

Increasing Students' Vocabulary through Comprehensible Input using Extensive Listening Sources

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THE AIM OF THIS PAPER IS TO DEMONSTRATE THROUGH THE USE OF Extensive Listening sources how teachers can facilitate the increase of students' comprehensible input and thereby increase their vocabulary. This is done through a selection of websites, smartphone applications and podcasts, the main benefit of this is taking the learning outside the classroom and engaging the students with interesting meaningful input. As the students can access the various sources through the use of their mobile phones, tablets or computers the activities can be done in the classroom, at home or a combination of both; thereby helping them acquire English in a natural, familiar method while also guiding the students to becoming autonomous learners. The main reason for taking this approach was the lack of up to date and interesting input that was available through the many traditional textbooks. In today's modern society where people in general, not just students, are becoming increasingly more demanding in the speed of the information available to them, it seems reticent to not make use of the plethora of available media accessible through the many devices that the majority of students and institutions have at their disposal.

Introduction

Listening capability is an essential part of any collective language skills, it is something we often do in our first language (L1) subconsciously and yet when we try to

do it in another language (L2), we as teachers, try to teach certain listening skills or techniques to aid our students. However, this is often not even necessary, as by the time students reach University age they will have been listening, in their L1 for at least 18 years, that is not to say we should completely eschew teaching listening practices and techniques, instead, they should be planned and effective teaching rather than simply being an afterthought of a regular non-listening class. In addition, as educators, we should be giving our students as many opportunities as possible for comprehensible input, building on that knowledge and then moving on to the next stage, as outlined by Krashen's *i+1* hypothesis (Krashen, 1982). Here in lies the problem, finding material that is engaging, interesting and accessible to all of our students. As listening is part of any foreign language classroom where it is either something as simple as listening to the instructions of the teacher, listening to a classmate or something more explicit, such as a listening task from the textbook it is quite often disregarded as something that just happens. Yet as Harmer (2012) explains, the more students listen, the better they will get at listening, so our goal in a dedicated listening classroom is to get them to listen as much as possible. This however brings two challenges, firstly, finding materials that students want to engage with and secondly, being able to find resources that are a suitable level for everyone. In language teaching terms there are two main types of listening, extensive listening (EL) and intensive listening (IL). EL can be defined as learners doing a great deal of comprehensible, easy, accessible and enjoyable listening (Chang and Millett, 2014). IL on the other hand, as its name suggests is more focussed and brings the students' attention to differences in sound, structure and lexical choices (Rost, 2011). Put more simply, EL is something we do for pleasure and IL is when we are listening for specific item(s) of information.

Harmer (2012) also points out that, as with extensive reading, extensive listening should be enjoyable and at a level that the student can understand 95% of what they are hearing. In a regular university classroom, the teacher can expect student numbers from ten, up to almost forty, this then presents a particularly difficult challenge in trying to find

materials that all students will *i*) want to engage with and *ii*) be at a level that they can all mostly understand. Unfortunately, textbooks by their very nature fail to promote either of these two crucial points, even a textbook that has just become available, will be at the very least, six months old simply due to the lengthy editing and printing process. This will very rarely appeal to all the students in a class and even the best, ability streamed set of students will usually have some degree of varying language ability, some will find it too easy, some too difficult and although you may catch the majority of the students in the middle range, you risk 'losing' the students at either end of the bell curve. Plus, it is extremely rare to have a set of students that have a similar level of language ability and the same interests.

In order to counter these points, a listening portfolio that the students build up, class by class is far more engaging and able to meet the needs of the differing ability levels in one classroom. By using technology that the students are familiar with and up to date resources that they can mostly understand, approximately 90% according to the *i+1* hypothesis, also helps to promote autonomous learning. This paper will show how through the use of a variety of resources the students can see, class by class how they build up their own resources, have time for reflection and also quality time for just listening, to interesting and engaging English material in the classroom. As Schmidt (2016) and Nation and Newton (2009) elude to, most listening in the classroom is focussed on testing listening and not teaching listening and this would not be tolerated for reading, writing or speaking and should therefore not be the norm for listening. So simply by giving students ample opportunity to just listen to the target language and not worry about testing them we are moving away from this paradigm.

Methodology

One of the many benefits of using this approach is that it is accessible to students of many ability levels, from A2 to C2 (CEFR), in addition, as there is very little restriction placed on the students regarding what websites, applications or podcasts they use, the

students choose their own level of material. If a source is too difficult then they choose a different source, if something is too easy then they choose a more difficult option. At first, the teacher is the main resource for recommending which website, podcast or application to use, however, as the students gradually become accustomed to the process they can then start self-selecting their own material. The only real stipulation being that it is in English, they must explain why they chose a particular resource and what they are learning from it. For the classes related to this study, this teaching methodology has been practiced on University students, ages ranging from 18 to 25 years old, both male and female with a wide range of educational majors. A further benefit of this methodology is that students can often find websites relating to their own major studies, sports or social club or interests outside of the classroom and discover relevant interesting material to study.

