**HOW TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO LEARN LISTENING EFFECTIVELY?**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper reports a study that used a matched-pair pre-test, post-test control group design to compare the impacts of Intensive Listening program and Extensive Listening program on the learners’ listening proficiency based on the 30-day experiment. It is hoped that the study can help Vietnamese learners who study English as a foreign language develop a positive attitude towards extensive listening on one hand and may motivate them to listen for pleasure on the other hand. This study may shed light on how to introduce extensive listening into English foreign language classroom practice and how to maximize the students’ exposure to suitable listening materials, which has been effectively adapted and reproduced, for the real classroom practice.*

***Key words:*** *motivate, intensive listening, extensive listening*

1. **INTRODUCTION**

“Not let a word get in the way of its sentence

Nor to let a sentence get in the way of its intention

But to send your mind out to meet the intention as a guest

That is Understanding”

(Chinese proverb, 4th Century BC)

Needless to say, understanding, or comprehension, as we usually put it, has been considered as a very important part from the very beginning of human history. And listening, which partly decides whether or not the understanding process takes place successfully, plays a vital part in our social life that no one can deny. Listening takes up as much as 50 percent of our everyday communication time and is the most used language skill at work and at home (Goh, 2002). To non-native speakers of English, listening is even much more important since it is not always easy to understand what the other person wants to say, no matter how good you are at the other three skills. According to Poedjosoedarmo (2002, p: 40-42), “ESL and EFL teachers around the globe frequently sigh in despair because, although their students may be quite good at deciphering written texts and may be able to create if not grammatical at least intelligible written texts themselves, they frequently remain quite hopeless at understanding anything said in normal English, much less responding to it.” With that in mind, listening has become more and more important in the English teaching programs in all schools in EFL and ESL countries.

1. **LITERATURE REVIEW**
2. *A glimpse of listening teaching approach around the world and that of in Vietnam*

According to Jack C. Richards (1983. p, 219), “There is little research on second language listening comprehension”. However, many studies have been conducted in many ESL and EFL countries which have explored the approach of teaching listening by English teachers. Richards and Renandya’s research (2002) reveals that listening skills did not receive priority in language teaching for many years and it was often assumed that listening skills could be acquired through exposure but not really taught. Brown (1987) also agreed that 25 years ago, listening was not taken very seriously in the mainstream of English language teaching. The emphasis in teaching, as in the courses published at the time, was mainly on reading and writing the foreign language. And then, during the late “50s and 60s, listening comprehension began to be paid a little attention but was still very much the runt of the litter” (Brown, 1987. p, 135).Listening in language classes was chiefly in the form of identifying the sounds (Brown, 1987) and presenting new grammar structures (Field, 2002). Then, the significant shift in the approach to the teaching of listening comprehension came in the late 70s when students were required to understand language in context because the context is crucial for the understanding of the language since its text is the context that will offer cues which will narrow down the possible meanings of the language. (Brown, 1987)

In a research paper about English policies and their classroom inputs in some ASEAN/ Asian countries, Dardjowidjojo (1997) has observed the English teaching approach in mainly four Asian countries Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore and concluded that until recently, English was taught in accordance with the way the teachers believed to be the best, that was to study grammar. The survey that Liu and Little Wood (1997. p, 371) made reveals that traditionally, “the teaching of EFL in most East Asian countries is dominated by a teacher-centered, book-centered, grammar - translation method and an emphasis on rote memory”. That results in the “introverted learning” and the belief of seeking knowledge “as something to be transmitted by the teacher rather than discovered by the learners.” (Liu and Little Wood, 1997. p, 380). Song (1995) found that the practice that most teachers in East Asia employs is to emphasize learning through reading whereby the students read new words aloud, imitating the teacher. The teacher explains the entire text sentence by sentence, analyzing many of the more difficult grammar structures, rhetoric and style for the students who listen, take notes and answer questions (Zhenhui, 2000). To him, the East Asian preferred learning style is concrete-sequential, following the teacher’s guidelines to the letter, to be focused on the present and demand full information.

Vu Duong, in a research named Foreign Language Teaching at Hanoi Teachers’ Training University (2001) remarked that teachers are more concerned about providing the students with grammar knowledge and limited amount of vocabulary used for the students; specific areas. According to Tran Van Phuoc (2001), the common practice of teaching English at secondary schools is focus on grammar and vocabulary, while the teaching of four skills is completely ignored. To him, Vietnamese teachers’ preferred teaching style is repeating sentences from the dialogues and drilling grammatical structures at low level.

