



Extensive Listening for Teaching English to Young EFL Learners: The Views of Asian EYL Teachers

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Introduction

Second language (L2) listening has received growing attention in the arena of L2 acquisition. Most recently, for instance, studies have given a snapshot on how learners develop their L2 pronunciation and fluency via narrow listening (Tsang, 2019) and how listening strategies help alleviate the learners' L2 listening anxiety (Fathi et al., 2020). Studies have also investigated how individual differences impact on the learners' L2 listening comprehension (Wallace, 2020) and how syntactic knowledge and vocabulary knowledge correlate with the learners' L2 listening ability (Vafae & Suzuki, 2020). However, its growing body of empirical evidence notwithstanding, L2 listening has still been the least practiced skills in most EFL formal classrooms. Some primary reasons are due to the limited allotted teaching hours available, the absence of supporting audio equipment in the class, and the lack of an emphasis placed on L2 listening in the EFL curricula. If there is a teaching focus on listening, it is mostly on training learners to correctly answer comprehension questions, not providing them with enough exposure to L2 oral input.

Fortunately, the current nature of L2 listening underscores the importance of processes (Vandergrift, 2012) that give learners space to perform their listening in a more self-regulatory way (Goh, 2018). Learners should no longer practise listening merely to prepare for the listening tests. Instead, listening practice is necessarily done individually and on a daily basis to strengthen their aural L2 competence. Instead of listening to 'artificial' texts in a laboratory-like environment, learners should be engaged in extensive listening (EL). In particular, this involves listening to any self-selected listening materials that fit to their language levels and personal interests (Renandya, 2011; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016; Waring, 2008). Through simply putting their earphones on, they can enjoy listening to their favorite stories on their smartphones while, for example, waiting for the school bus, queuing for food in the canteen, and so forth. They can also do EL at their convenience by watching their preferred YouTube videos or movies on their laptop. Learning can still happen at any time whether or not they attend the class. Through practising EL, learners can develop their L2 listening fluency (Chang et al., 2019), reinforce their L2 vocabulary knowledge (Chang,



2012), develop their L2 vocabulary (Pamuji et al., 2019) and get more familiar with oral language features (Renandya, 2011; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016).

However, although the clear benefits of EL have been reported both empirically and conceptually, extensive listening today is still highly associated with adult learners. Insights into the advantages of EL are mostly reported by studies carried out in higher-level settings. With its emphasis on listening for pleasure to easy and compelling listening materials (Renandya, 2011; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016; Waring, 2008), extensive listening could ideally be enjoyed by EFL learners of all levels. Especially for young learners who need ample exposure to oral input for their L2 development, listening pleasurably daily is indispensable.

L2 Listening in EYL Pedagogy

Listening is not a rare practice in EYL pedagogy. Some listening activities commonly practised by young learners in their EFL classrooms are listening to songs (e.g., Coyle & Gracia, 2014), listening to stories (e.g., Au et al., 2015; Leśniewska & Pichette, 2016), and listening to teacher talk (e.g., Shintani, 2014). Although lacking in popularity (e.g., Chou, 2013), listening has become a preferred practice for teaching English to young learners. For instance, in a survey involving 125 South Korean EYL teachers, listening was one of the most preferred activities for teachers (Garton, 2014). Meanwhile, for young learners themselves, listening was a source of enjoyment for their EFL learning (Muñoz, 2014).

L2 listening practice in EYL pedagogy has been empirically shown to provide young learners with several linguistic gains. Studies have shown the relevance of listening to facilitate young learners' L2 vocabulary learning (e.g., Coyle & Gracia, 2014; Leśniewska & Pichette, 2016). In a study by Coyle and Gracia (2014), twenty-five Spanish children listened to an English song they were familiar with for a total of seven times. Listening to the song with some reinforcing activities was found to hone their L2 receptive vocabulary knowledge. In addition to benefitting young learners' L2 vocabulary, the listening practice has also influenced their L2 phonological development such as accent (Au et al., 2015) and pronunciation (Trofimovich et al., 2009). In a study by Au et al. (2015), young learners from Hong Kong with an L1 Cantonese background were required to listen at home to the storybooks either in the L2 English or the L2 Putonghua. Listening to recorded stories read by native speakers was shown to help the young learners develop their L2 accent. In a longitudinal study by Trofimovich et al. (2009) involving young francophone learners of English, it was found that the input they got from listening helped them enhance their L2 pronunciation skills.