Using a school's computer room is not essential but does make the whole process much smoother and easier as the teacher can easily instruct and monitor for any problems in the first class or two. After the first initial classes the students are used to the procedure and can get on with most of the tasks with little difficulty, at first however, this type of class is alien to them and they do require guidance. The class time of 90 minutes is split into three sections, for the first 20 minutes, a standard listening textbook is used, mainly for students to practice some intensive listening and become aware of any useful listening techniques that they may find useful. For the next 60 minutes a website, smartphone application, podcast or sometimes a combination of all three are introduced. Depending on the resource given, there will usually be an associated task on paper (tables 1-3), which they add to their portfolios. This has several functions, firstly, it focuses their learning and gives them something that they can keep as a record of what they did during the class. Secondly, they must record what they liked about the resource and anything they disliked. This is vitally important, as every student is different and what one likes may well be different to another student, additionally, as teachers it is essential that we receive as much feedback as possible to continually improve the learning experience. If there is

overwhelming feedback that students do not like using a particular website or application, then we can choose to omit it from our bank of resources or use it as a secondary source if required. Likewise, if there is extremely positive feedback from students on an application, website or podcast (as happened with lyricstraining.com) then we can introduce it at an earlier stage of the course to enable students to get the maximum usage out of it. Lastly, the final ten minutes of the class are devoted to student reflection. This is both a self-reflection of what they have listened to during the class but also a chance to discuss with their peers about their in-class listening experience. This is valuable in two ways, firstly as the students are recording their self-reflection notes, after the listening session, it means that they are focussing solely on their listening task, something that is not afforded them in many other classes. Secondly, even if students are on the same website or using the same application they may be doing a different activity or listening to a different story, in this way it is easy for students to recommend activities to each other. As my feedback and results show (see results section), students are 88% more likely to listen to recommendations from other students. Finally, as for trying to get students to be more self-aware and independent learners, homework is set at the end of each class. However, the normal requisite of doing *X* amount of questions or *Task A, B, C* have been replaced with time recommendations. For example, the students will be asked to listen to a podcast of their choice for a minimum of 30 minutes, once they have finished listening to their selection they then have to record in their files what they listened to and some basic notes on the content, such as how useful it was, what they learned from it, would they recommend it, just to choose three examples. By allowing the students to choose the content of their homework and not forcing them to do a certain activity, makes it seem less of a laborious task and empowers the students for their own learning and helps them on the path to becoming more independent learners. Below are three portfolio samples taken from a course comprising 15 classes.

Table 1. Portfolio Sample 1

<u>Portfolio #2</u>	
Did you find any other useful websites?	
esl-lab.com, elllo.org, newsinlevels.com, bbc.co.uk, Youtube.com	
Talk with your partner, what websites did they find?	
Partner's name:	
Partner's websites:	
Podcast search: Learning English, English news, easy English	
In class activity: 1. go to http://youglish.com/	
2. in the 'search for' type 'car' > Listen to some examples of how to pronounce 'car'	
3. go down the page and look at 'Tips to improve English pronunciation'	
4. look at these other YouTube channels > Check out Rachel's English ,	
English With MisterDuncan and BBC Learn English	
Use some of these and write down what you watched and listened to:	
Today I used:	I learned:
Talk with your partner, what did they watch and listen to, what did they learn?	
For homework, spend about 30 – 40 minutes using any of the websites that you like, write down notes:	

Table 2. Portfolio Sample 2

<u>Portfolio #3</u>		
1. What websites/podcasts did you use? Why?		
2. What did you learn from listening?		
3. How long did you do Listening homework for?		
Talk with your partner, what did they do for homework?		
Today's in class listening > Lyrics training!! Lyrics are the words of a song, it's a great way to learn new English words or just practice words you already know. Go to http://lyricstraining.com/		
1. Choose an artist/song you know/like		
2. Try beginner level at first		
3. When you finish that one, choose a film/TV video		
4. Maybe also try the same video but a more difficult level		
How many videos did you watch on lyrics training?		
Artist name / film name	Song title	Score
Why did you choose these videos?		
<i>Favourite artist/want to watch the movie/favourite movie... etc</i>		
Talk with your partner, what did they watch?		
Partner's name:		
Artist name/Film name:		
Song title:		
What was their score?		
Why did they watch this?		
<u>Homework</u>		
Use lyricstraining.com, watch 4 or 5 different videos, try to spend at least 40 minutes using it.		
What did you watch?		
What was your score for each video?	How long?	

