

OPTIMIZING LISTENING EXPOSURE IN LISTENING CLASSES THROUGH LISTENING REPORTS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstrak

Salah satu penyebab rendahnya tingkat kemahiran menyimak adalah minimnya frekuensi pajanan dengan materi menyimak dalam proses pembelajaran bahasa. Akibatnya, ketrampilan mahasiswa tidak berkembang secara optimal. Untuk mengatasi masalah tersebut diterapkan laporan menyimak pad kelas Menyimak I dan II di Jurusan Sastra Inggris UGM. Mahasiswa harus mengumpulkan 10 laporan dari aktivitas menyimak di luar kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Laporan menyimak ternyata efektif untuk memacu motivasi mahasiswa dalam meningkatkan ketrampilan menyimak. Tugas tersebut menciptakan suasana belajar yang aktif dan mandiri. Muncul beberapa kendala dalam penerapannya, namun keuntungan yang dirasakan baik oleh mahasiswa maupun dosen jauh lebih banyak sehingga model ini dapat dilanjutkan di masa-masa yang akan datang.

Katakunci: pajanan, laporan menyimak, motivasi

A. Introduction

Competence in any language skill cannot be achieved without practice and gradual development. Its achievement needs efforts and patience because the result is not immediately gained. Unfortunately, too many learners are impatient and often overlook “practice” because they want to be good at it in an instant. Some people are also misled by a myth that if one could speak well, one will be good at listening, and similarly if one is good at reading, one will be good at writing. Quite oftentimes,

however, one's speaking skill is already on an intermediate level, but his listening skill is still on an elementary level.

Success in language learning is determined by a number of factors. Harmer (1986: 3-6) puts motivation at the top priority; if a learner really wants to learn he or she will succeed whatever the circumstances are under which he or she studies. Further, he separates motivation into two main types: extrinsic motivation, which is concerned with factors outside the classroom, and intrinsic motivation, which is concerned with what takes place in the classroom. Both have strong correlation to one another in that what happens in the classroom will have an important effect on students who are already in some way extrinsically motivated.

The application of the listening report in the listening classes aims at increasing extrinsic motivation through a task that triggers the student's motivational drive. Harmer (1986) suggests that it is the teacher's job to set goals and tasks at which most of his or her students can be successful or rather tasks which he or she could realistically expect the students to be able to achieve. It is also to encourage students to use authentic materials (songs, news, and movies) that bring students into contact with language as it is used in its culture to meet actual communication needs (Melvin and Stout in Rivers, 1987). Meanwhile, by writing the reports, they have experience in creating messages from what they hear, since comprehension is a process of creation (Rivers in Rivers, 1987).

A study was conducted by assigning ten reports in a semester. There was only one group for the study. The reports were evaluated to find out the students' preference for listening material, progress, and intensity in completing the task. As they administered the task completely on their own, the control was carried out mainly by comparing their reports with the result from a controlled task conducted in the classroom. At the end of the semester students were given closed and open questionnaires to find out their response to the assignment.

This paper is divided into four parts: part A, the introduction; part B, a description of the listening report; part C, the findings and discussion; and part D, the conclusion. The appendix contains a sample of listening reports which shows the interaction between students and the teacher.

B. Listening Reprt

Listening Comprehension at the English Department of the Gadjah Mada University is given in 4 semesters: Listening A, B, C, and D. According to Valette (1967) the objectives should cover all skills of listening, which require proficiency in three areas: discrimination, retention, and comprehension. The last area is comprehension of many kinds of listening texts of different levels of difficulty. However, with one credit semester unit (limited time allocation), English Department students will get only a general outline of listening techniques. It does not give enough time to apply the techniques intensively on different types of material under the supervision of the instructor in class. Another disadvantage is that students pay less attention or give smaller effort in a one-credit subject, as they usually think that it does not affect their GPA much.

Lack of formal enforcement has also made the students at the English Department abandon the facilities available in the SELTU (Staff of English Language Training Unit) and LC (Language Center) Libraries. Moreover, it has been a long-time tradition that the teacher hardly gives students assignments to be completed outside the class. As soon as the listening class is over, everything is over, too. Lazy students are happy because they have to do anything like turning in papers while keener students are not encouraged to be active outside. Suggestions to practice listening, as always, will be easily forgotten.

