

*Developing Listening Comprehension in English Language Teaching:
Insights From a Needs Analysis Study*

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Abstract

Listening proficiency, though inherently challenging to teach due to its complexity and implicit nature, holds paramount importance in linguistic competence as it serves as a comprehensible input for enhancing both auditory comprehension and broader linguistic competence. Recognising the pivotal role of needs analysis in educational inquiry, this teacher research seeks to elucidate a cohort of 73 ELT students' needs and preferences concerning listening comprehension to suggest and implement instructional approaches. Employing introspective self-reports, the study aimed to discover students' perceptions of their self-efficacy, encountered challenges, strategies to overcome, and instructional preferences pertinent to listening comprehension. The inductive content analysis of 1732 words disclosed a nuanced depiction of students' moderately perceived self-efficacy in listening comprehension ($M = 3,15$), delineating prevalent impediments such as the inadequate listening practice ($n = 21$), recognition of spoken words ($n = 13$), and deficient lexical knowledge ($n = 11$). Proposed remedial strategies prominently featured cinematic engagement ($n = 41$), extensive auditory exposure ($n = 14$), and the utilisation of auditory media such as songs ($n = 12$) and podcasts ($n = 14$). Notably, recommendations for instructional enhancements underscored the salience of extensive listening practices ($n = 20$) and the cultivation of speech clarity ($n = 18$) in intensive listening. Systematic categorisation of identified issues and solutions facilitated a coherent synthesis, illuminating a collective inclination toward addressing bottom-up processing challenges and advocating for the augmentation of extensive listening activities. These discernments furnish valuable insights for formulating targeted pedagogical interventions to ameliorate listening proficiency within the ELT domain.

Keywords: Listening Comprehension, English Language Teaching, Needs Analysis

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Introduction

Listening comprehension in English as a foreign language context is one of the most essential skills to develop, yet the most neglected skill both for research and teaching purposes. To fill this gap, this research incorporated a needs analysis to examine students' needs for improving listening comprehension. Therefore, this paper covered the background of the study, the characteristics of the current study, findings elicited from needs analysis, discussion of these findings with the literature, and concluding two types of listening instruction.

As for the background of the study, five components served the purpose of this study: the researcher's experience as a learner and teacher, ELT students, the listening course, the listening comprehension, and needs analysis. As a lifelong learner and teacher of the English language, the researcher experienced listening skills as the second challenging skill, following speaking skills to learn and to teach due to, intuitively speaking, variety of accents, deficiency of exposure to those accents, pace of speech, phonological forms of words, and so on. Secondly, working at an ELT department of a state university in Türkiye, where English is perceived to be a foreign language rather than a second language, the researcher involved the students of this department who would be future English teachers in four years of education. As learners of English and future English teachers, their English language proficiency, especially their listening skills, deserves much attention in research. Thirdly, English language programs in Turkish universities deliver compulsory listening lessons in two terms in the first grade with two credits, which, by experience, is inadequate for developing listening skills. As a fourth component, listening skill is a complex cognitive process implicit in decoding, interpreting, and understanding the spoken discourse, which also involves actively employing both top-down and bottom-up processing skills (Rost, 2011) along with listening strategies (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). This multi-faced skill might also require some levels of instruction (Field, 2008). It can also be best improved by listening extensively outside the classrooms according to the students' interests (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Students' needs should be considered when choosing either of these instructions. Lastly, as Goh (2023) suggests, the triggering point of most investigations in listening comprehension should start with a needs analysis of students' problems in listening comprehension; to this end, this study focused on students' particular needs specific to the context of the current research.

Needs analysis could be defined as a systematic process essential for designing effective language instructions tailored to students' needs, learners' current language abilities, specific problems in language use, solutions to overcome these problems, and student's preferences in language use that could be collected through various methods such as surveys, interviews, diagnostic tests, self-reports, and observations (Brown, 1995). Supported by these five components and to meet the research objective, the current study was predicated on two targets: a deep discovery of comprehension problems and finding pedagogical solutions to those problems. Therefore, this small-scale study attempted to find answers to two research questions as follows:

1. What are ELT students' primary needs and suggestions regarding listening comprehension in the EFL context?
2. What are the possible instructional solutions to meet the needs and to follow the suggestions?