It has been shown empirically that practising listening brings considerable benefits to young learners in their EFL learning. However, due to limited time, listening practice in class does not seem sufficient to provide the necessary exposure to L2 oral input. Extensive listening at the learners' convenience could thus be a remedy of the existing situation. Young learners might regularly practise EL in their everyday activities through watching YouTube cartoons, children TV shows, children movies, or listening to nursery rhymes for their enjoyment, but such practices are often neglected pedagogically. To cast light on the potential pedagogical practice of EL in the young learners' EFL contexts, garnering insights from those closest to young learners is thus necessary. EYL teachers are the prime actors from whom we can gain meaningful insights in this regard. Therefore, this study aims to explore the EYL teachers' views of extensive listening practice, addressing the following three research questions:

1. Do EYL teachers favor extensive listening for teaching English to young EFL learners?
2. If yes, what kind of listening materials do they suggest to young EFL learners for their extensive listening practice?
3. How likely is it that EYL teachers use extensive listening for teaching English to young EFL learners?

Method

Using a descriptive survey, this study involved a total of 132 EYL teachers from ten Asian countries. They responded to the online questionnaire sent by researchers via social media networks. The majority of the respondents came from Indonesia (86.4%), and the smaller percentages came from Thailand (3%), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2.3%), Bangladesh (1.5%), Japan (1.5%), Turkey (1.5%), Vietnam (1.5%), Iran (0.8%), Pakistan (0.8%), and the United Arab Emirates (0.8%). Their educational background included diploma (0.8%), bachelor's degree (69.7%), and master's degree (28%), with a majority mostly in English education (87.1%). Involved in this study were teachers who currently teach English to young learners ($n = 74$) and those who have taught EYL in the past ($n = 51$). They teach/have taught in kindergarten ($n = 25$), elementary school ($n = 64$), junior high school ($n = 46$), and language school or center ($n = 32$). Some of them were affiliated with more than one institution. Their years of teaching experience and their hours of teaching on average in a week varied from subject to subject (see Table 1). In addition, in this study, those who plan to teach English to young learners in the future ($n = 3$) and those who have never taught English to young learners but had a deep interest in EYL ($n = 4$) also participated.

TABLE 1

Years of Teaching Experience and Hours of Teaching Per Week (N = 132)

	Years	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)	Hours	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Currently teach English to young learners	<5 years	38	28.788	<5 hours	15	11.364
	5-10 years	24	18.182	5-10 hours	26	19.697
	11-15 years	5	3.788	11-15 hours	8	6.061
	16-20 years	5	3.788	16-20 hours	12	9.091
	>20 years	2	1.515	>20 hours	13	9.848
Have taught English to young learners in the past	<5 years	39	29.545	<5 hours	17	12.879
	5-10 years	10	7.576	5-10 hours	18	13.636
	11-15 years	1	0.758	11-15 hours	6	4.545
	16-20 years	-	-	16-20 hours	4	3.030
	>20 years	1	0.758	>20 hours	6	4.545
Will teach English to young learners in the future		3	2.273		3	2.273
Have a deep interest in EYL		4	3.030		4	3.030
Total		132	100.000		132	100.000

The questionnaire in this study was comprised of four sections. The first section was used to get to know the profile of the participants. The next sections were used to look into whether the EYL teachers favor extensive listening for teaching English to young learners (section 2), the kind of listening materials they recommend for young learners' EL practice (section 3), and how they would use EL for teaching English to young learners (section 4). The main parts (section 2-4) included 15 closed and 3 open-ended items. The ten principles of extensive reading (ER) by Day and Bamford (2002) served as a guide in drafting the questionnaire. In addition to the questionnaire, one-to-one personalized interviews were administered with four selected EYL teachers. The interviews were conducted online either in a written chat via WhatsApp or a virtual meeting via Zoom. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered in this study. The quantitative data were further analyzed using descriptive statistics, whereas the qualitative data were analyzed thematically to address the three research questions posed.

Results and Discussion

Extensive Listening for Young EFL Learners: Yes or No

No one participating in this study disagreed that listening to English audio or video materials was vital for young EFL learners ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 3.19$, a four-point Likert scale). The EYL teachers also showed strong positive responses towards almost all the extensive listening principles (adopting the ten principles of extensive reading by Day and Bamford, 2002) (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
EYL Teachers' Attitudes towards the Principles of EL (N = 132)

