Extensive Listening: Pedagogy, Resources, and Tools

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Abstract – Listening could be called the gateway skill to language. It is the natural precursor to speaking and a key factor in the early stages of language development. Providing opportunities for language exposure through listening could aid quantitative goals, such as vocabulary acquisition, and qualitative goals, such as boosting confidence. Alongside autonomy and the renewed focus on self-directed learning, a growing area of interest for many teachers and researchers is extensive listening (EL). This paper is aimed at teachers who are interested in implementing an EL program on a class-by-class basis or at the institutional level. What and why are covered before discussing general considerations for the preparation stages. Later, pedagogy and techniques, resources, and tools are covered to give a range of options for educators to consider in the practical running of an EL program.

Keywords: extensive listening, listening resources, language teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Much has been done in the field of extensive reading (ER), which can be defined as the "rapid reading of large quantities of material or longer readings" (Carrell & Carson, 1997) with "meaning-focused input and fluency development" (Nation, 2009) to the point where ER is now a well-established component of many courses. However, its close relation, extensive listening (EL), has attracted less attention. It is "underutilized" (Ducker & Saunders, 2014) with a "theoretical framework [that] is underdeveloped" (Chang & Millet, 2014). Indeed, a search on Google for "extensive listening" provides 68,000 results, whereas a search for "extensive reading" delivers 452,000 results. This gives an indication of the discussion generated by these two fields.

Extensive listening is "an individualized listening activity with large amounts of target language input of learners' interests and at their levels" (Yeh, 2013). Renandya and Farrell (2011) define it as "all types of listening activities that allow learners to receive a lot of comprehensible and enjoyable listening input." EL can be teacher-directed within the classroom or student-directed in the learners' own time (Renandya & Farrell, 2011), although it is not the same as intensive listening, which is the usual mode of classroom listening practice that uses shorter recordings for extracting and comprehending discrete parts of information (Wilson, 2008). To contrast EL with intensive listening, Wilson (2008) states "extensive listening is usually marked by factors such as relative ease in terms of comprehension, and the use of gist questions rather than questions asking for detailed

information." According to Duckers and Saunders (2014) EL is "not concerned with drawing attention to details, vocabulary, or form, but rather places fluency, meaning, and understanding ahead of all else."

Due to the wealth of material related to ER, the key characteristics of an ER program provided by Bamford & Day (1998) can serve as a starting point for creating the characteristics of an EL program. Below the list is edited to serve this purpose:

- Students listen to large amounts of recorded material.

- Students listen to a variety of materials in terms of topic and genre.

- The material students listen to is within their level of comprehension.

- Students choose what they want to listen to.

- Listening is its own reward.

- Students listen for pleasure, information and general understanding.

- Listening is individual (students listen on their own).

- Teachers guide and keep track of student progress.

Vandergrift and Goh (2012) set out three guiding principles for extensive listening:

- Variety

- Frequency

- Repetition

Variety means that the types of listening texts should be as varied as possible to expose learners to a range of discourse styles. It is suggested that learners be encouraged to select listening texts that are a little above their level and not always featuring familiar topics. Frequency is the scheduled routine of listening to texts in the target language. Learners should make a daily or weekly plan that is realistic and manageable, depending on their age and capacity. Repetition is related to the amount of time learners listen to the text. Learners should be encouraged to listen more than once in order to become familiar and "greatly reduce the learners' cognitive load for each listen, freeing their attention and limited working memory resources" (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

1.1 Why extensive listening?

Although the importance of listening in language learning is accepted, the specifics of EL programs are still in contention. Stephens (2010) argues that an EL program should precede or be simultaneous with an ER program, as "the practice of internally 'hearing' a language as

they read it may be taken for granted" and intonation facilitates comprehension. Although Chang & Millet (2014) bemoan the lack of empirical evidence for the effect of EL on improving comprehension, there are some studies that point to the benefits. Kim (2004) found that extensive listening brought about more improvements than intensive listening for low-level middle students. Onoda (2012) found university students improved their listening comprehension and self-confidence. Ramirez & Alonso (2007) concluded in a study with young, lower-level learners that EL may improve concentration, attention, and motivation. However, Chang & Millet (2014) found that extensive listening in addition to reading scripts was more effective for university students than only listening or only reading. Finally, Stephens (2015) advises that interlocutors and participation are still needed to extend possible gains that can be made in these programs.

