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## INTEGRATING VOA LEARNING ENGLISH INTO AN ENGLISH LISTENING CLASSROOM

### MENGINTEGRASIKAN VOA LEARNING ENGLISH KE DALAM PEMBELAJARAN DI KELAS

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**Abstract:** Extensive listening is crucial for language development, especially when students' exposure to the target language is not adequate. This study presents how *VOA Learning English* website is integrated into an English listening classroom as a listening activity outside the class. Data were collected through questionnaires and learners' extensive listening journal weekly entries, seeking to examine students' learning experiences and views on experiencing the website. Thirty undergraduate students participated in this study for 14 weeks. Results indicated that learners were satisfied with their learning experience as they had the chance to select materials that they found suitable and appropriate to their proficiency level and interests. Although the students did not enjoy writing the weekly journal assigned after extensive listening, they discovered that learning from *VOA Learning English* is convenient and useful in enriching their vocabularies and widening their knowledge of the world.

**Keywords:** Extensive listening, *VOA Learning English*, Listening journal

**Abstrak:** *Extensive listening* sangat penting dalam pengembangan bahasa, terutama ketika paparan siswa terhadap bahasa target tidak memadai. Penelitian ini menyajikan bagaimana situs web *VOA Learning English* diintegrasikan ke dalam sebuah kelas Bahasa Inggris sebagai kegiatan menyimak di luar kelas. Data diperoleh melalui penggunaan kuesioner dan jurnal mingguan *extensive listening*, yang bertujuan untuk memeriksa pengalaman belajar siswa serta pandangan mereka dalam menggunakan situs web tersebut. Tiga puluh mahasiswa program S1 telah berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini selama 14 minggu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peserta didik puas dengan pengalaman belajar mereka karena mereka memiliki kesempatan untuk memilih sendiri materi yang mereka anggap sesuai dengan tingkat keahlian dan minat mereka. Walaupun siswa tidak benar-benar menyukai kegiatan menulis jurnal mingguan setelah melakukan kegiatan *extensive listening* yang ditugaskan, mereka mendapati bahwa belajar dari *VOA Learning English* tidak hanya nyaman tetapi juga berguna dalam memperkaya kosakata mereka dan memperluas pengetahuan mereka tentang dunia.

**Kata kunci:** *Extensive listening*, *VOA Learning English*, Jurnal simakan

## INTRODUCTION

Extensive listening has a vital role in improving language skills, as one of the critical aspects of language development is vast amounts of digestible language input. Krashen (1996) emphasized that a pivotal component of learning a second language is comprehensible input. Recent years have witnessed a growing academic interest in extensive listening due to its recognition of meaningful input to the target language. Nonetheless, most students in Indonesia have limited exposure to English listening inputs as the shared use of English is relatively low. Therefore, relying on listening activities during class with limited hours is not adequate. As a solution, learners should do more listening activities outside the class to reach the targeted language proficiency level.

Extensive listening is composed of all sorts of sufficient, significant listening tasks done individually outside of class. Milliner and Chaikul (2018) believed that the practices involved listening to large amounts of self-selected texts at the students' proficiency levels. The types of activities chosen allow students to access their preferred listening inputs at their own pace. Besides, Yeh (2017) added that extensive listening is also an alternative to a more convenient, understandable, and enjoyable listening practice. Several studies investigated the benefits and potential extensive listening provided when properly integrated by teachers (Chang et al., 2016; Graham & Santos, 2015; Ivone & Renandya, 2019; Mayora, 2017; Mishan & Timmis, 2015). However, according to Povey (2016), teachers must consider the learners' levels and capabilities in restricting the listening resources before given to the students. Investigating listening resources such as *VOA Learning English* is a continuing concern within extensive listening research.