Table 3. Portfolio Sample 3

<u>Portfolio #8</u>				
What did you do for HW?		Partner's name:		
What videos/activities?		What did they do?		
Why?		How long?		
How long?				
Today's in class listening				
1. go to 'englishcentral.com/videos'				
2. choose – <i>beginner</i> level				
3. choose a topic – <i>business, media, social, travel, academic, kids</i>				
4. choose a video				
5. do the activities – <i>watch the video – learn the words – speak the lines</i>				
Next, choose some different videos, try different levels and different topics				
❖ choose a level – <i>beginner – intermediate – advanced</i>				
❖ choose some videos!				
What topics did you do?				
What videos did you do?				
What words did you learn?				
Were they interesting?				
Why did you choose these videos?				
What did your partner do?				
What topics did you do?				
What videos did you do?				
What words did you learn?				
Were they interesting?				
Why did you choose these videos?				
<u>Homework</u>				
Use the English Central website, choose 4 or 5 videos, spend about 30 – 40 minutes				

Results and Student Feedback

The ALC Net Academy 2 website is a reliable source of information as students must use their student numbers to log in to the website and there is a separate administration page where teachers can monitor students' activity. For this particular website a total time spent of one hour was set over the course of several weeks, broken up into several increments. As can be seen from the data, only three students failed to reach the goal, however seven students attained more than two hours total time spent, while the remainder of the 18 students achieved between one and two hours. Although not being able to monitor other publicly accessed websites as thoroughly as ALC Net Academy 2, the feedback received from the students and having being observed during class times, in addition to the students recording their own Listening behaviour outside of the classroom, it can be argued that the students are more willing to continue their listening activities when set recommended time limits rather than asked to do a set number of questions. With the majority of students doing far more than was required of them.

When asked which they found more useful/beneficial (Q 1 & 2 on questionnaire), the listening portfolio material was overwhelmingly chosen as a better source compared to the textbook, while 10% of students chose equal status. This is taken from three different classes with a combined student population of 102 students. While 100% of students said they would use at least one of the websites, applications or podcasts again (question 9) and that 88% of students would use a source recommended by a fellow classmate (question 7). Below are the data taken from ALC Net Academy 2 (neecana.nanzan-u.ac.jp/anet2/) at the end of a 15-class course, website introduced at class 4, student names and numbers withheld for privacy.

Table 4. Number of Students, Tasks Completed, and Total Time Spent on Website

No. of students	Tasks completed	Total time spent on website
1	46	02:59:27
2	30	02:35:16
3	38	02:29:12
4	30	02:24:22
5	36	02:21:17
6	40	02:19:07
7	20	02:13:46
8	28	01:54:45
9	30	01:54:21
10	16	01:51:29
11	24	01:49:12
12	36	01:46:45
13	16	01:40:33
14	28	01:40:17
15	34	01:38:30
16	22	01:36:36
17	26	01:29:06
18	24	01:28:25
19	20	01:27:26
20	32	01:26:35
21	30	01:13:29
22	34	01:07:38
23	32	01:07:11
24	18	01:04:23
25	12	01:03:55
26	14	00:49:33
27	8	00:42:31
28	10	00:25:30

Table 5. Listening Class Questionnaire

1. From 1-10 how beneficial was the textbook?									
☹ Not at all A lot!! ☺									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. From 1-10 how beneficial was the in-class listening activities (your portfolio)?									
☹ Not at all A lot!! ☺									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Did you enjoy this listening class?									
4. Have you had a class like this before?									
5. Is this what you expected from a listening class?									
6. Which was better for listening class?									
Textbook or Listening tasks using the PCs?									
Why?									
7. How often did you listen to something your partner / classmate recommended?									
Rarely			Sometimes				Very often		
8. Do you think your Listening skill has improved?									
☹ Not at all A lot!! ☺									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. How likely are you to use any of the websites or podcasts from this year?									
Probably never						Very likely			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Which websites / podcasts will you use the most?									
Websites					Podcasts				
1.					1.				
2.					3.				
3.					3.				
11. Would you recommend this Listening class?									
12. Any other comments about this class / textbook / teacher / Listening portfolio etc...?									