Part of the reason for slower uptake of EL course components, compared with ER, could be the practical implications of setting up and supervising an extensive listening program vs. an extensive listening program. Whereas books and texts for extensive reading have been an integral part of education for a long time, listening materials and, more importantly, the tools for copying and dissemination have been available for a much shorter period. The recent renewed interest in EL and the current accessibility of listening resources mean that it is now easier than ever to implement EL.

1.2. Considerations for Extensive Listening

1. Choosing listening materials

There are several factors to consider when choosing materials for an EL program, whether it is the teacher or the learner who chooses which texts to use. A key factor is the level of the learners and the kind of materials that will challenge them but yet still be comprehensible (Vandergrift and Goh, 2012). Graded materials, which have been created for specific levels of learner, may be more suitable for lower-level learners. In contrast with ER, which has a wealth of graded reading materials, there are fewer sources for graded EL materials. Ducker and Saunders (2014) bemoan the lack of graded EL materials available and suggest training learners to find materials online and implementing sharing systems using cloud services or social networks. Publishers may also be moving towards offering more graded materials (Lynch, 2009). Later in this paper, many options and links are provided which can serve as the basis for an EL program.

For authentic materials, the rate of speech could become an issue that affects comprehension. Griffiths (1992) found that slower speech rates aided comprehension in second language learners, although Vandergrift and Goh (2012) suggest repeated listens and listening practice in teacher-mediated interaction can help to scaffold learners' ability with faster speech rates. Buck (2001) lists the average speech rates of British speakers in various authentic speech contexts. Conversations rate the highest at 210 words per minutes (wpm), with interviews (190wpm) close behind and monologues (160wpm) and lectures (140wpm) at a slower pace.

Richards & Burns (2012) expand on the list the considerations of choosing suitable EL materials as:

- Variety of situations and discourse structures

- Relevance to learners' needs

- Listening processes (bottom-up and top-down processing)

- Suitable linguistic level

- Range of topics

If the teacher allows students some autonomy in choosing the listening resources, then these factors could be introduced to the students for their consideration. Learners could be encouraged to use a range of sources and check their comprehension with a few minutes of listening before committing to the whole text. Teachers may need to consider the level and capabilities of the learners and introduce graded or authentic materials that a suitable.

2. Teaching listening strategies

Considering that much of the listening in an EL program might be done without teacher supervision, some of the class time could be spent discussing and modeling listening strategies. Field (2007) suggests training learners in transferable skills that can be used outside of the classroom and beyond the end of the course. In terms of listening, these metacognitive skills are related to "listener awareness of the cognitive processes involved in comprehension, and the capacity to oversee, regulate, and direct these processes" (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Although the explicit teaching of strategies to lower-level students has been questioned and there is a lack of evidence for strategy training (Renandya, 2012; Lynch, 2009), others have espoused listening strategy instruction (Cross, 2012; Siegel, 2011).

Richards and Burns (2012) suggest explicitly teaching learners about the three stages of listening, how to use cognitive strategies, and modeling their use. The three stages of listening are planning, monitoring, and evaluating. In the planning stage, learners can think about how they will approach the listening task ahead. They can consider the language and topics they may encounter, and the parts that will need most attention. During listening, learners can monitor their understanding and take steps to repair misunderstandings, for example by stopping and repeating a section or consulting a dictionary or transcript. Notes and graphic organizers may also help listeners to quantify their comprehension. Finally in the evaluation stage, learners can review and assess their level of success. Reflection of what helps and hinders their comprehension will be important at this stage before learners enter the cycle again at the beginning.