Practitioners began recognizing *VOA Learning English* as an extensive listening resource with numerous features incorporated effectively in English classrooms. Jiang (2018) stated that *VOA Learning English* facilitated students' English learning in context, contributing to authenticity in real-life English use. It provides various forms of listening activities that can be chosen based on one's preference, such as audio programs, podcasts, and videos with printable subtitles. It also covers diverse topics that may interest a wide array of learners at various levels and encourage them to practice extensive listening (Barella & Linarsih, 2020). Xia (2017) stated that some of the materials provided by *VOA Learning English*, which were read one-third slower than regular *VOA* programs, eased beginner students considerably in grasping ideas spoken in the audio. The terms spoken in the audio are limited as typical and general and comprehensible for the learners, as idioms are avoided.

However, research on *VOA Learning English* to enhance students' listening skills outside of class for lower proficiency students at the tertiary level has not yet been done, despite the importance and potential as an extensive listening practice. Hence, the researchers believed that this study should be carried out. This paper aims to give an overview of the students' learning experience as well as perspectives of using *VOA Learning English* as an extensive listening activity. This paper also discusses how *VOA Learning English* is incorporated within the classroom for lower-proficiency learners as an extensive listening resource. Lastly, the survey results present students' perceptions and learning experience of the strategies and activity's efficiency and effectiveness to facilitate an enjoyable learning practice for students at a lower proficiency level.

### **Extensive Listening in English Language Learning**

In English language learning, extensive listening improves learners' listening skills and vocabulary while making them learn English comfortably and enjoyably. It enables students to engage in their learning process and allows them to find materials suited to their levels and undergo exciting activities based on their interests. Intelligible and engaging extensive listening resources can motivate learners to continuously expose themselves to the target language (Ivone & Renandya, 2019). Extensive listening is also advantageous to the learners as they are given the freedom to pick their suitable English materials (Mayora, 2017). Chang and Millett (2016) also added that learners who have been exposed to extensive listening tend to have a more comprehensive vocabulary range and better comprehension in conversational and narrative contexts, as it allows them to process the spoken language more accurately and fluently. Besides, extensive listening material flexibility is one of the most critical factors as it is accessible anywhere and anytime learners wish to listen. Extensive listening activities help improve students' automaticity in recognizing English texts within the audio, rather than demanding learners to comprehend each piece of the discourse provided as usually required in intensive listening activities. Mishan and Timmis (2015) added that learners do not need to spend more time checking their comprehension, testing memories, or getting anxiety from ensuring their understanding. Instead, they should have a general understanding of the audio while finding the activity pleasurable (Graham & Santos, 2015).

Despite the countless benefits, the idea of using extensive listening is not flawless. Giordano (2016) listed some limitations of extensive listening, such as how there was no way for teachers to know the number of materials comprehended by learners, the similarity between one learner's material to another that could lead to repetitive answers, and how some learners might have done extensive listening only briefly because it was not an obligation for them. Implementing extensive listening practice requires thorough and detailed explanations to avoid misunderstandings, and if possible, be linked with in-class activities. Otherwise, students might not complete the tasks given as they would not consider those as a part of the compulsory curriculum. According to Chang and Millett (2016), extensive listening is still seen as a novel idea. Thus, since its theoretical framework is still underdeveloped, not many language teachers know ways to implement it. Some students also rejected the notion of extensive listening as outside-of-classroom activities as they were unaware of the benefits given (Tsai, 2019). The researchers mentioned above argued that this could be caused by a lack of engaging and relevant extensive listening resources. Hence, further information about strategies used in integrating certain media as an extensive listening resource is highly demanded.

Overall, these studies illustrate that extensive listening needs to be implemented and supported with some directions and strategies for integrating it into the classroom. Websites offering various topics and levels suitable for extensive listening also provide limitless authentic materials and accessibility for students to control their learning while still being supervised by teachers. However, teachers should also promote the practice of extensive listening as students might not be aware of the benefits they could reap. This situation becomes an evident potential to extend learning opportunities that can occur outside of classrooms.