The listening report is designed as skill enforcement in Listening Comprehension A and B. If reading comprehension enjoys great

advantage from Book Reports A, B, and C, which are compulsory and designed as intensive reading activities to enforce reading techniques and skills acquired in Reading Comprehension A, B, C, and D, listening comprehension does not have such support. With this formal enforcement, students become externally motivated to read. Similarly, with the listening report students will be externally motivated to listen more.

The listening report is in fact an integrated skill development. It is intended to motivate students to practice not only their listening skill but their writing skill as well. As suggested, listening without a purpose is nonsense. By having to write something out of it they create for themselves a purpose. Similarly, by having to submit the reports they will put harder effort to produce pieces of good writing. They will consider their sentence structure, grammar, and choice of words. This is quite effective in that students have compulsion to write: without this, most of our students are reluctant to practice writing. And by giving a higher grade to those who write with their own words the writer encourages them to practice paraphrasing. Paraphrasing will be very useful when they write a synopsis for songs, or when they analyse poems in the Poetry class. It also sets a good habit for writing 'on one's own', which our students are not used to.

It is also intended to be an integrated way to develop vocabulary: students must write the key words/phrases that help understand the passage. The writer wants the students to always keep in mind that to understand the target language greatly depends on one's knowledge of vocabulary, vocabulary in the broadest sense (Valette, 1967).

As part of the assessment for the final grade, the students are required to write 10 reports. They are free to decide the material to listen to. They are suggested to make use of the facilities such as the TV, cassettes, and tape recorder available in the SELTU and LC Libraries. They are also encouraged to listen to radio programs/news and songs, or watch TV and movies. With the availability of CDs from CD rentals,

they have a wide variety of choices ranging from classics to cartoons. They can watch, if they wish, films developed from great classical novels and plays to enrich their knowledge in literature. Or, if they just want to enjoy themselves, comedies and cartoons are so entertaining. The writer is sure that this activity offers fun.

Concerning the material, the writer encourages students to use different materials for the listening report. In accordance with the contents of Listening Comprehension A, which focus on topics related to real-life needs and interests of students such as daily routines, holidays, directions, flight announcements, telephone messages, reservations of hotel accommodation, descriptions (jobs/locations of objects/people's physical characteristic, etc.), the teacher encourages them to listen to any material they like. Another consideration is that it is still in the stage of introducing students to different types of material and topics. In Listening Comprehension B, however, the teacher encourages the students to focus more on TV and radio programs to be in line with the syllabus contents, i.e., topics such as news, documentaries, sports commentaries, interviews, and short lectures/talks on a variety of subjects. Trying to be consistent with this, the teacher also gives group assignments of making a synopsis of the morning news broadcast by TV stations in three days successively.

Listening reports are kept in a folder and put together in a box in the library. Each student has an individual folder, and at anytime they can add new reports or check and take back the assessed ones for revision or responding to the teacher's comments. The comments are made while the teacher is doing corrections and the evaluation. The teacher's comment is one way to create interaction between the teacher and students. It sometimes takes the form of a question for clarification, reminder, criticism, or idea that the students should respond to. In turn, this gives the students a feeling of appreciation and meaningfulness. Without feedback from the teacher, students may become less motivated and think of no need to be serious. It also brings the students to peer-

group discussions to correct mistakes or to revise the work. Grading for listening reports is based on the student's level of proficiency, i.e., if a student on an intermediate level chooses materials for an elementary level, however excellent his work is, he will not get a maximum grade. Similarly, those of an elementary level but trying to choose material for an intermediate or higher level will not be able to complete the task well. It is the teacher's responsibility to remind them by, for example, writing it in the 'teacher's comment' part. It is not difficult for the writer to know each student's proficiency because he teaches the subject himself and often discusses their difficulties and other related matters with them. The students themselves have plenty of sources in the library to enable them select the appropriate ones.

The aspects of assessment include the type of material, level of difficulty, and quality of synopsis. At the end of the semester, the variety of the material is evaluated to see whether or not they use different kinds of material. The writer supports their opinion that using different materials make them exposed to different styles of speech, pronunciation, vocabulary, etc. Reports of different types of material get a higher grade than those of one or two types only. An appropriate level also becomes one of the considerations, especially when the students choose materials from a lower level of difficulty than their actual proficiency level. The synopsis will be seen from its general content, grammatical aspects, and degree of originality. A higher grade is given for paraphrasing and original work.