Principles	Statements	Mean	SD
2	Young EFL learners need to listen to a wide variety of listening materials.	3.68	3.19
1	The listening materials for young EFL learners must be easy and comprehensible.	3.66	3.16
5	The listening materials for young EFL learners must be compelling so that they can enjoy the listening.	3.62	3.13
4	Young EFL learners need to listen to English materials on a daily basis.	3.56	3.06
3	Young EFL learners should be given space to listen to their own favorite English materials.	3.55	3.05
9	Young EFL learners need to get assistance and guidance from their teachers in practising extensive listening.	3.54	3.06
10	EYL teachers should first be the example for their students in doing extensive listening.	3.45	2.98
8	Young EFL learners should be given space to do the listening individually at their own pace.	3.35	2.86
6	Focus should be given to the young EFL learners' listening experience; no comprehension questions are necessary.	2.82	2.40

Note. Four-point Likert-scale 1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree

Principle 2 ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 3.19$), 1 ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 3.16$), and 5 ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 3.13$) become the top three principles of EL accepted by the EYL teachers. It is more or less in line with the core principles used mostly in 44 ER programs (see Day, 2015). Implied in this is that teachers need to ensure that young EFL learners listen to the listening materials that are varied, easy, and compelling when using EL in the young learner context. As Waring (2008) suggested, students need to find those that are easy and interesting for them to listen to so that they can maintain their continuity of doing EL.

Almost all EYL teachers (99.2%) agreed that extensive listening could help young EFL learners develop their English proficiency. An EYL teacher from Japan mentioned:

Natural listening input is especially critical considering that the spoken language is full of significantly more variance than written language. (Teacher T047, Questionnaire)

An EYL teacher from Indonesia added:

Because, I have students that have good English especially in listening and speaking skills. They like watching English videos, such as horror movies, and English songs for children on YouTube. (Teacher T032, Questionnaire)

Looking at all the EYL teachers' responses to the open-ended questions, they were well aware of the necessity of providing young EFL learners with the exposure to language input via EL and the potential benefits of EL for the young learners' L2 development (especially in vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation skills). When asked whether they favor extensive listening for use in teaching English to young EFL learners, 122 EYL teachers (92.4%) responded "Yes".

Listening Materials for Young EFL Learners' Extensive Listening Practice

A total of 122 EYL teachers who favor the use of extensive listening for teaching English to young EFL learners then responded to the follow-up questions regarding EL materials. After a closer look at their responses, children songs and nursery rhymes (84.4%) and children stories (82%) were found to be their two most recommended materials for young learners' EL practice. Their choices seem to be relevant given that both songs (see Coyle & Gracia, 2014) and stories (see Au et al., 2015; Leśniewska & Pichette, 2016) proved beneficial for young learners' L2 learning via listening. The top ten topics suggested by the EYL teachers were animals, daily activities, hobbies, family, food, pets, school, fruit and vegetables, games, and colours (see Figure 1).

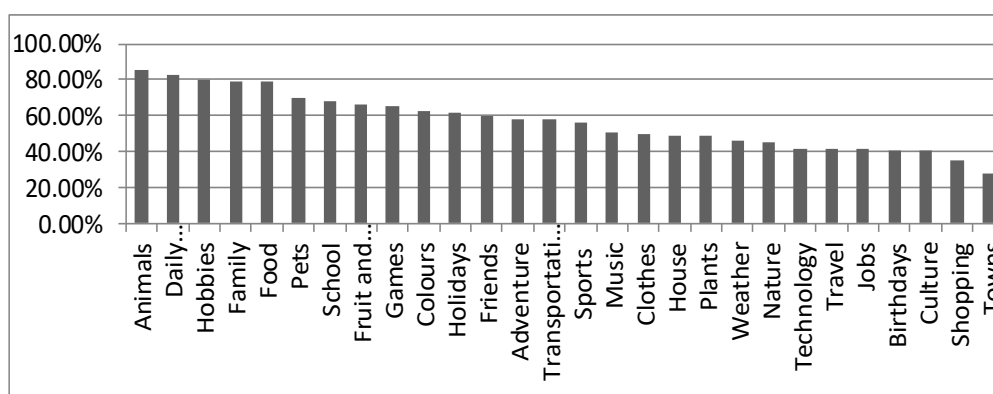


Figure 1. Topics of listening materials suggested by the EYL teachers.