*2. Approaches applied to teaching listening*

Brown (1993) affirms, “There has been a revolution in the teaching of English” (p.1). Before the 1970s it was still the case that spoken language was given secondary importance. Today the importance of teaching the spoken language is universally acknowledged. This revolution has ensured that the problems of understanding the spoken form of the foreign language have received increasing attention both in research and pedagogy. Many courses now offered aims to teach listening comprehension, and many books and conferences claim to teach teachers how to improve their students’ performance in listening comprehension. Many teaching techniques in this regard have been introduced. For example, Ur (1991) has presented more than 30 types of exercises for teaching listening. Similarly, Rost (1991) has suggested more than 30 activities with many variations. Among many techniques and methods for improving listening comprehension as well as listening proficiency is extensive listening. “The only way to learn to do something well is to do it – not once but thousands, even millions, of times.” (Brett Reynolds, 2004)

During the last fifteen years, extensive reading programs have been growing in popularity worldwide as a significant support to the teaching of English whether in L1, ESL or EFL. “Extensive reading is an excellent way to extend vocabulary and consolidate grammar as well as to develop a general communicative command of the language” (Paul Davies and Eric Pearse, 2000. p, 95). It is agreed that extensive reading is a crucial adjunct to classroom teaching in helping to expose English beginners to far more “good” English and that it can do this more enjoyable than most English lessons. If extensive reading is good for L2 learners’ language development, it can also be agreed that extensive listening may also be equally beneficial for students, particularly at the earlier stages of learning. For “in language teaching, communication is usually divided into four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are receptive skills, so reading has much in common with listening and many aspects of the teaching of reading comprehension are similar to the teaching of listening comprehension. (Paul Davies and Eric Pearse. 2000. p,92). In a recent article by Ridway and Field in English Language Teaching Journal Vol.54/2 April 2000. Tony Ridway (2000) puts the case for treating extensive listening like extensive reading, and argues that “in listening, working from the text, or texts in general, may be a more productive way of approaching comprehension than working from the notion of strategies and the uses of authentic listening materials.”

1. **RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH**

Celce-Murcia (1991) states, “the importance of listening comprehension in language learning and language teaching has moved from a status of incidental and peripheral importance to a status of significance and central importance (p.105). Listening comprehension is gradually receiving the emphasis that it has always deserved. Second-language educators now acknowledge it as a crucial skill in second-language learning and encourage language teachers to devote more class time to listening activities. The importance of listening cannot be overestimated.

Chastain (1988) asserts, “The ability to comprehend the spoken second language plays an essential role in second-language learning and use. It is one of only two sources of new linguistic data and general information. It is the more important of the two skills involved in all types of oral communication activities. It is an indispensable skill for oral communication between native and non-native speakers. And it is the skill most needed out of class by language students attempting to improve their knowledge and use of the second language.” (p.209)

Listening is the first language skill that learners develop and it is followed by the development of other language skills in this order: speaking, reading and writing. Thus, our ability to speak, read and write, and master complex cognitive skills is directly and indirectly dependent upon our ability to listen. Listening has been recognized as an important facilitator of language learning. As Rost (1994: 141-142) points out, listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding the input at the right level, any learning cannot begin. Listening is essential not only as a receptive skill but also as a catalyst to the development of spoken language proficiency.

Listening, like reading, can be broadly divided into two types: intensive listening and extensive listening. “Intensive listening focuses on components (phonemes, words, intonation, discourse markers, etc) of discourse and requires students to single out certain elements of spoken language” (Douglas Brown, 2001, p.243). It includes the bottom-up skills. Examples of intensive listening performance include these:

* Students listen for cues in certain choral or individual drills.
* The teacher repeats a word or sentence several times to “imprint” it in the students mind.
* The teacher asks students to listen to a sentence or a longer stretch of discourse and to notice a specific element, such as intonation, stress, a contraction, a grammatical structure, etc.

Many micro skills are included in this process. And in the practical teaching, teacher usually teaches students some “tips” to get some detailed information. By extensive listening it is hard to give a dictionary – type definition. A more useful way of understanding it is through a description of the characteristics, some of which are borrowed from the extensive reading.

1. Students listen to a lot of comprehensible oral language.
2. A variety of materials on a wide range of topics are available so as to encourage listening for different reasons and in different ways.
3. The purpose of listening is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.
4. Listening materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar.