The grade is not given in numbers but in terms of 'excellent', 'very good', 'good', and 'fair'. Later, for the final grade, the teacher converts them into numbers using the following equivalence: excellent = 90-95; very good = 85-89; good = 80-84; fair = 75-79. No grade lower than 75 is given because it is given more as an appreciation for their accomplishment. If a student turns in low-quality reports, he or she will receive the work back with a comment for revision. The teacher offers assistance by inviting this student for consultation. On his or her paper

the teacher gives hints and suggestions for improvement.

C. Findings and Discussion

The listening report is a new activity in Listening A and B classes for both the students and the teacher although it might not be new in other classes (e.g., writing a journal every week in the General English Course writing class). This brings enthusiasm, motivation, and also problems. The findings are worth presenting here. Things that increase student's skill are classified into the advantages, while those that create obstacles or negative effects are put under the disadvantages.

1. Advantages

The advantages from the application of the listening report are as follows.

- a. It allows the students to explore and get exposed to a variety of text: songs, stories, dialogues, news, films, cartoons, etc., some of which are difficult to be conducted in the classroom because of lack of facilities (e.g., VCD players and song files). Students act in a way to supplement what the teacher is trying to accomplish but it seems impossible because of limited time allocation. According to Geddes (Johnson and Morrow, 1981: 79), the teacher sometimes wants the listening text selected for the students to serve as a model for the students' own production. Text of this kind is not sufficient, however, to prepare the student for all his or her eventual communicative needs.
- b. The activity combines listening and writing skills. Listening cannot be isolated from other language skills as implied by Geddes (Johnson and Morrow, 1981: 78) when she proposes 'an implication for a teaching method: we cannot restrict our focus for speaking or listening but must consider both skills together'. In this study the writer proposes a different combination,

listening and writing skills.

- c. The activity boosts the student's practice. Language teachers should be aware of the fact that they cannot teach a student to listen. According to Geddes (Johnson and Morrow, 1981: 78), a teacher can only help him to practice and learn. With a minimum of 10 reports, students will practice using their skill at least 10 times in one semester. In some cases, they listen more before they finally make up their mind to choose a certain material.
- d. The activity builds up the students' independence and confidence. It requires students to be entirely on their own although at times they may consult with the teacher. The teacher, however, tries not to interrupt their practice to let them develop confidence in their abilities. When they wish, students can select tapes according to their interests, their linguistic ability, and the time available.
- e. It introduces active learning and self-discovery. This is closely related to point d. While listening, students may encounter problems that hinder understanding of the text. To solve the problems they look up references such as grammar books and the dictionary, or consult peers or the teacher. Quite oftentimes, students become engaged in a peer-group discussion to discuss the comments or improve their work. Active learning and self-discovery is a combined method of learning that has proven to be the most effective learning.

In the returned questionnaires (32 from 40, or 80%), most write that students perceive the importance and benefits, so they are enthusiastic in doing the task.

Table 1: Importance of the listening Report

Importance	Percentage (%)			
	1	2	3	4
Importance of the listening report	0	0	16	84

The numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 show the rank of importance: from the lowest (1) to the highest (4).

They write that the task is important because it

- a. develops the skill (and practice is very important because 'we can monitor our ability in listening by writing the synopsis'),
- b. supports the presentation of materials in the classroom,
- c. enhances the listening skill/enforces the materials taught in the classroom,
- d. enhances the listening skill in simple and effective ways,
- e. increases self-motivation for/frequency of listening practice,
- f. increases the final grade,
- g. improves the grammar and structure by rewriting what have been listened to,
- h. practices writing, using grammar, etc. while listening,
- i. makes students used to songs, dialogues, and news uttered by native speakers,
- j. increases vocabulary, and
- k. broadens knowledge (general, cultural, etc.).

Table 2: Rating of Benefit

Benefit	Percentage (%)			
	1	2	3	4
Vocabulary development		9	49	42
Mastery of grammar/sentence structure		28	47	25
Enhanced self motivation		22	41	38
Mastery of idiomatic expressions		13	34	53
Total	0	2	171	158

2. Disadvantages

In general students are not well informed about the levels of their own proficiency and the listening materials they are using, so they have problems in choosing the appropriate materials. Unlike the book collection, the cassettes in the library are not labelled according to their levels. The books are labelled with different colours to show the level. For example, Level One (Preparatory) uses a yellow band (500 words), another level a green band (850 words), and still another level a blue band (1,200 words). Meanwhile, TV and radio programs are of a mixture -some parts may be easy to follow, others are difficult.

Apart from that, the listening report also brings disadvantages. However, it should not discourage its further application.

