

EFL STUDENT'S DIFFICULTIES IN EXTENSIVE LISTENING ACTIVITIES: A THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

Indra Cipta Putra Mandiri

English Education Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia
Email: indra18@upi.edu

Muhammad Handi Gunawan (Corresponding author)

English Education Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia
Email: handi_gunawan@upi.edu

Suharno

English Education Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia
Email: suharno@upi.edu

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Abstract: The study of extensive listening (EL) is a comparatively new field in comparison to its peer, extensive reading (ER). Extensive listening itself can be defined as an engaging and enjoyable listening activity that is beneficial in increasing one's listening comprehension. Although there have been extensive studies in regards to the field of listening in general, the field of extensive listening receives relatively little attention. This study aims to uncover the difficulties encountered by EFL students in their extensive listening activities, and to contribute itself to the present gap of studies concerning extensive listening, specifically difficulties encountered in it. This study involves twenty-three EFL students under the class of listening for General Communication 1, and conducts a thematic analysis on the participants' questionnaire and interview responses. The findings showed that the difficulties encountered by the participants in their extensive listening activities can be divided into three major categories, namely comprehension difficulties, technical difficulties, and motivational difficulties.

Keywords: *extensive listening; listening difficulties; thematic analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Extensive listening is defined as all types of listening activities that allow learners to receive a lot of comprehensible and enjoyable listening input (Ivone & Renandya, 2019). In the world of English teaching, the concept of Extensive listening is a relatively new one. Listening itself (as a language skill) receives a relatively smaller teaching or research attention, in comparison with other language skills (Burns & Siegel, 2017), and the concept of extensive listening itself is quite possibly developed from the pre-existing concept of extensive reading (ER), or perhaps simply from the novel concept of L1 listening (Chang, 2018). Regardless of its origin, it is beneficial to the increase of listening comprehension as it allows learners to adjust their learning activities to the type of text, and their comprehension needs (Ivone &

Renandya, 2019). With the aforementioned definition of extensive listening, it should come as no surprise that extensive listening activities involves the act of listening to large amounts of motivating and engaging materials which are linguistically appropriate over a period of time, in which they listen to materials with a reasonable speed for general understanding (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). With this, we can infer that generally, extensive listening is an engaging listening activity where its listeners focus on attaining a general understanding of what is being spoken.

One of the most abundant extensive listening resources that are readily found in the internet is videos, sourced from sites like Youtube, Dailymotion, and many others. These resources can be considered as authentic E-Learning resources

(Kobayashi, 2020), and with it, comes several benefits, including (but not limited to): A way of implementing a comprehensive approach to learning, and significantly increasing learner's motivation to learn a foreign language (Zhdanov & Baklanov, 2020). Saputra and Fatimah (2018) argued in their journal that extensive listening activities allows the students to receive abundant comprehensible and enjoyable input (sourced from sources like youtube, TED, etc).

Listening itself (perhaps a byproduct of receiving a relatively smaller teaching or research attention, in comparison with other language skills), is considered to be a particularly difficult skill to acquire, especially for language learners (Nawir, 2020). This is because in listening, extra attention and concentration would be crucial in comprehending the speakers' utterances (Zulfikar, Aulia, & Akmal 2020). In this regard, Renandya (2011) has eloquently illustrated four notable reasons why listening is perceived to be difficult by language learners: First of all, speech is fast, as even in normal speech rate, spoken information could still be perceived as being too fast by beginner language learners. In addition to that, If the speakers speak too fast, problems in comprehension may occur for those who are not native speakers of the English language (Saraswati, 2018). Second, speech is variable, as when words are woven in a speech, they will oftentimes undergo (up to some extent, radical) phonological changes (e.g. modification, reduction, et cetera). Third, word boundaries tend to get blurry, as in some words could seemingly "blend" with other words in certain dialects or speech rates. Lastly, speech is by nature processed in real-time, meaning that unlike reading something, there is little to no chance to "re-read" what one may have missed, although the option of asking the interlocutor to repeat the sentence is viable.