Goh (2010) shares a list of questions for learners to use in appraising their self-directed listening:

A. Setting my listening goal

1. Why am I listening to / viewing this recording?

2. What do I hope to achieve?

3. How many times should I listen to / watch this recording? Why?

B. Preparing to listen

1. What do I know about this topic?

2. What type of information can I expect to hear (and view)?

3. What words can I expect? (Use a dictionary if necessary)

4. What difficulties can I expect?

5. What strategies should I use when I encounter these difficulties?

C. Evaluating

1. Am I satisfied with what I have understood? Why?

2. Was I able to make use of my prior knowledge about this topic?

3. What difficulties did I face? Were my strategies useful?

These questions could serve as a starting point for introducing listening strategies to learners. Teachers may need to decide with groups of students on a case-by-case basis how much learning strategies should be covered. Spending some of the class time providing concrete examples of techniques and specific activities may help to scaffold learners towards choosing and using the techniques that work best for them.

2. PEDAGOGY AND TECHNIQUES

For teachers implementing an EL program as part of a course, a rethink of the methods and techniques may be required. Certain techniques for intensive listening may not be suitable for autonomous extensive listening. Due to the time and effort required to set up these EL systems, it is suggested that teachers allow time for explanation and induction as early as possible in the course (Wilson, 2008). Learners may have some resistance for a range of reasons, from giving up their free time, to expectations that learning happens in the classroom. The teacher can discuss the benefits and negotiate expectations to overcome any hurdles in the early stages.

Here are some practical techniques and classroom practices that can be considered for use in setting up an EL program:

1. Needs analysis

When meeting a new group of students, it is useful for a teacher to audit their needs. A needs analysis for listening refers to "the procedures that will be used to find out in what circumstances a learner will need listening skills and what problems the learners might encounter with listening" (Richards & Burns, 2012). A learner's needs could be related to the contexts in which they listen, which could be as general as social and academic, or as specific as the aviation or hospitality industry. Needs could also be related to the issues that the learner has with listening, such as word recognition or accents.

The form of the needs analysis could be a survey completed by the learner, or a set of tasks given by the teacher to appraise their current listening comprehension skills. It could also be a combination of the two. This data can inform the teacher of which techniques and resources may be suitable for use in the EL program. Other data which could be collected through needs analysis include topics and areas of interest, expectations and views on assignments outside of class time, and current listening habits in the target language.

2. Target language enhancement

This technique may be useful if the teacher wants to retain some focus on form and is willing to prepare and provide the listening texts. The enhancement works by targeting grammar structures, expressions, and vocabulary in the audio file and increasing the volume around 20% on those sections to highlight and draw attention. Preparation involves downloading and editing the audio file in advance using audio editing software such as Audacity (http://www.audacityteam.org/download/), which is free to download. The files are then digitally distributed by the teacher to the learners. Reinders and Cho (2010) suspect that this subtle enhancement may help to draw attention to form, in much the same way as underlining or bolding text does for reading, although empirical evidence for this has not been collected.

3. Story swap

This technique requires students to get involved in the creation of the listening material to be used in extensive listening. Students record themselves telling a story or anecdote. These recordings are then shared with the other students to create a shared resource. Traditionally this might have been done on a desktop computer or with a dictaphone device, but with the widespread adoption of smartphones that have recording, editing, and sharing capabilities, many learners will be able to do this task with available resources. Audio can easily be recorded using apps that are often included or free to download onto smartphones. Files can be sent to the teacher for collection and redistribution, or they can be shared by students themselves in messages.

Wilson (2008) suggests asking the listeners to write two follow-up questions to ask the storyteller. These could be asked and answered using further recordings, which would create an extensive listening loop outside of class time, or the questions can be addressed during class in face-to-face and teacher-mediated discussions.

4. Flood listening

Wilson (2008) describes flood listening as "students choosing one topic and listening to everything they can about it (they get a flood of input)." Students are likely to choose a topic they are interested in or related to an area of their academic research, which may help to motivate them. The repetition of words and phrases in relation to the topic could help with retention and lessen the need for scaffolding new language for new topics. Finding sources for flood listening has been made easier with widespread Internet access and the range of sources that are available. Classes can share sources during class time or online, for example with a *wiki* or online message board.

5. Listen and read aloud

This technique requires a recording with a transcription. Students attempt to listen and read along with the transcript at the same pace as the speaker whilst copying the fluency features. This technique gives attention to rhythm, pauses and pronunciation (Wilson, 2008). Due to the natural fast pace of many native speakers, this can be quite a difficult task. Learners should be given ample opportunities for repetitive listening and practice. After a period of practice, the final objective is for students to make a recording with similar fluency features to the original. This recording can then be used again in an extensive listening program with other learners to give comprehension tasks or peer feedback.