It is no doubt that intensive reading has been gaining much attention in classroom teaching practice. It is time for EFL teachers to be opened-minded and fair enough to bring extensive listening into our classroom and to see whether it will help to improve EFL learners’ listening competence. As EFL teachers, it is our responsibility to encourage our students to listen for relaxation and pleasure because this will motivate them to listen more. Listening to large amount of comprehensible English, at or even below the level of the beginners’ own productive command of the language, and in a non-threatening atmosphere, is undoubtedly of great benefit to learners of English as a second or foreign language. Confidence and motivation can be substantially encouraged through suitable listening materials and activities. Therefore, it is advisable that much attention should be given to extensive listening and purposefully provides more opportunities to add it to classroom listening activities. Intensive listening involves controlled process to sound recognition and language content while extensive maximizes learners to a great amount of listening exposure, motivates them to acquire the habit of taking up listening voluntarily and improving their automatic processing. Therefore this proposed research is to test the extent to which EL may improve EFL learners’ listening competence.

1. **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Based on the above rationales, this study is further conceptualized and elaborated in the following research question:

* 1. Is there a significant difference in the pre-test listening proficiency scores of the control group (i.e., students who do not participate in an EL program) and those of the experimental group (i.e., students who do participate in an EL program)?
  2. Is there a significant difference in the post-test listening proficiency scores of the control and experimental groups?

The second question was of major interest. The first was asked simply to test whether the randomization procedures used before the study had succeeded in yielding control and experimental groups that were indeed matched as to initial listening proficiency.

1. **METHODOLOGY** 
   1. *Participants*

The first- year classes were chosen due to the following reasons:

* The students study at the researcher’s university.
* They are at the same age of 18.
* The students’ proficiency levels are about the same as they have been chosen according to their results from the Placement test given by the English Department.
* They are around elementary level.
* The average number of students per class was 30 and 60 students from two classes participated in the study. One class was randomly assigned to a control group and the other an experimental group, so as to achieve balance on relevant variables in the two remedial listening classes.
  1. *Design*

*2.1. Procedure*

The study was conducted over a period of 30 days from March 2010 to April 2010. Each day in that period, both groups received the same 45 minutes of English instruction, plus an additional 45 minute remedial class. The first author conducted the remedial classes for both groups, whereas two different teachers taught the regular English classes. The school had no EL program, prior to the project, and it is not common for teachers to have initiated their own. The regular English class followed the same syllabus for both groups, while the remedial reading class was deliberately varied in line with the aims of the project. In their remedial class, the control group studied via an intensive listening, emphasizing the detailed information and the use of skills to help students get most information out of the listening materials. For the extensive listening group, the remedial listening class exposed the students to a variety of stories, and the language level of the listening materials was below the students’ reading level.

*2.2. Lesson plan*

*2.2. a. Intensive listening*

A typical listening class period at the school in which the present study was conducted began, like all classes as follow:

The teacher started the lesson by introducing the context and explaining some difficult words in relation to the listening texts. Then the teacher played the tape two or three times, in paragraphs or in sections. In the process, the teacher asked students questions and then modeled or discussed with the students which skills could help them to complete the task. After finishing the exercises, students listened again and practiced listening skills that the teacher had taught. The aim was to help learners to develop a better awareness of how to listen. The control group participated in an intensive listening program.

Table 1: Guidelines for IL programs and how they were implemented in the study.

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| --- | --- |
| **IL program guidelines** | **Implementation** |
| 1. Careful selection of suitable listening texts and additional materials at students’ level. | 1. Adopt the supplementary listening materials which matched students’ textbooks and their levels; supplement suitable listening materials to train students’ listening skills. |
| 2. Time collocation in remedial class at school. | 2. 30% of class time is reserved for listening and 70% for discussion about skills suitable for getting the detailed information of the listening text. |
| 3. Teacher taught students listening skills by modeling and discussion. | 3. During IL, the teacher equipped the students with effective listening skills when they listened to different things in different ways according to the questions of the listening text. |
| 4. Finish off the listening exercises. | 4. Listen again and provide chances to practice listening skills to complete the exercises. |

The teacher modeled the skills, gave students enough time to practice and discussed with their classmates. The teacher guided learners through the process of listening, monitoring their listening difficulties and offered help if necessary. Necessary different skills and possible activities were listed as follows:

