

Unveiling an Indonesian EFL Student's Self-Directed Listening Learning: A Narrative Inquiry

Arini Nurul Hidayati¹, Sitti Hadijah², Ginanjar Masyhur³, Enjang Nurhaedin⁴
{arininurul@unsil.ac.id¹, sittihadijah@edu.uir.ac.id², 182122108@student.unsil.ac.id³,
enjangnurhaedin97@gmail.com⁴}

Universitas Siliwangi Tasikmalaya, Indonesia^{1,3,4}
Universitas Islam Riau, Indonesia²

Abstract. Extensive aural inputs that support English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to learn independently are ubiquitously found in the recent learning milieu. The ease is mostly influenced by the massive emergence of technology that shaped beneficial platforms. These triggered students to conduct listening practices beyond classroom activities. The present study aims at investigating one university student's experience during her independent listening activities and how she obtained inputs from these activities through narrative inquiry. Underpinning Knowles' Self-Directed Learning framework [1], this study developed a preliminary conversation about this approach to scrutinize the participant's decision to learn listening independently considering the needs, goals, materials, strategies, and progress evaluation. In an attempt to gain the data, e-interviews were conducted. Afterall, thematic analysis was used to segregate the obtained data and help organize them to summarize the conclusion. The findings revealed that this student has gone through a very long process of independent English language exposures by listening to English songs and watching English movies. By doing so, she could improve her vocabulary, understand the implicit and explicit information from the texts, which eventually enhanced her speaking competence.

Keywords: EFL Students, Independent Learning, Learning Autonomy, Listening Skill, Self-Directed Learning

1 Introduction

"And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed" (Ta-ha:13). Listening as a fundamental language skill is necessary to improve. This is because people spend most of the portion in communication through listening which is 45 percent, while speaking takes up 30% of communication time, reading takes up 16%, and writing takes up 9% [1]. In short, listening is the basic support system to other language skills. Due to its importance, Wills and Guo argue that listening deserves particular attention [2]. Moreover listening is unique, according to Harmer, since comprehension is a process of receiving, processing, and engaging with relevant knowledge that the mind must complete in real time [3]. It involves understanding the accent and pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning [4]. However, because there are no rules like in grammar training, teaching listening comprehension is one of the most important and difficult duties for any foreign language teacher [5].

Miscellaneous studies as investigative attempts to capture teachers' efforts in improving students' listening skills were well documented [6][7][8][9][10]. All in all, the findings indicate

the importance of increasing students' awareness to learn listening independently. This is because when the students listen, they are required to provide full attention and engagement, as well as motivation [11]. To support this, Semmar emphasizes that extrinsic and intrinsic motivation play an important role in achieving the success of listening courses [12]. Language teachers should provide learning with guidance in order to raise the students' independent learning consciousness and facilitate them as self-directed learners who are able to explore the potential learning situations which are convenient to them. This is because the individual learners themselves are the ones who are in the best position to create this need, by generating listening situations that are appropriate to them. In order to create these opportunities, they must develop their self-directed learning (hereafter, SDL). This does not mean that the teachers leave them alone or unguided, rather teachers play roles as facilitators who control their learning progress [13]. This activity is expected to increase their learning motivation as a necessary factor because when the students have high motivation, they will tend to have better engagement in autonomous learning and vice versa [14]. Therefore, the use of SDL strategy in learning listening is worth exploring.

SDL provides the students opportunities to decide their learning goals, select learning tasks that they can accomplish and complete [15]. A number of studies have suggested this approach to achieve students' learning goals [16][17][18][19]. Similarly, in listening learning, SDL has recently been implemented and researched in diverse contexts and showcased its effectiveness in increasing the students listening [20][21][22][23]. Even though the study conducted by Vu and Shah [22] reported about the students' unreadiness of SDL in English listening learning and suggested to organize more regular tests to motivate students, the earlier studies by Kovtun, Harmash and Khaidari [21] and Gonulal [24] maintain that the current technology such as Podcast has contributed positively on the students' listening, speaking and writing' improvement as well as their vocabulary increase. These studies provide evidence that the implementation of podcasting technology in SDL of students is effective for enhancing students' foreign language listening competence, as well as the expansion of linguistic and sociocultural competence. Given this fact, the present study aims at exploring the further process of the technology utilization in the listening SDL.