There had been previous studies conducted in light of revealing difficulties that learners encounter in listening activities. Nushi and Orouji (2020) discovered that encountering phonological processes such as assimilation, deletion or addition of sounds, and not understanding the sounds in combination poses itself as a significant difficulty for learners in relation to their listening. Another evident difficulty is when learners try to comprehend considerably lengthy and/or comparatively complex materials. Another research

was also conducted by Nadhira and Warni (2020), and it revealed additional insight to the plausible difficulties that learners encounter in listening. These difficulties include perception of unfamiliar words and/or vocabularies, rate of speech, accent used by the speaker (alongside his/her pronunciation), and technicalities (audio quality, for example). Another study conducted by Rakhman, Tarjana, and Marmanto (2019) reflected similar results in regards to listening difficulties, especially in the question of having difficulty with the speech rates of the speakers. Additional difficulties were also revealed, namely difficulties related with inadequate practice of listening outside the classroom, and difficulties in recalling spoken information.

Reflecting on the preceding paragraph, it is clear that a number of studies have been conducted under the guise of revealing difficulties in listening. However, from it we can also infer that there is a lack of study that specifically focuses itself on revealing the difficulties under the context of extensive listening activities. It is for this reason that this paper aims to fill in the present gap of scarcity of studies exploring difficulties in extensive listening. This paper means to conduct a thematic analysis of EFL students' difficulties in extensive listening activities in order to unveil difficulties that may arise in extensive listening activities, under the demography of Indonesian EFL students. Thematic analysis is chosen as the study does not only intend to simply generalize the difficulties found, but also to thematically group common themes found in each difficulty, the factor inducing the aforementioned difficulties, and to see whether co-occurrences are found along the way.

Thematic analysis is a form of analysis that moves beyond counting the occurrence of explicit words and phrases, and instead focuses itself on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data's themes (MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2012). In that regard, thematic analyses may include the comparison of code frequencies, the identification of code co-occurrence, and the graphic display of existing relationships between codes contained in the data.

METHOD

As previously mentioned, this paper aims to conduct a thematic analysis of EFL students' difficulties in extensive listening activities in order

to unveil difficulties that may arise in extensive listening activities, under the demography of Indonesian EFL students. Specifically, this study involves first-semester English Education department students of a public state university located in Indonesia, under the class of Listening for General Communication 1 as its participants. The data that serves as the main focus of the analysis is sourced from a reflection questionnaire in regards to their experience throughout the course. Among other questions, the reflection questionnaire also includes questions that inquire the participants' difficulties in their extensive listening activities, and the way they cope with said difficulties. All 23 students of the selected class are participating in the study, and 5 out of the 23 participants are selected for an additional interview session as a means of clarification and/or to provide additional insights, as their responses are deemed unclear and are in need of further elaboration. These interview sessions implemented a semi-structured style of interview, as the writer prepares a set of predetermined questions, but opens the possibility of formulating more questions should it be deemed necessary. It is important to note that both the questionnaires and the interview uses Bahasa Indonesia, and therefore the original text and excerpts that will be provided in the article will include both its Bahasa Indonesia version and its translated to English variant, as a means to provide transparency to the readers. The time allotted to each individual interview with each participant is 30 minutes, and the three main questions that the interview is centered around are:

- (1) *Kesulitan-kesulitan apakah yang paling sering muncul ketika anda melakukan extensive listening?*
- (2) *Dari kesulitan-kesulitan tersebut, yang manakah yang menurut anda merupakan kesulitan yang paling sukar untuk ditangani?*
- (3) *Bagaimana anda mengatasi kesulitan yang telah anda hadapi?*

(1) What do you think are the most prevalent difficulties that you encounter in extensive listening activities? (2) From the aforementioned difficulties, which one do you think is the most challenging one to deal with? (3) How do you cope and manage the difficulties that you have encountered?)