6. Information transfer

This technique would be useful for learners to create visual summaries of listening sources to be presented and shared in class. Information transfer requires learners to listen and "reproduce the message they hear in a new form" (Nation & Newton, 2009). This could be in the form of a map, timeline, table, chart, calendar, a drawing created from scratch, or any other graphical representation that fits the message content. A key factor in this is that the form of the message is changed but the components of the message should be intact. This is a very flexible technique that can be adapted to a range of listening materials, from narratives and speeches to instructions and reports. The completed graphical reinterpretation of the message provides an opportunity for self, peer, and teacher assessment of comprehension, and can be used as a material for presentations, sharing, and discussions. The graphical representation provides visual scaffolding, minimal extra task burden, a representation of structure, and deeper processing in the transformation of the form (Nation & Newton, 2009).

3. RESOURCES

Although the teaching systems used in an EL program are an essential component, it could be argued that the suitability and variety of the resources is equally significant. Thankfully, there is a large range of listening materials available in most contexts that educators and learners

can exploit. This section will cover and discuss some of the options, with links where possible.

1. Television and radio

Television and radio may offer the resources needed for EL in contexts that are less connected to the Internet. This has limitations, as the source cannot be listened to multiple times, unless recording is possible. Many countries have national English-language radio stations, which are often operated with awareness that language learners are amongst the audience. These have the benefit of familiar and local topics. There are also global English stations broadcast in many countries, such as BBC World Service or Voice of America, that cover international news and current issues. If possible, specific programs of interest can be recorded for multiple listens and to share with classmates. English-language TV channels are also featured in many countries' TV network offerings with a wide range of content from syndicated soap operas to factual programming. Learners should be able to find content that appeals to them and schedules for regular viewing can be agreed that are then discussed and tracked in class time.

2. Audiobooks

With a focus on the "extended" element of extensive listening, audiobooks are a great resource for long narrative language discourse. The characteristics that distinguish audiobooks from short intensive classroom listening materials include authenticity, pleasure and choice (Wilson, 2008). Indeed, a "good story is a good story in any language" (Wilson, 2008). Audiobooks are available for all levels and interests with rich and authentic language. Audiobooks can be bought, borrowed from a library, or downloaded from the Internet. There are many websites that offer free downloads of public domain audiobooks in genres as diverse as children's fiction to suspense and horror. Here are some online resources for accessing and downloading free audiobooks:

- www.openculture.com/freeaudiobooks

- https://librivox.org/

- www.gutenberg.org

- http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/

- http://freeclassicaudiobooks.com/

- www.loyalbooks.com

- www.storynory.com

- www.librophile.com

3. Podcasts

With Internet access, a large range of new listening sources become accessible in the form of podcasts. These are essentially radio shows that are shared online as MP3 files, which can be streamed or downloaded. The options range from homemade recordings by hobbyists to professional podcasts made by international media companies. Topics are equally diverse, from comedy and light entertainment to technology and education. Learners should be able to find content that matches their interests. Here are some sites that have searchable databases of podcasts:

- www.podcast.com

- www.podcastalley.com

- www.digitalpodcast.com

- learnoutloud.com

- podfeed.net

- gpodder.net

There are also smartphone apps for searching, streaming, and downloading podcasts, such as Overcast and Stitcher.

For learners who want to focus entirely on learning English, there are many podcasts created specifically for English language learners. Considering the amount of options available, it may be better for the teacher to introduce a list of podcasts that are graded at a suitable level. Learners may have suggestions or they can add more as they become familiar with the options. Here are a few popular options, many of which include categories for beginner to advanced-level learners.

- www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/tae

- www.podcastsinenglish.com

- www.listen-to-english.com

- www.englishclass101.com

- splendidspeaking.podomatic.com

- www.betteratenglish.com

- esl.culips.com

- www.eslpod.com

Podcasts are an extensive supply of listening resources that can be accessed and listened to easily. The range of options available mean that most learners should find something suitable that fits their interests.