At a university in Tasikmalaya, there was a student who had an extraordinary listening skill. She gained the highest score in all listening subjects every semester. From the preliminary interview, it was found that she has been practically implementing technology-based self-directed listening learning that has helped her achieve good scores in listening classes. After learning her profile and understanding the importance of SDL to improve listening skill, this study is conducted to scrutinize how the student implemented self-directed listening learning to improve her listening skill. The concept of SDL coined by Knowles [25] is used to answer the question. He maintains that SDL situates individuals to take the lead in diagnosing learning needs, developing learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, and appropriate learning, with or without the help of others. It is also a learning strategy that selects and implements strategies and evaluates learning outcomes. This study is anticipated to give a practical impact to the EFL learners who are willing to improve their listening skills by doing independent learning beyond the classroom. Moreover, the empirical evidence provided by this study will also expand the literature on the effectiveness of SDL in listening learning. Last but not least, EFL teachers are also expected to gain benefits from the findings and encourage their students to practice the SDL strategy.

2 Research Method

A narrative inquiry was employed to answer the following research question (RQ), “How does an EFL university student conduct her Self-Directed Learning in listening?” The design was chosen because of its characteristic as a means of exploring participant’s stories and experience. This is relevant to what Clandinin and Caine [26] revealed that studying stories is a way to understand experience. Therefore, it is a way to see the phenomenon of people’s experience by scrutinizing their stories. To answer this RQ, a higher achiever university student was recruited as the participant. This single participant was selected due to her outstanding performance in the listening subject every semester. We called her Ivana (pseudonym). This 21-year-old-girl always got ‘A’ which showcased the highest rank in listening subjects. After learning her profile from the preliminary interview, it was found that she frequently listened independently to increase her listening scores. She was aware of what she wanted to achieve, chose the materials on her own, set the schedule, made notes, and consulted dictionaries. More importantly, her voluntary participation was also another consideration of why she was chosen. This was proven by her willingness to fill in the informed consent form which also protected her confidentiality. Semi-structured e-interviews were conducted via WhatsApp Messenger to take a closer look at how she managed her self-directed learning in improving her listening skill. To achieve the saturation of the data, the interview was conducted three times from 30th November 2020 – 7th September 2021. After having accomplished this, the data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis [27] underpinned the concept of Knowles’ framework of SDL comprising four primary aspects, namely learning needs, learning resources, learning strategies, and learning outcomes [25]. Finally, member-checking was conducted to the participant as a way of constructing trustworthy findings.

3 Findings and Discussion

The independent learning experience that Ivana shared in this scrutiny was summarized into three main themes. At the outset, she expected to perform good speaking skills, therefore, she was triggered to listen to more English words and expressions. Understanding her personal purposes, she decided to start listening to a myriad of interesting materials as well as creating enjoyable learning circumstances for her. Each of the details is explained subsequently.

3.1 Triggered by an intention to perform good speaking skills

Ivana’s personal drive to learn to listen independently grew because of her desire to have good speaking skills. She believed that listening was a fundamental receptive skill that supported an EFL learner to improve speaking. Within this faith, she constantly did the listening every day. This implies the importance of understanding personal goals as the basic foundation when implementing SDL.

“Listening is just like a baby trying to speak up. By listening, I can know how exactly a word is pronounced. So, if I become a good listener, I can be a good speaker. Therefore, I purposefully learn English speaking through listening... Because of that, I listen... every day, then, there are many new words that I know, and also how to pronounce them.”