Methodology

To answer these research questions, a needs analysis was conducted in the form of introspective self-reports before the listening course in the fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. 73 ELT students voluntarily gave responses to four open-ended questions in two days through Google Forms in the first week of the semester. Two days were granted to them to answer these questions so that they could reflect on their listening experience. The questions are: (1) *How do you evaluate your listening skills? Choose from 1 to 5.* (2) *What problems do you face while listening to a spoken text?* (3) *How do you overcome those problems and develop your listening skills?* (4) *What do you expect to have in this course, and what are your instructional suggestions to the lecturer?* The responses consisted of around 1732 words. This data set was analysed through inductive content analysis; that is, the categories were not pre-determined; instead, they emerged out of data analysis. One of the ELT professionals also checked the codes and categories. We agreed on the codes and categories at the level of .90 to meet the inter-coder reliability. The ethical committee of the university where the larger research project of this research was administered also approved the conduct of the study on 05.06.2024 with the document no: 7062.

Findings

The findings encapsulated learners' responses to four questions in the self-reports. For the first question, as shown in Table 1, students' evaluation of their listening skills was moderate ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .67$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening level	71	1.00	5.00	3.15	.67

Table 2 illustrates the answers to the last three questions probed from learners in the form of the frequency of the mentioned codes. Regarding the problems faced by learners for listening comprehension, inadequate practice occurred 21 times, and the accent factor was mentioned eight times, all of which could be converged under the extensive listening category ($f = 29$). Deficiency of lexical competence ($f = 11$), recognition of spoken words ($f = 13$), and co-articulation effects ($f = 8$) were other most commonly occurring codes. These could be subsumed under intensive listening ($f = 32$). Regarding the solutions or strategies that learners used to overcome the problems above, watching movies ($f = 41$), extensive auditory exposure ($f = 14$), listening to songs ($f = 12$), and podcasts ($f = 14$) could be amalgamated under the extensive listening ($f = 81$). Only seven mentions of intensive listening practice (developing lexical knowledge = 4 and developing pronunciation = 3) were found as strategies used by learners. As for the last question about learners' suggestions to instructors, learners suggested more extensive practice ($f = 20$). Intensive listening ($f = 18$) was also offered by instructors by stating slow speech seven times, clear speech six times, and focusing on words five times.

Some sample quotes from learners were also added here to illustrate and confirm the codes and categories. For instance, regarding the most frequent code of *inadequate listening practice*, "not practising enough" by Participant 53 (hereafter P.) and "I have not practised before and have studied completely exam-oriented" by P. 56 were stated. As regards the role of *accents*, "some words are pronounced differently in different accents" was stated by P. 58 and "every teacher has a different accent, and this situation confuses me" was mentioned by

P.51. As for *the deficiency of lexical knowledge*, P. 5 remarked that “there may be a lack of vocabulary,” and P. 59 averred that “it is necessary to work with the pronunciation of words.” The other quotes were related to the code of *phonological aspects of words* such as “some letters come together to make different sounds (P. 68)” and “some words in English are very similar to each other, and sometimes I get the pronunciation confused (P. 49).”