2. TED Talks

These recorded presentations are a perennial favorite for language educators, especially those who teach adults above intermediate level. TED Talks (www.ted.com) is an endless resource of interesting and meaningful presentations with support materials. Speakers from many backgrounds cover topics are as diverse as business, science, and entertainment. Many talks are informative and inspiring, often with a focus on personal growth and development, meaning that learners can develop more than just their language. There is also a specific section on the site designed for teachers and students called TED-Ed (ed.ted.com) with curated video content and supplementary educational materials.

Besides the TED Talks site, resource websites offer lesson plans and materials that have been developed based on a selection of the talks. This may be the quickest way for a teacher to find suitable talks and support materials specific for EFL/ESL. Here are some examples of sites that offer these resources:

- https://tedxesl.com/

- https://freeenglishlessonplans.com/category/video-classes/ted-talk-lesson-plans/

- http://www.linguahouse.com/esl-lesson-plans/esl-course-plans/general-english-course-plans/ted-english/

- http://kalinago.blogspot.kr/2011/09/10-speaking-english-activities-using.html

3. ESL/EFL listening websites

There are many sites with content specifically for English language learners to practice their listening skills. Audio or video files are offered for streaming and download, often with support materials such as embedded quizzes and transcripts. These sites can be used in an extensive listening component of a course, or for self-study. Here are some of the popular sites that focus specifically on listening for ESL/EFL learners:

- http://www.esl-lab.com/

- http://www.real-english.com/

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish

- http://englishmedialab.com/

- http://www.eslfast.com/

- http://www.eslvideo.com/

- http://www.talkenglish.com/

- http://repeatafterus.com/

- http://spotlightenglish.com/

4. TOOLS

This section will cover online tools and services that teachers can use to check learners' engagement in listening outside of the classroom, track progress, assess comprehension, and collect reports based on the listening texts.

1. Online video services with embedded quizzes

As websites have become more interactive with Web 2.0 elements that emphasize user-generated content, the number of services available for teachers to utilize has grown exponentially. Along with the growth of online learning management systems (LMS), there are now streamlined offerings that focus on specific LMS components, yet outdo them in terms of accessibility, ease of use, and set up time.

For an EL program, there are online video services that allow teachers to set up private online classrooms, edit and customize videos, embed quizzes with the videos, disseminate them to learners easily, and track learners' progress and results. This list of capabilities would previously have been the preserve of institution-level computer software systems, but now any teacher can set up their own online classroom and utilize these tools easily on a class-by-class basis.

One of the most popular services for this is EDpuzzle (www.edpuzzle.com). Its popularity is perhaps as closely related to the free cost of entry as its ease of use. Like many of these services, it requires teachers to create a teacher's account from which they can manage their content and quizzes. Teachers can upload their own videos or search for content through EDpuzzle on popular video sites such as YouTube. Videos can then be customized with notes, voice-overs, and embedded quiz questions. Questions can be multiple choice or open-ended questions. The teacher can then create online classes for students to join. For each class, a code is created for students to input when they create their free student account. Once the students have joined, the teacher can set assignments to watch videos and answer the embedded questions with options for deadlines and student feedback. Teachers can view the progress, completion, and results for each assignment, making it a useful tool for tracking and assessment.

Other options similar to EDpuzzle include Zaption, EduCanon, and PlayPosit. Each has a variety of strengths and weaknesses, with some including premium paying options. Due to the nature of these Web 2.0 services, they are continually being updated and refined with new features and upgraded user interfaces.

3. Online message boards

Another example of the democratization of web tools is online message boards and Internet forums. These allow members to join and post messages online so that others can read and respond. Previously, these required the host to have their own web presence and a certain level of computer coding skills. Now there are a myriad of options, from simple hosted message boards to free coding that will embed a forum into a teacher's or institution's website.

An online message board can be used by learners in an EL program to share resources and report their experiences. This a good option if the program is more autonomous and rigorous tracking is less of a concern, as the impetus is on the learner to post reports and share their progress. Furthermore, this web tool is focused on communication outside of the classroom, not assigning listening materials, so there is more freedom to select and share the sources that interest them with a more decentralized system.