### **Learners' Perception in Extensive Listening in English Language Learning**

Listening may seem like the most effortless skill in learning English, yet it is quite challenging for second language learners. Chang et al. (2016) proved that listening comprehension problems come with some other language difficulties, just as in speaking and pronunciation, for which the development of listening skills is crucial. There are two

highlights which made listening to spoken content difficult for second language learners. Firstly, the typical speed of spoken content is seen as excessively quick for beginner language levels. This is an urgent problem as researchers discovered that the speech speed of native speakers corresponds to learners' understanding and faster pace gives more incredible difficulty to comprehend the audio (Duan et al., 2019; Silveira, 2019; Ye & Inoue, 2016; Zhang, 2018). Secondly, the problem which hinders second language learners from comprehending spoken texts is word limitations. Generally, in casual discourse, words tend to mix with different terms in a specific context, making it hard to see the limit between words, where they begin, and where they end.

Corresponding with the previously mentioned challenges in learners' comprehension development in English, extensive listening helps learners improve their capacity in adapting to discourse rate. A study conducted by Chang et al. (2019) discovered that learners frequently experienced issues in understanding communication in their target language as the speakers spoke excessively quickly at times. Even when the native speakers assumed their speed was acceptable to second language learners, it might be considered too fast. In line with this statement, Jiang and Li (2018) explained that second language learners found it stressful when speaking to native speakers as they tend to talk too fast. This way, an alternative suggestion is to help learners adapt their listening pace by giving continuous listening practice in the form of extensive listening activities. Gradually, they will become used to listening to typical discourse at an average speed.

Furthermore, extensive listening is enriched with limitless inputs for learners to use. Extensive listening provides authentic spoken input, which enables vocabulary acquisition to occur quickly (Masrai, 2020). Rodgers (2016) suggested that listening fluency contributed significantly to one's language proficiency and that it can benefit the most through the practice of extensive listening. According to Renandya and Jacobs (2016), the practices pushed students to recognize spoken words, as well as reach higher and more profound levels of comprehension. Additionally, Ly and Nga, (2020), who examined the effects of extensive listening practice, discovered that it affected the participants' vocabulary learning skills impressively.

Regarding the previous studies mentioned, it can then be drawn that extensive listening has excellent potential in breaking the difficulties encountered by second language learners. Extensive listening is not much superior to concentrated listening. The truth of the matter is that teachers do not know what the learners understand during extensive listening. Are learners obtaining more information? Is the information being obtained sufficient? Would it be able to benefit the learners' listening comprehension? Is it safe to say that they are autonomously creating and conveying their very own learning techniques? Can their methodologies be more productive than things that the teachers instructed them? Thus, what are they doing during extensive listening? Are the learners indeed understanding, or are they merely faking the understanding?

All in all, extensive listening in learning English may improve the proficiency level in learners' desirable ways and topics when it is properly incorporated and supervised. Thus, the researchers found that extensive listening is beneficial as long as learners do the extensive listening method.

### **The Use of VOA Learning English**

*VOA Learning English* is part of Voice of America, a multimedia source accessible on websites and smartphone applications. Both are open source, composed of an extensive list of daily news and podcasts ranging from various topics. Abdi and Makiabadi (2019) recommended *VOA Learning English* due to helpful features such as transcriptions, vocabulary lists, and podcasts, making listening tasks more comfortable

and practical for learners. The contextual information provided also makes it more appealing as students can connect the phrases they learned in real-life situations. Besides, the app allows learners to access both offline and online modes Muzdalifah and Van FC (2018).

A primary consideration in using *VOA Learning English* is its effectiveness as instructional material. Studies in the past discovered that incorporating *VOA Learning English* in classrooms contributed to learners' improvements in various aspects of English language teaching. A study conducted by Mahmudah and Izzah (2019) explored that *VOA Learning English* YouTube channel significantly improved students' understanding of simple past tense. Researchers also found that the *VOA Learning English* website videos efficiently honed students' speaking skills (Nguyen, 2018; Sulastrri & Arina, 2018), meaning that *VOA Learning English* could improve more than students' grammatical features. Kartikasari (2018) introduced the teaching of *VOA Learning English* in her speaking classroom using project-based learning. She discovered that the treatment significantly impacted the teacher's and the students' relationship in the classroom.