Under the context of the aforementioned course, it should be noted that in the practice of listening, both intensive and extensive listening practices are combined. This is due to the fact that in the Department of English Education in the aforementioned university, there is no standalone

class that focuses itself on extensive listening. Listening courses in the department heavily relies on intensive listening, where the lecturers previously dictate the materials that would be used in the course. The extensive listening part of the course comes in the form of a weekly assignment where the students would have to listen to various extensive listening materials such as podcasts, Ted Talks, etc. In addition to that, they were also required to record their extensive listening activities through the use of listening journals, adapted from Takaesu (2013). After recording their extensive listening activity in their weekly listening journals, they would then be allotted time to discuss their journals with their peers in class, after they are finished with the intensive listening part of the class. The time allocation for each session in the class is roughly 40 minutes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of the gathered data from the distributed questionnaire revealed that there exists three major recurring themes under the context of difficulties faced by students in extensive listening activities. These three major difficulties are Comprehension difficulties, Technical difficulties, and Motivational difficulties. Each of these difficulties would be further elaborated alongside relevant factors that induced each accordingly in the following passages. The ways that these students cope with the difficulties will also be discussed.

Comprehension-related difficulties

Comprehension-related difficulties concern itself with difficulties that pose a challenge in comprehending the listening material that the students are listening to. For comprehension-related difficulties, three factors play a pivotal role in inducing it:

Range of used vocabulary

Thirteen students (Approximately 57% of the students that filled out the questionnaire) admitted that the extensive range of vocabularies used in the extensive listening materials they listen to poses a challenge for them in comprehending said podcast. A few examples of the statement are provided below:

"Kendala yang saya alami yaitu terkadang sulit untuk memahami topik yang dibicarakan di

podcast/sumber lain tersebut karena beberapa kosa kata masih terdengar asing bagi saya."

("A hurdle I experienced was the difficulty of comprehending the topic being talked about in the podcast/other sources I was listening to, as some vocabularies still sound relatively unfamiliar to me...")

"Terdapat banyak slang yang asing bagi saya dan ketika saya mencarinya di google berbeda dengan apa yang dimaksud."

("There are many slang words that sound alien to me, and when I look up what they mean on google, it would sometimes be different than what was intended.")

"...kurangnya kosa kata yang saya miliki, hal tersebut membuat saya sulit memahami isi percakapan dalam podcast maupun dari sumber listening lainnya."

("...due to the little range of vocabulary I am familiar with, I often find it hard to understand the topic of a conversation in a podcast or other sources.")

Accent of speakers

Seven students (Approximately 30% of the students that filled out the questionnaire) admitted that the accent of the speakers in the extensive listening media that they listen to poses a challenge for them in comprehending said media. A few examples of the statement are provided below:

"Terkadang saya sulit memahami jika Bahasa Inggris yang Podcast bicarakan itu aksennya yang sulit dimengerti."

("Sometimes I find it difficult to understand the spoken English in the podcast if the accent itself is difficult to understand.")

"Kesulitan yang saya dapatkan yaitu pelafalan dan aksen mereka yang masih asing untuk saya dengar..."

("The difficulties I faced are the speakers' pronunciation and accent, which are still unfamiliar to me...")

"Aksennya yang kadang kurang dimengerti."

("The accents are sometimes a challenge to be understood.")

Rate of speech

Three students (Approximately 13% of the students that filled out the questionnaire) admitted that the speakers' rate of speech in the extensive listening media that they listen to poses a challenge for them

in comprehending said media. A few examples of the statement are provided below:

"Kadang-kadang terdapat kata yang saya belum ketahui dan tidak ada script atau subtitle seperti pada platform Youtube, sehingga saya harus mengulang-ulang pengucapan kata tersebut dari podcastnya dan mencari penulisan dan arti dari kata tersebut. Atau ketika pembicara dalam podcast tersebut berbicara terlalu cepat."

("Sometimes there are words that I don't know and there are no scripts or subtitles like on the Youtube platform, so I have to repeat the pronunciation of the word from the podcast and look for the writing and meaning of the word. Or when the speaker in the podcast is talking too fast.")

"Jika peserta yang ada di podcast mengomong terlalu cepat/keras/rendah sampai microphone mereka tidak meregistrasi suaranya, membuatnya bersuara tidak jelas dan tidak dapat dipahami."

("The problem I encounter when listening to a podcast is if the participants of the podcast speak too fast/loud/low, to the point where the microphone cannot register the sound, making it unclear and incomprehensible.")