Table 2. Content analysis of learners’ responses to the last three questions

Theme	Codes	f	Categories	f
Problems	Inadequate practice	21	Extensive listening	29
	Accent	8		
	Deficiency of lexical competence	11	Intensive listening	32
	Recognition of spoken lexis	13		
	Co-articulation effects	8		
	Others	26	Attention, syntax, speed, etc.	
Total		87		
Strategies	Watching movies	41	Extensive listening	81
	Extensive auditory exposure	14		
	Listening to songs	12		
	Podcasts including stories	14		
	Developing lexical knowledge	4	Intensive listening	7
	Developing pronunciation	3		
	Others	10	Applications, Tedx, etc.	
Total		99		
Instructional suggestions	Extensive listening practices	20	Extensive listening	20
	Slow speech	7	Intensive listening	18
	Clear speech	6		
	More focus on words	5		
	Others	13	Loud voice, pronunciation, etc.	
Total		51		

Discussion

These findings reflect the outcomes of some studies in the literature. Regarding the factor of inadequate listening practice, Goh (2000), Graham (2006), Gökmen (2021), and Renandya and Farrell (2011) encountered insufficient listening practice in their participants and called for more extensive practice in listening. To support the finding in this study that accent is a defining factor in listening comprehension, familiar accents can affect listening comprehension positively (Gass & Varonis, 1984), while stronger accents, including non-native accents (Major et al., 2002), can negatively affect understanding (Munro & Derwing, 1999). The lack of lexical competence found in this study can also be ascertained by Nation and Snowling (1997) and Stæhr (2009), who found a strong correlation between listening comprehension and lexical knowledge. The other factor was related to the ability to recognise the phonological forms of words, which Matthews and Cheng (2015) found to be a challenge in recognising known words in connected speech due to co-articulation effects. To

compensate for such hurdles, note-taking (Gökmen et al., 2024) and more strategic instruction (Gökmen, 2023b) could be incorporated into the listening classrooms.

Conclusion

On the grounds of needs analysis, two instruction proposals could be suggested to ELT shareholders; teacher educators, language practitioners, and learners. Intensive and extensive listening could be used in a complementary way to develop listening comprehension, which is a necessity in the deschooling ELT in the digital era (Gökmen, 2023a). As language learning commences at schools, listening lessons could cover more intensive listening instruction that focuses on the detailed understanding of lexical and structural patterns of spoken language to improve students' top-down and bottom-up processing skills along with listening strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, and compensatory strategies. Distinguishing figures imported on some of the benefits of intensive listening. First, intensive listening could provide students with the skills to comprehend specific details through note-taking, answering comprehension questions, and focusing on the meanings of individual words (Rost, 2011). Provision of listening strategies such as cognitive (inference, elaboration, summarisation, etc.) and metacognitive strategies (planning, monitoring, and evaluation) can raise more strategic listeners (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Thirdly, though graphical forms of words could be known to learners, their phonological forms may not be familiar to them; therefore, more focus on phonological aspects of language, such as supra-segmental dimensions of spoken language, could contribute to listening comprehension (Field, 2008). Lastly, intensive listening can create opportunities to delve into some explanation regarding lexical and grammatical forms through dictation (Richard, 2005). As most listening classes only have two hours of instruction, which is not enough to develop an implicit and complex skill as listening, listening practice could be geared towards outside the classroom through extensive listening practice. Extensive listening is a crucial type of practice in English Language Teaching (ELT) as it provides learners with ample exposure to the target language in a natural and engaging context by listening to a wide range of authentic sources, such as songs, podcasts, movies, and conversations to enhance listening fluency. Extensive listening can aid listening comprehension in four ways. Firstly, learners would be exposed to a variety of different accents, intonations, and speech rates (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). It will help broaden learners' competence in lexical and syntactical structures (Nation & Newton (2009). Listening fluency could be achieved through exposure to the natural pronunciation and intonation patterns (Field, 2008). Last but not least, considering the anxiety factor, extensive listening could give more enjoyable and less stressful time while listening in that students will listen to audio texts as songs and podcasts on their interests (Harmer, 2007). As an overarching dictum to conclude this paper, Rost (2011, p. 189) states that:

By engaging in intensive listening, learners hone their ability to decipher the intricate details of spoken language, which enhances their overall comprehension and linguistic accuracy. Complementing this with extensive listening exposes them to a wide range of authentic contexts, fostering fluency and a deeper cultural understanding.

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