## METHODS

The study of implementing *VOA Learning English* was carried out in an English listening class of 30 undergraduate students of the English language teaching major whose estimated English competence levels ranged from basic to low intermediate.

Apart from attending regular class, students were assigned to listen to *VOA Learning English* for fourteen weeks. Before the students were given the task, they were shown how to best use the *VOA Learning English* for their extensive listening activities. They were shown the features, levels, topics, and strategies to listen to it. Students were also asked to brainstorm how they could benefit the website each time they do the extensive listening activity. Also, the learners were not given any specific duration in completing the extensive listening activities, but they were required to do it at least once a week. The students were told that this assignment is worth 10% of their final grade to be more motivated to do the assignment seriously.

This extensive listening assignment was conducted by integrating various autonomous activities related to listening practices. Students were given a choice to choose their topic of interest and are required to journal their listening activities, such as noting down new vocabularies and summarizing. Besides, they were also expected to do shadowing or retelling in an attempt to share with classmates. They were recording their shadowing activities and sending those to the WhatsApp group.

The data collected for this study consisted of questionnaire responses and students' weekly journal entries. Questionnaires were administered to the undergraduate students by the end of the semester, after 14 weeks of extensive listening treatment. Other than that, further data were obtained through students' journal entries on their extensive listening at the end of week 14. These data were read, coded, and then put in specific categories according to the themes developed during the data analysis. These instruments were implemented to collect knowledge regarding students' learning experience and perspectives of the strategy. This assignment was then integrated into the classroom assessment.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research collected from the questionnaires and students' extensive listening journal logs were generated in the following themes: 1) the students' habits in using *VOA Learning English* as a listening resource, 2) students' perceptions in using

*VOA Learning English* for extensive listening activities, 3) students' critics and feedbacks on the use of *VOA Learning English* as learning material, 4) students' listening comprehension skills, and 5) suggestions given by students regarding possible improvements in implementing *VOA Learning English* in classrooms.

### Students' Habits in Using VOA English as a Listening Resource

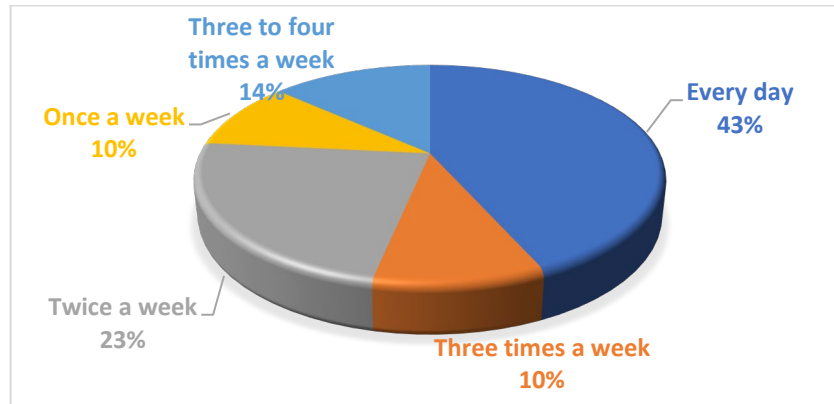


Figure 1. Students' Weekly Frequency in using *VOA Learning English*

As Figure 1 indicates, most learners followed the instruction given, carrying out the extensive listening activities at least once a week. More than 76.6% of students carried out the activity exceeding the demanded amounts, which was a massive surprise to the researchers. 43.3% of the respondents said that they used *VOA Learning English* as a listening material every day. 23.3% did the activity twice a week. 10% conducted extensive listening materials three times a week. Another 10% agreed that they utilized *VOA Learning English* once a week. Simultaneously, the rest carried out the activities three to four times a week, and others preferred doing *VOA Learning English* during Saturdays, Sundays, and Tuesdays. A few students stated that they did the activities quite rarely, depending on their moods, they might do it more often in some weeks, and they might not.