- a. It tempts irresponsible students to cheat. The absence of the teacher's supervision tempts some students to cheat. They do not listen to the material but look at others' work. They make slight changes to produce slightly different synopsis. Or, by reading the transcript (some cassettes, especially song albums, are accompanied with transcription) they write the synopsis.
- b. It gives a heavy work load for the teacher. The listening class

consists of 40 students, and if each student submits 10 files, it comes to a total of 400 reports to be assessed. Some students are indeed so enthusiastic that they make more than fifteen reports. The writer spends weeks to complete the assessment because many students like to put off their work until just before the final exam (approaching the deadline) instead of turning it in every week. Procrastinators bring another problem: no time for revision or responding to the teacher's comments.

3. Attitudes Toward Listening Reports

It is evident that students in general show a very positive attitude toward this assignment, as they perceive the benefits. However, the degree of attitude varies, ranging from very enthusiastic to silent rejection. The following 'cases' should describe the details.

Case 1: This student realizes his weakness. He realizes that he is weaker than most of his peers, so he works very hard in making his listening report. He wants to cover his weakness in the mid-semester test and final test by doing his best in making the reports. He shows high motivation and enthusiasm, and can complete the tasks relatively well because he selects the material to the level of his proficiency (elementary level). He even types the work; nobody else does the same. His enthusiasm strengthens the writer's confidence in applying this method.

Case 2: This student turns in more reports than the minimum required. Several (female) students demonstrate very good motivation and enthusiasm by turning in more reports than the minimum number required. The reward is worthwhile pursuing: if students submit additional reports, they will get additional credits. At the end of the semester, ten best files out of the total reports will be considered for the final grade. They really want to get this reward, and the teacher should keep the promise.

Case 3: This student procrastinates, turning in the reports by the deadline. Few (especially male) students turn in their reports just before

the deadline. One student even asks for more time to finish his reports. It is a bit disappointing to find out that he remains low motivated and keeps on putting off his work in spite of the teacher's hard effort. Late reports will be accepted only with one condition: the student agrees on the reduction of grade as a punishment. Perhaps, it will be better if the teacher is not too lenient in order to make the students more disciplined.

Case 4: This student makes less than the minimum required. Two students fail to fulfill the minimum requirement of 10 reports. The reason is that they forget to check their file, and miss two. Although understandable, it is intolerable. Everyone is quite well informed about the rules - to check the file: if there are comments, they must give responses. They have to accept the penalty: reduction in the final grade.

Case 5: Another kind of student makes no report at all. Two students (in two semesters) do not make their reports. It is really disappointing. The reason is somewhat surprising: one student says that she is sure that she will fail, so she just gives up. The other simply says nothing after being explained about the consequence. Whatever their reason is, the teacher must comply with the set-up rule: no final grade despite excellent mid-semester test and final examination results.

4. Materials for the Listening Report

The writer encourages the students to use any material they are interested in, and expects that they will explore as much variety of materials as possible. The following tables present their choices of material for reporting and the rating of their preferences:

Table 3. Choice of materials

Material	Total	Percentage
Songs	24	75
Films	22	69
TV news/bulletins	14	44
Dialogues/conversations	13	41
Cartoons	12	38
Stories	11	34
Radio news	6	18
Lectures	5	16

This table shows that songs, films, TV news, and dialogues rank the highest for the following reasons:

- a. they are relatively easy to understand (simple structure, not too fast),
- b. they are supplied with visualisation to help understanding,
- c. they give information on cultural background and common language,
- d. they give illustrations of how the language is used in real situations,
- e. they are interesting and entertaining, and
- f. they are the most accessible.

Table 5. Consideration for Choosing the Material

Consideration	Percentage (%)			
	1	2	3	4
Interesting/Entertaining	0	9	39	52
New (Information, vocabulary, etc.)	0	9	42	48
Easy to understand/simple	3	21	42	33
Having been used before	24	30	27	18
Challenging	3	43	45	9
No specific reason	69	18	9	3

This table indicates that students always choose listening materials with a purpose related to either its entertaining quality, novelty, or level of difficulty. Few show ignorance of such considerations.

In Listening Comprehension B, their consideration grows more complex. They begin learning to choose materials that have relevance with the materials used in the classroom. Because the syllabus contents in Listening B are more focused on news and commentaries, the students take TV and radios as the major sources. It is interesting to learn their actual perception of the 'relevance' of the materials that they select for the listening reports with the materials used in the classroom.