Ivana's self-learning awareness was the main factor that pushed her to undertake outside classroom listening activities. This awareness required her to have a great amount of motivation to pursue a learning experience that is most beneficial for a long run [28]. With this regard, O'Shea contends that this kind of responsible feeling is supposed to be lifelong since it will help the students, especially adult learners, manage their own learning process within formal learning settings [29]. This responsibility is one factor that keeps the students' intrinsic motivation up. Regarding the motivation issue, Pintrich maintains, intrinsic motivation was an important factor in determining whether a student received a pass or fail grade [30]. He further explains that by adopting intrinsic motivation, the students are able to improve their independent learning. It is obvious that self-driven learning desire is the major factor of the successful students' listening performance. In line with this, Van Etten, et al. [31] reveal that many students have been aware about their own learning styles and goals that become pivotal factors to achieve their self-regulated learning success. Given these facts, all independent listening learners are encouraged to find their personal learning drivers that will make their learning spirit remain updated.

3.2 Selecting a myriad of interesting materials

Ivana managed to improve the numbers of English words and expressions by listening to various types of exposure, such as songs and movies. She decided to choose these learning materials from the sources that met her personal preference, something interesting and exciting for her.

"I love listening to English songs, and I listen to them very often. The song that influenced me was It's you from Aly Gathy. I also listened to Maroon Five, Memories; Imagine Dragon, the title is Bad Liars. Those are cover songs. I learnt pronunciation from them, they're really good. I really love it. Like Best Gort from Daniel Cesar, also 'Someone you love' from Louis Cataldy...and many more."

Songs are combinations of music and lyrics which possess many central advantages which provide a valuable source for language learning and teaching [32]. They are also considered as authentic materials that are beneficial to learn foreign language directly from the native speakers. Song lyrics have many repetitive verses and they can be utilized to assist EFL learners develop the language skills by divulging them to forms, syntax, lexical items, segments and suprasegmental [33]. Furthermore, the song is mainly believed to help students enhance their listening skills. Several studies have proven its effectiveness [34][35]. They argue that the influence of listening to English songs can improve listening skills. In an interview conducted in November 2020, Ivana articulated that she was trying to improve her listening skills by listening to English songs very often and that she became addicted to them ever since.

Some previous studies have informed understanding about the benefits of using songs in learning English [36][37]. Among the benefits, developing their multiple intelligences is worth counting. Simpson contends that musical intelligence provides a positive impact on the students' learning progress when the teachers are able to combine it with their well-planned teaching strategies as well as students' linguistic competence [38]. Linguistically, the students are assisted to identify and imitate the native English pronunciation and get used to hearing the diverse accents with different speech tempo. Therefore, they are helped when encountering any oral text in particular listening tasks in the class.

“For benefits, the first one is more accustomed to listening, more familiar with English words, adds more vocabulary too....., I learn how to pronounce the words as well. As a result, very often, when I hear the words spoken by someone else in a slow or fast tempo, I can catch and identify that those words existed in a particular song.”

Ivana revealed that she has been able to connect the words she found from songs with the other authentic spoken texts as the result of her independent listening learning. With this regard, Orlova mentions some benefits of learning with songs as an articulation therapy to improve students’ rhythm, stress and intonation patterns of the English language. Moreover, songs can also facilitate teachers to teach vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and listening [39]. The nature of songs is repetitive and it also facilitates automation of the language development process. The power of the “songstuck in my head” phenomenon emerges to combine both emotional and unconscious factors [40]. Singing is an easy way to remember something, and the melody seems to help us get information easily. Finally, the song is composed of colloquial English, which can prepare the learner for informal conversations in real-life situations. In addition, songs are a culturally rich resource and easy to use in class [41].

Another independent learning activity that helped Ivana increase her listening skills was watching English movies. Movies draw students’ attention and capture their interest [42]. Since movies show real life situations, watching them may be interesting for teaching listening comprehension and help motivate students to study in English language [43][5]. Ivana was also a movie-lover. She often spent her leisure time lingering with her favorite movies. Somehow, she also planned certain schedules to watch several movies she really liked repeatedly. In the interview, she admitted this statement.

“I am also a big fan of English movies. I frequently repeated watching them because the files were saved on my laptop and I watched them over and over again. The Harry Potter series and Twilight series are the movies I watch the most. I also watched other movies, sometimes with English subtitles, some other times no...”