* + - Listen for the main idea: Students could listen to a short dialogue between two persons and then identified the topic of their conversation; students in group jig-saw listened to different parts of the story and then pieced them together.
    - Listen for specific information: Students listened to a short story after which the teacher asked four or five questions about certain specific details; students could be given sets of pictures of people, places, animals which shared many similar characteristics, and yet differed quite clearly in one or two details. They could then listen to a description of a person, place, animals and try to identify the picture described.
    - Listen to follow instructions: The teacher made full use of materials from everyday situations involving listening to follow instructions in order to fill in the form, label diagrams, mark out a hiking route on a map, locate the building, and draw a weather map.
  + Post – listening activities included:
* Examine functional language: listening texts provided excellent of functions such as locate a place, make a phone call, talk about food, hobbies and relaxation.
* Infer vocabulary meaning through Listen and repeat: the purpose is to train the ability of lexical segmentation (identify individual words within the stream of sound)
* The personalization activity: students could be asked to formulate their own ideas based on the language points already discussed. The aim was try to help the students consolidate the new information. It was important at this point, not to place a heavy demand on using new language. It was better to let it happen naturally, letting students say what they meant with the new language available if they wanted and needed it.

*2.2. b. Extensive listening*

In contrast, the experimental remedial group took part in an EL program. Students listened to a great variety of stories of their interests and for pleasure, and then meaningful post-listening activities to provide maximum opportunities for learner involvement. The teacher read aloud the stories for the students as “Reading aloud should be two-way interaction, with students not just listening to their teacher’s output, students should also be providing input to their teachers and peers. In this way, teachers are reading aloud “with” students, not “to” students” (Trelease, 2001). As a storyteller, the teacher was able to adapt what was being said, to make sure the students understand and to retain their interest. The meaning of what was being said was supported by the teacher’s facial expression.

Table 2: Guidelines for EL programs and how they were implemented in the study.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **EL program guidelines** | **Implementation** |
| 1. Large selection of stories turned to students’ level and interests. | 1. Materials were obtained by students and teacher from a variety of sources, |
| 2. Time collocation in remedial class at school. | 2. 70% of class time was set aside for listening, and another 30% spent on pre and post-listening activities (mostly post-listening) which discussed the students’ problems in listening and a variety of post-listening activities. |
| 3. Teachers encouraged students to listen. | 3. During EL, the teacher read the story aloud at the initial stage (later played the cassette); the teacher monitored students’ progress and motivated them to enjoy listening to stories. |
| 4. Engaging post-listening tasks | 4. Story tree, story re-telling, role-play, problem solving. |

Ideally, the teacher would have spent a much larger percentage of the class time to read or play more stories aloud for the students. However, it was thought that post-listening activities could facilitate their enjoyable listening. Post –listening activities included:

* Ask students to retell the whole story in their own words.
* Role-play the story.
* Problem-solving: telling a story without the ending (for example a problem was left unsolved), asking the students to supplement a reasonable ending and comparing which group could produce a much better solution.
* Story tree: ask students to write each item in the correct space on the tree frame. Students were asked to write out the name of the main character; words to describe the main character; what happened to her or him, the most interesting part; why they liked or disliked the story.
* Story-editor: suppose the students were the editors of the story, give them chance to re-edit the story. The following questions would be asked:

If you could, how would you change the ending of the story?

If you did not like the main character of the story, how would you change that character?

Which character did you like best?

No matter what form of materials teachers make use of, whether they teach from textbooks, institutional materials, or teacher-prepared materials, they represent plans for teaching. They do not represent the process of teaching itself. As teachers use materials, they adapt and transform them to suit the need of particular groups of learners and their own teaching styles. These processes of transformation are at the heart of teaching and enable good teachers to create effective lessons out of the resources they make use of. It is useful therefore to collect information on how teachers use course books and other teaching materials in their teaching. Listening materials, which appeal to the students and graded to fit their level are limited. Clearly, it is essential to select good written texts that are highly suitable as oral texts. Narratives that have a clear, simple story line, characters, and some dialogues seem to be most appealing and effective. Ideally the story texts have the potential to elicit a range and force of dramatic expression, individual interpretation, and delivery elements such as intonation, phrasing, and gestures. It is important that the stories include manageable vocabulary and are relatively easy for students to understand as readers and as listeners. Care should be taken that stories serials are below the learners’ reading level. Themes must be appropriately appealing to the students in order to ensure successful lessons. Given this fact of “comprehension input”, that means obtaining materials will take a good deal of effort and time. Actually, teacher reads aloud and cassette recordings of readers will offer teachers a rich graded resource of extensive listening materials. The aim of extensive listening is to produce entertaining and thought-provoking stories at a level where the students can understand them. And the aim of the actor (usually the teacher) who records the story is to use his or her voice to bring the character alive while students can easily understand and enjoy the story. There is no virtue in using aids in class merely for their own sake. It is also true that the teacher, especially non-native speakers often underrate the value that their own “input” can have as listening practice for their students.