Table 6: Perception of Relevance

Consideration	Percentage (%)			
	1	2	3	4
Relevance				
Of topic	0	55	33	12
Of vocabulary	0	15	58	27
Of grammatical aspect	0	15	64	18
Of source	0	42	45	12
No idea	79	3	6	9

This table tells us that the students put heavier weighing on vocabulary and grammatical aspect, rather than source and topic as the factors to determine the relevance. Apparently, they put aside practicality, i.e., source and topic, which are much easier to identify. It implies that they still hold the traditional view on language learning that grammar plays the most important role. The writer thinks, however, that topic should occupy the top consideration for choosing the material, as in listening it is not the grammar which learners should concentrate on. The listening skill requires the ability to get the idea/message being

conveyed, not the ability to identify the grammatical forms.

5. Variety of Materials

All students agree that listening to various material is important for many reasons. The following presents the major reasons why they choose different materials for their listening reports:

- a. to get information from different media and different ways of presentation,
- b. to get used to listening to different qualities of pronunciation and sources,
- c. to avoid monotony and boredom,
- d. to give more inputs,
- e. to enrich the skill and creativity,
- f. to cover all aspects of listening (related to item 1 above), and
- g. to learn more vocabulary.

6. Teacher's Comment/Correction

This is in line with Harmer's suggestion (1983:140) that comment should be made about whether the work is interesting, or succeeds in its purpose, or where the work is effective and where it is not. Most students support the inclusion of the teacher's comment in the evaluation of their report. They see its importance for their skill development and retention of self-motivation. This section presents students' reactions to the teacher's comment.

- a. The teacher's comment should be more detailed because it serves as a feedback.
- b. The teacher's comment should be given a follow-up (but it is not clear what kind of follow-up).
- c. The teacher's comment/correction gives students a feeling of being appreciated and meaningful.
- d. The teacher's comment helps student monitor their progress.
- e. The teacher's comment helps to develop further skill by giving

suggestion on what level/type of material to be used for the next file.

To the teacher's comment, some students give immediate response by writing it on the other side of the file. Other students prefer to respond by directly talking to the teacher. This makes it possible to discuss it with them in more detail, and they become open to sharing their problems. Some others do not respond to the comment at all, neither orally nor in writing. It is all right, because some comments are made to be responded to in action.

D. Conclusion

The application of the listening report in Listening Comprehension A and B is indeed beneficial for both the students and the teacher. It provides fairness and clear measurement in the assessment of student progress, and students regard the teacher as being fair and objective. It serves as an enforcement of the skill and strategy taught in the classroom. Most importantly it builds students' awareness of that effective learning is not something to be done in a single time and then stop. Instead, it must be a continuous effort to achieve desirable results. In detail, the advantages have been presented in the findings. The writer is fully aware that this application is still far from perfect. Some students still seem reluctant to do it, showing that this method has not been very successful to motivate these students. Apart from that, due to heavy workload the writer cannot give adequate comments on each file. Students demand more detailed comments from the teacher as useful feedback for their progress.

Therefore, the writer is thinking about the possibility of peer correction to reduce the workload, and which in itself can be classed as a communicative activity (Harmer, 1983:140). Suggestion to give group work for listening report is echoing in the writer's mind. It is very beneficial in at least two ways: for the teacher it reduces the workload, and for the students it provides opportunity to work in groups where the weak ones get assistance from

the strong ones (mutual cooperation). So far, the writer has accomplished only one group work, and it has worked out very well. It is worth trying for more in the next semesters.

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Source : Story from record cassette, sent by my uncle in America (no text)

Title : Wonderful Thanksgiving

Key vocabulary: Turkey (n)

To stuff (v)

Synopsis:

On Thanksgiving morning all women would get up early to begin cooking. They stuff the turkey with bread and onions and then roast it. They also make a dozen pumpkin pies.

On Thanksgiving Day everyone is always waiting for somebody to give pieces of food. Generally, before thanksgiving Day comes, everybody works to prepare for this day, cleans every part of the house, gets all the extra rooms ready for relatives, washes all the best clothes which are called 'Sunday best dress and suits'

NB: my cousin records this when she remembered about the last Thanksgiving Day in America

Teacher's comment:

Is that your cousin's voice or somebody else's?

It is very interesting, may I borrow it to be played in the classroom? Share your experience.

The student who writes the first report writes a short response under the teacher's comment: "I'm sorry sir, I can't. She won't let me do it. It's just for me as a close sister. About the language, it is not too formal". The response from the student who writes the second report is neatly written on the overleaf, and for her immediate response and good revision the teacher gives 'very good' credit.