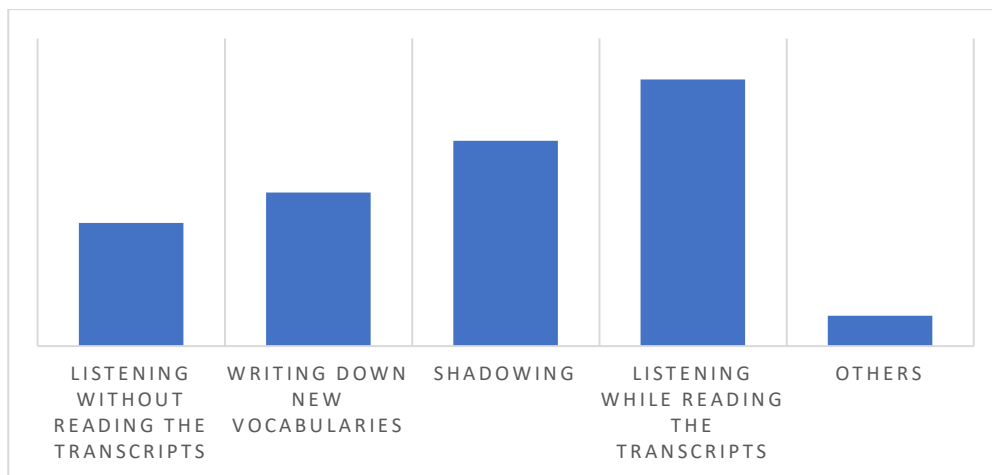
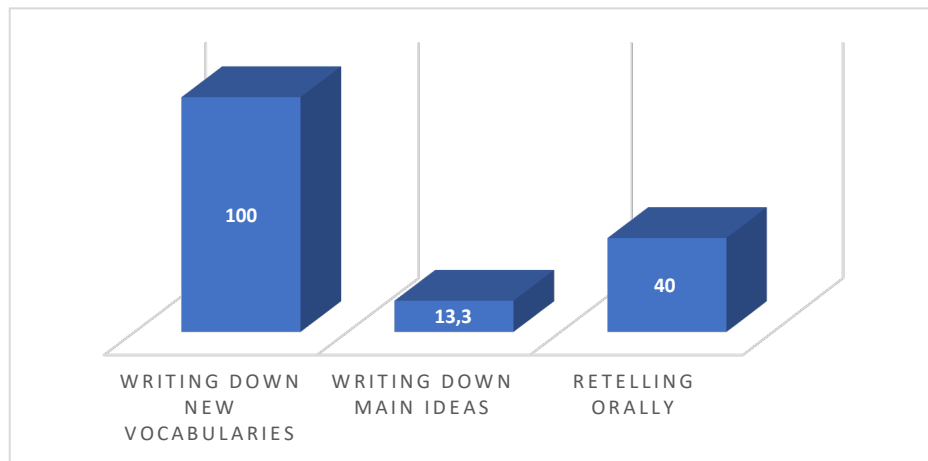


Figure 2. Students' Habits When Listening to *VOA Learning English*

Figure 2 illustrates students' habits when listening to *VOA Learning English*, with the most proportion of students who listen to the audio while looking at the text enlisted

(86.7%). Then, it is followed by shadowing/imitating the speaker's statements (66.7%), listing new vocabulary (50%), listening without looking at the text (40%), and the three least habits (3.3% respectively) are writing down main ideas, downloading the audio, and listening to the audio without reading the text, and having another turn to listen while reading the text. It corresponds to Chang and Millett's (2014) study, which concluded that simultaneous listening-and-reading was proven more effective than only reading or listening. According to Kirbas (2018), learners can recall the materials more effectively when facilitated with written texts and pictures. Other studies also confirmed that reading a text simultaneously while listening to it being spoken helps give deeper comprehension and further understanding of vocabulary recognition (Gobel & Kano, 2014).