*2.3. Instrument*

A pre-test-post-test control group design was used. Listening proficiency was assessed with two listening tests.

The first was the MCQ test (Multiple choice test) including 20 questions which yielded scores from 0 to 20 on listening comprehension. The second was composed an adapted form of a story frame. Story frame tests (Cudd and Roberts 1987: 74) focused on the story structure rather than specific content. They employed a cloze procedure which contained 15 missing words. In the story frame test, one or two key words were taken out of the adapted story frame, and the students filled in the blanks with suitable words according to their understanding of the story. In the multiple-choice test as well as story frame test, one mark was given for each correct answer.

The aim of pre-test is to test whether the control group and the experimental group are similar as to their initial listening proficiency and it was administered by the first author with assistance from other teachers at the researcher’s department, while the post-test was administered by other teachers, in an effort to lessen any possible experimenter bias.

*2.4. Data analysis*

*2.4. a. Pre-testing*

The pre-test was administered in one session three days before the onset of instruction. Students first answered the multiple- choice test, then the story frame test. The means for the two groups on both tests were presented in table 3. A comparison of the pre-tests means revealed no significant differences between the two groups on the multiple- choice test: t = 1.65, p < 0.05; on the story frame test: t = 1.3, p< 0.05. This confirms that the two groups were essentially equivalent.

**Table 3: Pre-test means (M) and standard deviations (SD)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Listening** | **Control (n=30)** | | **Experimental (n=29)** | | **T-test** |
| **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** |
| MCQ test | 3.6 | 1.4 | 3.9 | 1.2 | **1.65** |
| Story frame test | 3.3 | 1.0 | 3.6 | 1.0 | **1.3** |



*2.4. b. Post* *–testing*

The post-test was conducted one week after the instruction was completed. The two tests were administered by other teachers of the researcher’s English Department in an effort to lessen any possible experiment bias. The interval between pre-testing and post-testing (40 days) was deemed long enough to control for any short-term memory effects.

Table 4: **Post-test means (M) and standard deviations (SD)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Listening** | **Control (n=30)** | | **Experimental (n=29)** | | **T-test** |
| **M** | **SD** | **M** | **SD** |
| MCQ | 9.3 | 1.8 | 12.3 | 1.4 | **6.3** |
| Story frame test | 9.1 | 1.5 | 11.2 | 2.0 | **4.6** |



Table 4 shows the post-test means for the two groups on both tests. The comparison of these means showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on both tests: on the MCQ: t = 6.3, p < 0.01; on the SFT: t = 4.6, p < 0.01. The results indicate that learners had better proficiency of listening from extensive listening than intensive one.

# VII. SCHEDULE FOR THE STUDY

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| --- | --- |
| February | Selection of listening materials and design of listening |
| March | Literature review and dissertation outline |
| March - Mid April | Make research: data collection |
| May - June | Dissertation writing |

# VIII. CLOSING REMARKS

This study was an attempt to seek ways to develop students into fluent and independent listeners in the hope of giving students a love for listening, a thirst for it. The results of the study suggest that a well-conducted EL program can make a significant on listening proficiency. However, some limitations may have occurred:

The condition in which the research was conducted was too good: the students were tested through both tests: the Placement test and the pretest, which may not be very practical for carrying out on a large scale.

The sample size was not big enough. Therefore, the result drawn from the study may not have been of high representativeness.

During the one-month treatment, some students were occasionally absent from class, which might have affected the result of the post-test. However all the students were present at the pretest and post-test.

To prevent the Hawthorn effect, the researcher made sure that the students did not know about the research.

To control for short-term memory effects, the pretest-post-rest papers were neither corrected by the teachers not returned to the students in both classes.

In conclusion, from a research perspective, the two groups would, ideally, have continued the control and experimental treatments for a longer period to see if the effect remained and if the experimental group continued their impressive progress.

Students who are not currently skilled, enthusiastic listeners as well as readers face unnecessary and serious obstacles to realizing their potential contributions to themselves, their families in particular and to society in general. Thus, it is time for the teachers to create and implement programmes to help students to get motivated in studying as well as students who fall behind in listening. The model set in this study suggests that EL can play an important role in assisting students to improve their level of listening proficiency, and listening skills as well as the benefits that flow from them are essential if students are to become people who understand the word to know what are changing around them.

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