"Ketika saya mendengarkannya (podcast) di Spotify saya selalu kebingungan ketika mereka berbicara dengan cepat..."

("When I listen to podcasts on Spotify, I always get confused when they talk quickly...")

It can be seen from these findings that the comprehension difficulties encountered by students in extensive listening activities are in line with the findings made by Renandya (2011), in regards to difficulties in listening. Just like in Renandya's findings, the idea that "speech is fast", as spoken information could still be perceived as being too fast by beginner language learners, is evident in the provided example, specifically "The main problem I face is when the native speakers start to talk. When they start talking, they do so rather quickly..." Another recurring finding is where word boundaries tend to get blurry, as in some words could seemingly "blend" with other words in certain dialects. This is exemplified in the provided response example stating "Sometimes I find it difficult to understand the spoken English in the podcast if the accent itself is difficult to understand."

Under the context of comprehension-related difficulties, it can also be inferred that the major

factor that plays a role in inducing it is the vocabulary-induced ones. This particular factor stems from the fact that apparently, the participants' unfamiliarity with the used vocabulary, or the use of slangs in the materials that they listen to, serves as a challenge for them in their effort to comprehend the aforementioned material. Another inducing factor is the accent used by the speakers in the material they are listening to. This mirrors what Renandya & Farrell (2011) had previously stated, that word boundaries tend to get blurry, as some words could seemingly "blend" with other words in certain dialects. As all of the participants of the research are not native speakers of the English language, for accents and dialects to pose a challenge in their comprehension of the materials that they listen to is surely something that is to be expected. The last factor related to comprehension difficulties is the rate of speech of the speakers, which also mirrors previous findings by Renandya in the preceding sentence.

Technical difficulties

Technical difficulties concern itself with difficulties encountered by the participants of the study that are related to the technicalities of the activity. As the materials used are sourced online, this section's difficulties mainly concerns itself with hurdles related to online material technicalities. Seven students (approximately 30% of the students that filled out the questionnaire) admitted that the technical difficulties, (poor connection, audio playback errors), pose a challenge for them. A few examples of the statement are provided below:

"Banyak kendala yang saya hadapi, misalnya internet yang lambat..."

("There are many hurdles I experienced, slow internet for example...")

"Terkadang saat menemukan topic yang kita inginkan audionya tidak bisa diputar..."

("Sometimes when we find the topic that we want, the audio cannot be played...")

"Kendala atau kesulitan yang saya alami ketika mendengarkan podcast atau sumber lain yaitu kendala jaringan dan kesulitan menemukan media tersebut."

("The hurdles, or the difficulties I experienced when listening to podcasts or other materials are the difficulties with the connection, and the difficulty of finding the media.")

As previously mentioned, Technical difficulties concern itself with difficulties encountered by the participants of the study that are related to the technicalities of the activity. These difficulties are present—and are taken into account as the extensive listening activities being carried out by the participants are under the confines of the material being sourced from online resources. The findings indicated that when it comes to technical difficulties, poor internet connection (resulting in buffering video/audio) and playback errors are the most prevalent technical difficulties encountered by the participants. The sentiment of having these technical difficulties are shared by approximately 30% of the participants involved in the study.

Motivational difficulties

Albeit being the comparatively smallest number of occurring difficulty that surfaces in the questionnaire and interviews (by only summing up to a total of 22%), this difficulty is still worthy to be discussed, as it remains a factor that plays in the grand scheme of encountered difficulties in extensive listening activities. Motivational difficulties concern themselves with difficulties that pose a challenge in a student's motivation and focus to follow through in their extensive listening activities. For comprehension-related difficulties, the factor that unanimously induces it is mainly centered around how the material is being delivered. Example of responses that voice these difficulties are provided below:

"...cara penyampaian yang membosankan, dan penyampaian yang tidak jelas/ terkesan mumbling."

("...Boring delivery, and the delivery is unintelligible/felt like mumbling.")

"Sejauh ini kendala yang dialami adalah dari podcast itu sendiri. Seperti saat pembawaannya datar atau materinya yang kurang menarik, saya sangat cepat kehilangan minat untuk lanjut mendengarkan."