Their recommended sources for accessing English audio/video materials were children YouTube channels (90.2%), young learner websites (73%), audiobooks/audio graded readers (53.3%), and children TV channels (53.3%). YouTube was shown to be their most recommended source for young learners to access EL materials. An EYL teacher from Indonesia mentioned:

... the materials that I took were mostly from YouTube. ... I recommend such kinds of YouTube channels because it is interesting for children. The videos on YouTube have excellent visual design, animation, and music (Teacher T115, Interview)

An EYL teacher from the KSA added:

Today, YouTube is easily accessible and available to everyone. (Teacher T059, Interview)

Their favored view of YouTube is relevant since the platform is a potential source for students' EFL learning outside the class (e.g., Lee & Lee, 2021). These findings agree with a recent study by Pamuji and Setyarini (2020) that found that most EFL teachers preferred YouTube for students' EL practice. There were some aspects that were considered pivotal by the EYL teachers when creating/selecting EL materials (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

The Important Aspects of Creating/Selecting EL Materials for Young EFL Learners (n = 122)

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
The audio/video can be controlled easily.	102	83.6
The characters or events are closely related to their daily activities.	99	81.1
The topics are familiar to them.	96	78.7
The visual images help them catch the meaning of spoken words.	95	77.9
The sound and video quality are excellent.	91	74.6
The content is educational.	88	72.1

Although slightly more than half of the EYL teachers (54.9%) accepted both the native and non-native speaker models, more than one third (41%) considered it better to use English audio/video materials spoken by native speakers of English. It is in line with young EFL learners' attitudes in South Korea who favored the native speaker model for their listening input (Butler, 2007). In contrast, most EYL teachers (70.5%) preferred English audio/video materials that showcase the young learners' own culture rather than those that showcase the culture of native speakers of English. An EYL teacher from Indonesia mentioned:

I have ever assigned my students to listen to folk stories English listening materials that show the own culture of students are more engaging because they are already familiar with it. (Teacher T021, Interview)

Using Extensive Listening for Teaching English to Young EFL Learners

EYL teachers in this study concurred that young EFL learners should listen to English audio/video materials on a regular basis. However, their recommendation of the necessary amount for the students' EL practice varied from subject to subject (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
The Amount of Listening on Average Per Week (n = 122)

Days of listening per week	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)	Hours of listening per day	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
1 day	14	11.5	<1 hour	47	38.5
2 day	23	18.9	1 hour	55	45.1
3 day	45	36.9	2 hours	12	9.8
4 day	9	7.4	3 hours	4	3.3
5 day	8	6.6	4 hours	-	-
6 day	4	3.3	>4 hours	1	0.8
7 day	19	15.6	Data missing	3	2.5
Total	122	100		122	100

According to the EYL teachers, doing EL roughly around three to four days per week would be appropriate if calculated on an average basis. Moreover, their recommendation is for young learners to listen to no more than one hour each day. An EYL teacher from Indonesia mentioned:

Since students will use gadgets for the listening ... , ... using gadgets too often will not be good for children. There are also many other activities that they need to do for their motoric development. (Teacher T066, Interview)

More than half of the EYL teachers (60.7%) preferred asking students to retell orally face-to-face to monitor students' EL activities. The remaining preferred asking students to share their EL activities in the online class group (22.1%) or write it up in the learning diary (9.8%). For the follow-up activities of students' EL practice, most of the EYL teachers preferred asking students to retell orally what they have listened to. Only one-third of the EYL teachers preferred asking students to write a short summary of what they listened to (see Table 5).

TABLE 5

Follow-up Activities of Young EFL Learners' EL Practice (n = 122)

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Retelling orally	87	71.3
Pronouncing some new words	82	67.2
Drawing pictures	74	60.7
Making a list of new words	74	60.7
Performing dialogues	44	36.1
Writing a short summary	40	32.8

However, an insightful point was made by an EYL teacher from KSA:

But if we want to assess our students, let's say we have more than 20 students in the class, it is not easy for us to evaluate them by speaking individually one by one. So looking at their writings or drawings is preferable because it is more time-saving. (Teacher 059, Interview)

If looking at a study by Kormos et al. (2020), the listening-writing task was shown to be more favorable for young learners than the listening-speaking task. But in the Kormos et al.'s study, the listening was not explicitly under the extensive conditions.

Conclusion

This preliminary study sought to explore EYL teachers' views towards the use of EL for teaching English to young EFL learners. The study found that the EYL teachers accepted EL for use in EYL pedagogy. In their eyes, there are three pivotal aspects when using EL in the young learner context: 1) young learners need to get exposed to a variety of listening materials; 2) young learners need to listen to materials that they can easily understand; and 3) young learners need to listen to materials that are enjoyable for them. In this regard, most of the EYL teachers preferred children songs and stories as the listening materials for young EFL learners' EL practice. The EYL teachers suggested that young learners listen at a sensible pace, not too much but routinely. A variety of activities could be embraced to succeed in the implementation of EL in EYL pedagogy. In this study, the views of EYL teachers towards EL have been explored; it is now time to cast further light on the practical implementation of extensive listening for teaching English to young EFL learners.

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