Ivana also mentioned that she utilized subtitles to reach a full comprehension at the beginning. This is under a belief that when students are engaged in the listening activity, subtitles can give them better emphasis or hint of what they should pay attention to. Clearly, movies are effective ways for students to improve their listening ability and get better insight in English culture. The movies along with the movies’ script are widely used as a teaching method in English lessons; however, practice in class only is never enough. As Wills and Guo [2] mentioned, successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice. All in all, those two listening sources have contributed positively towards Ivana’s listening skills. At the end, she remarked,

“...because of the habit of listening to English songs and watching movies – so when I take listening courses, I become more used to it. So, I am more accustomed to listening, so it is easier to catch new words during the course.”

3.3 Creating enjoyable learning circumstances

The use of interesting listening materials creates a pleasant learning sphere and this pleasure brings comfort and security. For instance, songs believed to help introduce individuals to sounds, stress, rhythmic patterns, vocabulary, intonation, grammatical and conversational

exchanges are not only beneficial on the students' improvement of linguistic accents, memories, grammar, but also mood and joy. They also have positive effects on motivation. To support this, Conesa & Rubio emphasize that the notion of the listening songs contributes positively to the students' learning atmosphere since it brings the feeling of enjoyment and relaxation [44]. When the students are having fun listening to English songs, they indirectly will do some attempts to learn to translate the the English songs' lyrics. This lyric translation activity is a continuation of the student's learning satisfaction. Once the students feel satisfied, they will be triggered to learn more. In this regard, Murphey mentions that English has a stress-timed rhythm, for which songs can help establish a feeling, thus, it has the power to engrave itself into the students' brains [41]. He continues that 'songs work on our short and long-term memory' and are therefore adequate tools for using in learning language [41]. Ivana confessed that she also managed to prepare the songs' lyrics to learn how they were pronounced and conducted this activity many times until she fully caught the messages.

"I learn by listening to songs by searching their lyrics then listening to them while looking at the lyrics. Oh, that's how it's pronounced, like that. Then if, for example, I haven't caught on how it's spelled, I will repeat it again and again until I get it. Besides listening to it while doing activities, I also always sing along... So, I can imitate the lyrics directly when singing"

"...Fortunately, it can help improve my listening as well as practical speaking at the same time. There are some words, for example 'crow' which was actually still familiar, but when I heard it for the first time, I missed it, it even turned into a cow. Then I listened again and again, it turned out to be a crowd. And I found out the meaning was crow, that's simply an example."

This finding supports Lo and Li' claim stating that songs present an enjoyable classroom sphere which make students enhance their linguistic skills easier [45]. It is obvious that there are numerous benefits associated with it. The song is very expressive. Some people convey love and emotions, while some others tell unforgettable and moving stories. Some embody your dreams and ideals and remember the golden past. Songs are rich in themes and expressions that resonate with learners. Acquisition of automatic language skills depends on being exposed to comprehensible, unconscious, and comprehensible input over and over again in a focused and meaningful way [46]. This is because the smoothing effects of music in songs are able to alter the students' boredom. Besides, songs in a learning environment also pleases them to feel relaxed and remove their negative attitudes towards a foreign language [47].

4 Conclusion

The study reported on Ivana's ways of self-directed learning in improving her listening skills. She purposefully set the extensive listening activities to develop her understanding on new vocabularies and the meanings, recognize native English pronunciation and accent, as well as learning native cultures which could increase her speaking skills. This repeated learning strategy was considered successful to increase her listening skills, expand vocabularies, get used to identify the native pronunciation, find meanings through the contexts and extend her speaking competence because of the opportunity to learn pronunciation, fluency, and grammar from the spoken discourses. However, she did not regularly evaluate her learning progress due to inadequate knowledge of the importance of conducting listening evaluation when applying

SDL. This implies that teachers have to equip students with sufficient knowledge on how to conduct SDL more comprehensively. This study has several weaknesses that further research could fill. Firstly, the data was collected by interview only; therefore, the next researcher could expand the data collection techniques such as observation and documentation to result in a more comparable and credible findings and discussions. Secondly, the analysis tool was also limited to Knowles's SDL framework. Thus, further researchers could expand multiple approaches to investigate students' personal experiences more deeply.

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