("So far, the problem is from within the podcast itself. Like when the delivery is flat or the material is uninteresting, I very quickly lose interest in listening to it further.")

"Kendala saya Ketika mendengarkan podcast yakni, bosan dan kesal, tidak dapat dipungkiri bosan dan kesal adalah alasan terkuat yang menyulitkan saya."

("The hurdle when listening to podcasts for me is being bored and annoyed, it is undeniable that boredom and annoyance are the strongest reasons that make it difficult for me.")

3. *Students' coping mechanisms*

Coping mechanisms here mean ways of how students involved in the study cope with the difficulties in comprehending their selected listening material in their extensive listening activities. The coping mechanisms are divided into two ways, one being repetition of their extensive listening material, and two, enlistment of subtitles and/or transcripts of their selected extensive listening material. Both of these coping mechanisms and their example will be elaborated below, and cases of co-occurrences will also be discussed.

a.

Repetition of the material

Repetition of material is quite self-explanatory. It simply means that the way these students cope with the difficulty is by the repetition of listening to the material until they deem that they understood the material, and or/ what is being spoken by the speakers there. Sixteen students (Approximately 70%) have shown that repetition of their listening material is their preferred method of coping with the difficulties. Some examples are listed below:

"saya biasanya mendengarkan berulang kali sampai saya mengerti."

("I usually listen over and over again until I understand.")

"Biasanya saya akan mendengarkan podcast/sumber lain tersebut secara berulang-ulang hingga saya bisa memahami topik yang dibicarakan."

("Usually I will listen to the podcast/other source over and over again until I can understand the topic being discussed.")

"Apabila ada kata yang belum diketahui, saya harus mencari script podcast tersebut pada platform google kalau tidak ada, saya mengulang perkataan pembicaranya pada podcastnya berkali-kali."

("If there is a word that I haven't known, I have to look for the podcast script on the Google platform. If it's not there, I repeat what the speaker said on the podcast again and again.")

Enlistment of subtitles and/or transcripts

Enlistment of subtitles and/or transcripts means that the way these students cope with the difficulty is by using the aid of subtitles and/or transcripts of their extensive listening materials so that they could understand the material, and or/ what is being spoken by the speakers there. Seven students (Approximately 30%) have shown that enlistment of subtitles and/or transcripts is their preferred method of coping with the difficulties. Some examples are listed below:

"Mencari alternatifnya seperti mencari teks pembicara di website resmi sumber video. Seperti contoh Ted Talks di YouTube biasanya menyediakan link untuk membaca teks yang dibawakan narasumber dalam video."

("Looking for alternatives like looking for the speaker's text on the official website of the video source. For example, Ted Talks on YouTube usually provides a link to read the text presented by the speaker in the video.")

"...Namun, setelah 3 kali pengulangan dan isi video yang saya dengar belum cukup jelas, maka saya akan mengaktifkan subtitle berbahasa Inggris."

("...However, if after 3 repetitions and the content of the video I am hearing is still not clear enough, I will then turn on English subtitles.")

"...Dan cara saya mengatasi kesulitan ketika mendengarkan podcast yaitu dengan menggunakan transcript text untuk memahami percakapan dalam podcast tersebut..."

("...And the way I overcome difficulties when listening to podcasts is to use the transcript of the text to understand the conversations in the podcast...")

Co-occurrences found

Throughout the interview and questionnaires, three co-occurrences in regards to the way students cope with difficulties they encounter in extensive listening appear. The three found co-occurrences include both repetition of the material and enlistment of transcript and/or subtitles as a way of coping with the difficulties that these students encountered. The three co-occurrence excerpts are provided below:

"Biasanya saya akan mendengarkan podcast/sumber lain tersebut secara berulang-ulang hingga saya bisa memahami topik yang dibicarakan. Apabila masih terdapat kosa kata yang belum dimengerti, saya akan

memperkirakannya dan menghubungkannya dengan topik yang dibahas. Namun jika terdapat script audio atau subtitle, saya akan melihatnya dan mencari tahu arti dari kosa kata yang belum saya ketahui."