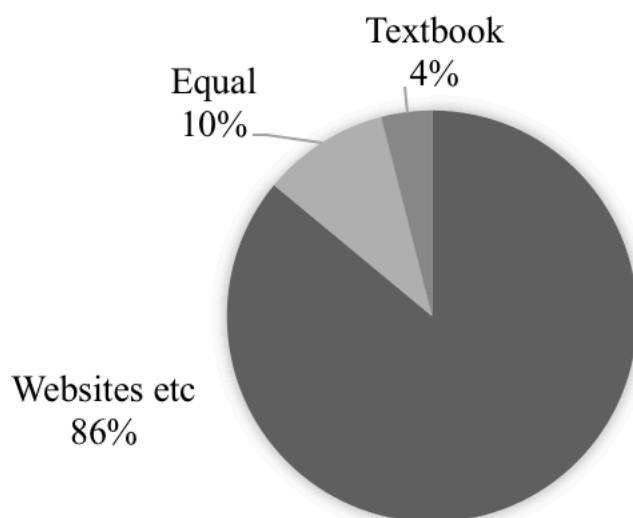


Figure 1. Textbook or Websites/apps/podcasts ($N=102$)

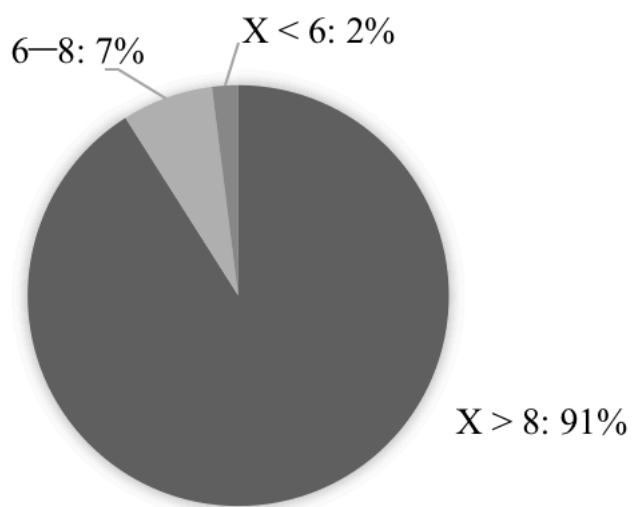


Figure 2. Listening skill improvement: Students' opinion ($N=102$)

Table 6. A Selection of Students' Comments (Question 12)

Positive	Negative
I can select my own interests	We could not interact easily with other students
Textbook was too easy so I can choose more difficult tasks	We could not change seats
*Website English was much better/important/practical	
*Was able to study/use correct / practical English	
*I wasn't tired/didn't want to sleep	

Note. *translated from Japanese.

Having only two comments that the textbook was too easy makes me consider that the level of the textbook is approximately the level of the students, again, it is very difficult to get one textbook that suits all the students in one class. Although the feedback from the first two questions stating that the non-textbook materials were more beneficial added to the positive comments received only further reinforces my stance that it is essential to use other sources. Some of the other student comments that reinforce my belief that this is the correct method for teaching listening were:

I wasn't tired / didn't want to sleep

I can select my own interest

Website English was much better / important / practical

On the negative comments from the students it is worth noting that they did also have many more positive comments for this class, but under the heading of 'any other comments' these two comments were put forward.

We could not interact easily with other students

We could not change seats

Unfortunately, these are not easily solved due to the physical nature of the computer room setup. Every student must sign in to their individual computer and the desks are arranged in pairs, therefore they are able to interact with their direct partner easily enough but cannot do so with other class members easily because of the practicalities of the computer room. It would take far too much time to get students logging out and logging back in, also there is very little desk space in the computer rooms. To try and counter these two issues, I have implemented a random assignment of seats at the start of every class, this way students know they will be sat next to somebody different every class. I have also made sure to include activities where each student will talk with their direct partner, who is sat next to them, but also that they can stand up and interact with the partner(s) who are sat behind or in front of them. Although they are still not able to freely change seats during class time they are now able to talk with up to three different class members each session. Since implementing this system, I have found that the students interact more effectively during class time and it also makes for a more positive class atmosphere. As the comments and scores received from the student feedback is far more positive than the negative aspects, I feel justified that this is the correct approach to the listening class.

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APPENDIX: WEBSITES FOR EXTENSIVE LISTENING RESOURCES

- ❖ ALC Net Academy 2 <https://neecana.nanzan-u.ac.jp/anet2/>
- ❖ Blyth, A. <http://winjeel.com/listening/>
- ❖ Elllo <http://elllo.org/>
- ❖ English Central <https://www.englishcentral.com/videos>
- ❖ Lyrics training website <https://lyricstraining.com/>
- ❖ TED Talks <https://www.ted.com/talks>

About the Author

Jaime Morrish is an English teacher at Nanzan University, an examiner for Cambridge University Assessment IELTS® and off-site language instructor and consultant for the British Council. He was born in Cardiff, Wales and grew up in an English-Welsh bilingual home. He received his double BA (hons) in Applied Linguistics and TEFL in addition to his Masters in TEFL from Swansea University while he also holds a CELTA teaching certificate from Cambridge University Assessment. Jaime has over 10 years of experience in English language teaching and throughout his career, he has been very keen to make his classes relaxed, enjoyable and to have a positive atmosphere in order to enhance the students' learning environment. The project introduced in this article is one example of such practice.

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