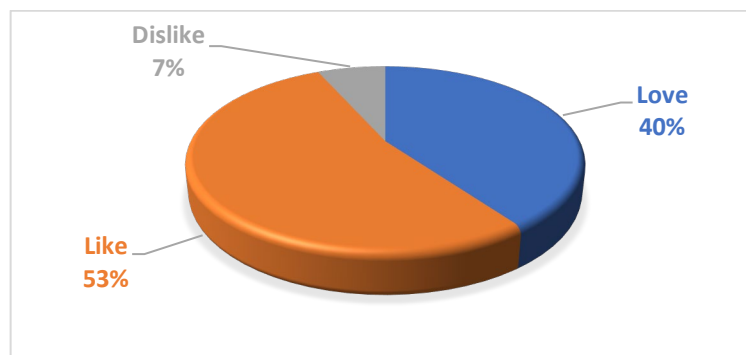
**Figure 3. Students' Habits After Listening to VOA Learning English**

Figure 3 indicates that all of the students noted down new vocabularies learned on their journal logs. Other than that, 40% of the participants reported that they retold the audio orally. 13.3% of the respondents preferred to jot down the main ideas in the extensive listening logs. Besides, 3.3% created new sentences using the vocabulary learned. It is in line with the research conducted by Dobbs and Kearns (2016), in which they stated students tend to write down new vocabulary, which they have just understood through reading, listening, or other skills. It helped students as reinforcements are given, and they are drilled to learn new vocabularies.

### **Students' Perceptions of Using VOA Learning English for Extensive Listening Activities**

In Figure 4, it is perceived that most of the research participants enjoyed using *VOA Learning English* for extensive listening activities (93.3%). 40% of the students claimed to find the exercises very loveable, while 53.3% agreed that they liked the activities. This data indicated *VOA Learning English*'s effectiveness when integrated into extensive listening exercises, just as similar studies have concluded. Students included opinions regarding the sections of activities they enjoyed the most in *VOA Learning English*, and the majority of the students agreed that after listening to *VOA Learning English*, they gained new knowledge and discovered the latest news. It is in line with the research conducted by Abdi and Makiabadi (2019), which stated that *VOA Learning English* gave real-life situations and up-to-date information around the world, which broadened students' visions and deepened their comprehensions, and hence created a meaningful language learning experience for the learners. Nearly all of the students claimed that they learned new words and even synonyms of several terms which they did not know before,

which supported previous studies carried out by Khaeriah (2018) and Muzdalifah (2018), discussing the relations between exposing students to *VOA Learning English* and building their vocabulary. These studies concluded a similar finding with the research conducted, as they stated *VOA Learning English* could help significantly develop their vocabulary.



**Figure 4. Students' Perceptions of Using *VOA Learning English* for Extensive Listening Activities**

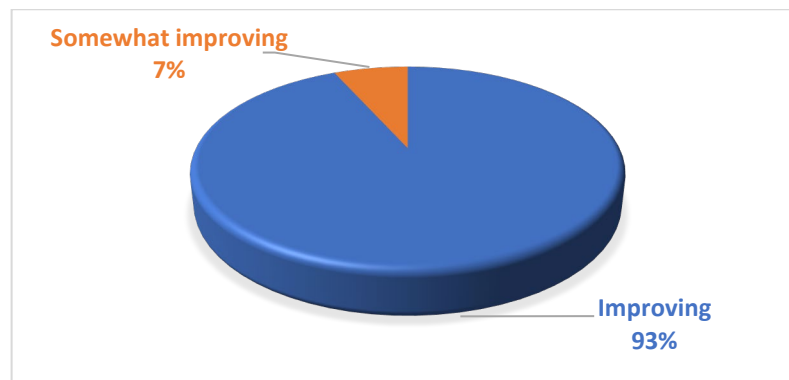
### **Students' Critics and Feedbacks on the Use of *VOA Learning English* as a Learning Material**