One of the easiest and most immediate options for this is TodaysMeet (www.todaysmeet.com). This allows for an online message board to be set up with its own shareable URL in less than a minute. A name for the message board can be created directly on the TodaysMeet homepage. This becomes the web address for the online message board, for example 'listeningclassreports' becomes https://todaysmeet.com/listeningclassreports. The length of time that the message board will be open can be set with a drop down menu, with many options from one hour to one month. This means that weekly or monthly message boards can be set up, although be aware that the page will disappear after the allowed time. Once these details have been completed, the message board is immediately available for sharing and joining. To join the board, there is no lengthy sign up process with email and password input. Members simply choose a nickname and click 'Join' to start messaging. Messages are displayed chronologically on the same page. A limitation of this is there is only one message thread on each page, so there cannot be sub-topics and multiple threads.

For more advanced options which offer multiple topic threads, there are many services that offer free forums that can be hosted by the service provider, or added into the coding of another site. Features range from basic to advanced, so some research is required for which services provide the level of features needed. Considerations could include:

- Cost
- Customizability
- Mobile access
- File uploads
- Bandwidth available
- Scalability

For a hosted forum, ProBoards (www.proboards.com) and Boardhost (boardhost.com) are popular options that provide many free features. If the teacher or institution already have a website and wish to embed a forum then Nabble (www.nabble.com) and Tal.ki (talkiforum.com) are two options for this. There are more advanced options, such as vBulletin (www.vbulletin.com), which provide industry-leading web forum services at a cost, but these are likely to be excessive for all except large institutions.

4. Student response systems (SRS)

Student response systems (SRS) started out as audience response systems, developed to collect immediate feedback and information from audiences. Small handheld devices, called "clickers," are given to the audience members. The devices have buttons, usually numbers or a small keyboard, so that audience members can input information which is sent to a receiver and collected, compiled, and displayed. These were previously expensive systems with specialist equipment and software, which meant that only large educational institutions were able to install them.

Several technologies have now widened the scope and availability of SRS, meaning that many contexts now have this option. The Internet and wi-fi have created global connections that can replace the previously closed systems. The handheld devices can now be replaced with a multitude of options, such as smartphones, tablets, laptop computers, or desktops, depending on availability and setting. Finally, expensive software is no longer needed, as online services have now stepped in to this role. This means that any Internet-connected context where devices are available, either provided by the institution or the learners, can take advantage of SRS.

These new SRS services provide an online and mobile portal for the teacher to create question forms in advance with content and data collection suitable for the level, age, and goals of the learners. Learners than access and complete the forms on their devices either during or outside of class time. For the purpose of EL, this would usually be outside of class hours.

The most popular and flexible options for this are Socrative (www.socrative.com) and Mentimeter (www.mentimeter.com). There are other options, but many offer a limited range of question types and are designed for immediate time-limited use during class time. Socrative and Mentimeter allow question forms to be left open indefinitely, so learners can complete them at their convenience, and the form can be closed and reopened by the teacher if deadlines are needed. There are options for creating open-ended and multiple choice questions. Open-ended questions can be used for collecting information such as names of sources used, personalized reports of progress, and comments on challenges. Multiple choice questions can be used for quantifiable data, such as amount of time spent listening per week or grading the difficulty level of sources. Much like the online video services with embedded quizzes discussed in a previous section, a special code is created for the joining members to use. Members then input their name which means the teacher can easily view, track, and archive the data for each student.

Student response systems used in conjunction with an EL program would give the teacher and the learners a flexible way of reporting and tracking data across the course. The results can be used for formative assessment, summative assessment, class discussion, teacher-student interviews, and reflection at later points in the course.

5. CONCLUSION

The myriad of resources and tools for extensive listening means that it is now easier than ever to implement an extensive listening program. There are many online options for sources of authentic and graded listening media which can be downloaded or streamed. These sources can be shared centrally by the teacher or amongst the students themselves with direct messaging or message boards. Tracking progress is also possible online, from the use of questions embedded with the media to self-reporting on message boards or with student response systems. These sources and tools are mostly free and easy to use, meaning there is no financial barrier of entry for teachers and the students beyond Internet access and the common devices needed. Teachers and institutions should consider these options and, if possible, implement an extensive listening program to expand and enhance language exposure for their learners.

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