("Usually I will listen to the podcast/other source over and over again until I can understand the topic being discussed. If there is still a vocabulary that is not understood, I will estimate it and relate it to the topic discussed. But if there is an audio script or subtitles, I will look at it and find out the meaning of the vocabulary that I don't know.")

"Saya selalu mencari transcript dari podcast yang saya dengar atau mendengarkan 2x audio tersebut, yang pertama tanpa subtitle dan yang kedua saya membaca transkripnya."

("I always look for transcripts of podcasts that I listen to or listen to twice the audio, the first without subtitles and the second I read the transcript.")

"Sebelum masuk ke podcast, waktu yang paling banyak saya habiskan ialah untuk mencari sumber betul-betul saya tertarik dengan sumber tersebut. Kemudian, saya akan mendengarkannya berulang semisal 2-5 kali. Karena ketika diulang, akan ada tambahan kata-kata yang dapat dipahami sehingga isi dari podcast tersebut lebih tertangkap jelas. Namun, setelah 3 kali pengulangan dan isi video yang saya dengar belum cukup jelas, maka saya akan mengaktifkan subtitle berbahasa Inggris."

("Before getting into podcasts, I spent most of the time looking for sources I was really interested in. Then, I will listen to it over and over again like 2-5 times. Because when repeated, there will be additional words that can be understood so that the content of the podcast is more clearly captured. However, after 3 repetitions and the content of the video I hear is not clear enough, then I will turn on English subtitles.")

From the provided excerpt samples, it can be inferred that there exists a connection between the two coping mechanisms. The first coping mechanism, the repetition of the extensive listening material, has the tendency to be the first coping mechanism utilized by the participants in the event where they think they were unable to comprehend the extensive listening materials that they are listening to. The second coping mechanism, the enlistment of subtitles and/or transcripts have a tendency to be chosen under the circumstances where repetition is deemed insufficient to fully

comprehend the extensive listening materials that the participants are currently listening to.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion to the aforementioned findings and discussions, the difficulties that are faced by EFL students in extensive listening activities can be divided into three major parts. The three parts are comprehension difficulties, technical difficulties, and motivational difficulties. Comprehension difficulties on its own are mainly induced by three key factors, which are the range of vocabulary being used in the extensive listening material being listened to (approx. 57% of cases), the accent of speakers who are speaking in the material (approx. 30% of cases), and the rate of their speech (approx. 17% of cases). The latter two factors are in-line with the findings of Renandya (2011) that stated that speech rate in spoken information could still be perceived as being too fast by beginner language learners, and as when words are woven in a speech, they will oftentimes undergo (up to some extent, radical) phonological changes (e.g. modification, reduction, et cetera), meaning that word boundaries would get blurry, as in some words could seemingly "blend" with other words in certain dialects or speech rates. Technical difficulties as the name suggests means that the difficulties encountered by the participants of the study are related to the technicalities of the activity. As the nature of the materials used are online, the difficulties mainly concern themselves with hurdles related to online material technicalities, like connection problems and audio playback problems. These technical difficulties are encountered in approximately 30% of the cases. Motivational difficulties are induced mainly by how the extensive listening material is delivered by the speaker. Among the three, this difficulty is the least-encountered, amounting to just approximately 22% of cases. Flat and boring delivery are the prominent complaints listed by the participants of the research, and it tampers with their motivation in carrying out the extensive listening activities. The participants cope with these difficulties mainly using two ways, repeating the materials that they are listening to, and by enlisting the aid of transcripts and/or subtitles. Co-occurrences of these two coping strategies are found, where the latter serves as a consequence to the former not being viable enough to attend comprehension of the material being listened to.

Results of this study may be applied as “heads-up” for educators who would like to employ extensive listening to their students. In other words, the findings may serve as an insight to the possibilities of difficulties encountered by the students and/or the practitioners of extensive listening activities in general. As a recommendation for a follow-up or continuation of the study, it is possible that further study in regards to EFL students’ preferred media and/or materials for extensive listening to be conducted, in order to complement the findings discovered in this study.

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