Despite the many benefits students can gain by experiencing *VOA Learning English*, the students proposed several critics and feedback that they believed could improve the learning experience. One student suggested, "3D visualization should be added to provide real-life contexts". In contrast, others thought, "not all of the news was updated to the latest ones, and sometimes they did not talk about the issue deeply," which both implied that *VOA Learning English* could be better improved when it contained deeper issues and visualization to aid students in understanding the audio better. It is in line with the research conducted by Liao et al. (2019), Raedts et al. (2017), and Ebrahimzadeh and Sepideh (2017), which stated that learning materials, when supported by facilities such as real-time videos and exciting contents, would boost the learners' motivation significantly, hence the classroom learning and teaching activities could be held conclusively. Moreover, several students added, "the speakers speak too slowly, sometimes, which made it boring. When it gets boring, I get sleepy." Some commented, "the speakers were not excited and lively in the audio; it did not sound so enjoyable sometimes," which then can be inferred that improvements on the speakers should also be made, like intonation and speed of the speakers significantly affect the interest of the listeners as well. As also discovered by Hamouda (2013) and Horrey et al. (2017), the way speakers in an audio speak could affect the listeners' moods. When they speak with a tone of being uninterested and discouraged, the listeners can feel bored and decide to stop listening.

### **Students' Listening Comprehension Skills after Experiencing *VOA English***

Figure 5 indicates the proportions of any improvements in students' listening comprehension skills after practicing with *VOA Learning English*. Exceptionally, a high number of students agreed that *VOA Learning English* had improved their listening comprehension skills (93.3%), while the rest were slightly unsure if the activities have any effects. It is in accordance with the studies conducted by Rohmah (2019), which reported significant enhancements of *VOA Learning English* as an extensive listening exercise towards students' listening comprehension skills. Students also jotted down several viewpoints concerning benefits that students felt prominent other than having

their listening skills improved, such as helping them adjust to American accents. Students agreed that *VOA Learning English* also honed their reading skills, which is following research conducted by Dentisak (2010).



**Figure 5. Listening Comprehension Skills in Using VOA English for Extensive Listening Activities**

### **Suggestions on Improvements in Implementing VOA English in Classrooms**

With significant concerns on the continuation of *VOA Learning English* to be implemented in future classrooms, students were also asked to suggest any improvements to be made. Some students insisted that weekly journal logs should be sustained as they helped them monitor their progress and maintain their extensive listening habits. However, several students believed that there should be a strict rule on the days of journal submission to raise the students' motivation in doing the task, at least just by sending a photograph of their journals through the WhatsApp group to notify that they have completed the tasks, as they tend to procrastinate and are unable to set their own deadlines. There was also a recommendation to have a presentation or group discussion during in-class sessions to follow up their extensive listening using *VOA Learning English*, which was done during their free time to strengthen and reinforce their vocabulary. These suggestions contribute significantly to teachers who plan to implement *VOA Learning English* in their future classrooms and other researchers wishing to conduct a similar study.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study presents how *VOA Learning English* website is integrated into an English listening classroom as an extensive listening activity outside the class. The results indicated that learners were satisfied with their learning experience. They had the chance to select materials they found suitable and appropriate to their proficiency level and interests. To add, they also discovered that learning from *VOA Learning English* is convenient and of great help in enriching their vocabularies and widening their knowledge and visions of the world. Students had their preferred styles in experimenting with *VOA Learning English* during the practice of extensive listening activities. Most of the students carried out the activity more than once a week, exceeding the required amount required to complete. Students also found the contents to be up-to-date information while enjoyably broadening their vocabulary knowledge. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of *VOA Learning English* proved a great potential to be implemented as extensive listening activities in classrooms.

Future studies may gather longitudinal evidence to assess the effect of increased listening abilities through extensive listening. Case studies will also further enhance

understanding about the use of an individual approach to such similar websites. Further research is needed to identify students' difficulties, particularly at a lower level of proficiency, and to develop successful strategies to help students improve their skills. It is hoped that this work would promote further study of the use of common systems in active listening to facilitate second languages learning.

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