that when students are doing EL activity, they listen to the listening input for pleasure but it is still meaningful (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Furthermore, it confirms the results of previous research investigating EL (Chang & Millett, 2014; Chang et al., 2018; Lee & Cha, 2017; Mahmudah, 2015; Fauzanna, 2017; Saputra & Fatimah, 2018; Setyowati & Kuswahono, 2018; Takaesu, 2013) that extensive listening offers many benefits for students' listening development.

The findings of this study implied that generally the students felt satisfied with the implementation of the extensive listening program. In addition, many students were aware of their need to improve their listening fluency outside the classroom through extensive listening activities. Furthermore, extensive listening serves a fun yet meaningful activity which then makes it worth doing. As several students stated that doing EL one time per week was not enough, the current EL program needs improvement. A language teacher could encourage the students to do EL more often without giving too much burden on them.

Conclusion and Suggestions

While listening skills could still be a "Cinderella skill" in English as a second or foreign language classrooms, extensive listening provides a room for teaching and learning listening. Extensive listening provides fun yet meaningful activities for students. In addition, extensive listening facilitates students to improve their listening fluency, increase their vocabulary, and expose them to various English



accents. In addition, they will be more confident to speak up with others in English as their English, especially listening skills, develops.

There are many resources to practice EL. TED Talks can be used as one promising resource of extensive listening because it provides authentic input spoken by inspiring speakers who deliver interesting topics which can increase students' general knowledge. The students believe that listening to TED Talks videos can make their lives better. Thus, using TED Talks for EL does not only develop students' listening skills but also develop their life skills. All in all, extensive listening serves many benefits for language learners and it gives a more fun yet meaningful room for listening skills teaching and learning.

This study revealed the students' perceptions of an extensive listening program that they generally had positive perceptions about EL. However, the results of this study cannot be used to generalize the usefulness of implementing EL in an EAP class although they confirm both the theories of EL and previous studies' findings. Therefore, further empirical studies investigating more convincing influences of EL towards the students' listening fluency and involving more participants are needed. Employing an experimental study to know to what extent EL develops students' listening fluency could be worth doing. In addition, future researchers can conduct research on how EL can potentially raise students' awareness of different types of English (world Englishes).

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