

USING TED TALKS AS AN EXTENSIVE LISTENING RESOURCE TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' LISTENING SKILLS AT SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES – THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	16/5/2022	The purpose of this research is to investigate students' perceptions about the factors that affected their choice of TED Talks as an extensive listening resource outside classroom, to assess if they can improve their listening abilities by using TED materials, and to investigate whether or not they think this strategy is beneficial for other aspects of English language learning. The participants in this study were 60 second-year students in their fourth semester at School of Foreign Languages – Thai Nguyen University. To collect the data, questionnaire, tests and interviews were used. The findings revealed that a variety of factors influenced their choice of TED videos. The most often reported factors were the speakers' accent, speech rate, vocabulary complexity and length of the talks. Students reported that the lectures improved their listening comprehension as well as other areas of the English language such as bettering vocabulary and background knowledge, enhancing pronunciation and accent, developing presentation skills, and increasing their learning motivation.
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SỬ DỤNG TED TALKS LÀM NGUỒN NGHE MỞ RỘNG ĐỂ NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG NGHE CỦA SINH VIÊN TRƯỜNG NGOẠI NGỮ - ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	16/5/2022	Bài báo này nhằm khảo sát nhận thức của sinh viên đại học về các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến việc lựa chọn TED Talks như một nguồn tài liệu nghe mở rộng ngoài lớp học, tìm hiểu liệu sinh viên có thể cải thiện khả năng nghe của mình bằng cách sử dụng tài liệu TED, và để đánh giá xem sinh viên có cho rằng chiến lược này có ích cho các khía cạnh khác của việc học tiếng Anh hay không. Đối tượng nghiên cứu bao gồm 60 sinh viên năm thứ hai đang học kỳ thứ tư tại Trường Ngoại ngữ - Đại học Thái Nguyên. Để thu thập dữ liệu, nhà nghiên cứu đã sử dụng bảng hỏi, bài kiểm tra và phỏng vấn. Kết quả cho thấy, có nhiều yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến việc sinh viên lựa chọn TED Talks. Các yếu tố như giọng nói của diễn giả, tốc độ nói, độ phức tạp của từ vựng và độ dài của bài nói được sinh viên quan tâm hơn cả. Các TED Talks video này đã giúp sinh viên cải thiện khả năng nghe hiểu cũng như các lĩnh vực khác của ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh như nâng cao vốn từ vựng và kiến thức nền, cải thiện phát âm và giọng nói, phát triển kỹ năng thuyết trình, và tăng động lực học.
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1. Introduction

Listening is one of the fundamental language skills. As Machado [1] defined, it is a mental process that includes attending, hearing, discriminating, understanding, and remembering. Listening involves identifying the sounds and processing them into words and sentences. When we listen, we use our ears to pick up individual sounds and our brains to translate them into messages that are meaningful to us. Despite its importance in communication and the fact that EFL students typically have difficulty listening, this oral receptive skill has received little attention. English is regarded as a foreign language in Vietnam. Nation and Newton [2] contend in their book that listening is the “least understood and most overlooked of the four major language skills in the language classroom”. This is related to the fact that communicating in multiple ways is given more weight. Despite these hurdles, English teachers have tried hard to assist their students grasp the four macro language abilities, including listening. Extensive listening (EL) is one method of teaching listening that has gained popularity in recent years. Renandya and Farrell [3] define EL as “all types of listening activities that allow learners to receive a lot of comprehensible and enjoyable listening input” (p.56). Students can benefit from regular exposure to intriguing and rich language by having this comprehensible and enjoyable listening input, which can aid in the development of their listening proficiency. One reason EL is not as popular as Extensive Reading (ER) is that appropriate listening resources are not always easy to get by. Teachers can now use publicly available listening materials on the internet, thanks to technological advancements. The TED series has established itself as one of the most popular websites for giving presentation-based video to global audiences. TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design. Since 2006, TED Talks have been made available on the TED website [4]. There are various advantages to using TED Talk videos [5]. Firstly, TED Talk videos are fascinating because they cover a wide range of themes, including technology, entertainment, design, business, science, and global challenges [6]. Secondly, each TED Talk has a unique “interactive transcript” element incorporated in it. The mix of reading and watching audiovisual materials is a very enjoyable experience. Furthermore, TED videos can be shared. Learners can quickly share the links on social media or save them as offline resources. They are also searchable “in many ways, including by speaker, subject, or theme,” [7]. This feature allows listeners to choose topics that they are interested in. Finally, as long as one is connected to the Internet, TED Talks can be viewed at any time and from any location. They can be seen on any mobile device, including tablets, smartphones, laptops, and PCs. TED Talks can help excite and inspire those who want to learn independently, boosting self-directed and independent learning in our students [8]. According to Taibi et al. [4], “there are more than 1800 talks that are publicly available on the website along with a rich collection of 35,000 transcripts in over 30 languages”. Given the ease with which TED Presentations can be accessed, a number of listening researchers have begun to study the extent to which the video-based talks may be effectively used for language learning. Takaesu [9] recently completed one such study, examining the influence of TED Talks for EL among his freshmen college students enrolled in his English for Academic Purposes course. In Vietnam, several researchers also exploited TED talks as extensive listening materials to enhance students’ listening skills and revealed positive outcomes. Motivated by the encouraging outcomes of the previous studies, this research aimed to investigate the language learning benefits of TED Talks for a group of students at School of Foreign Languages (SFL) - Thai Nguyen University in Vietnam and explored the following questions: 1) What factors are considered important by the SFL students when they choose TED Talk videos for their extensive listening? 2) Does listening to TED Talk videos help students to improve their English listening skills? 3) What other benefits do students can get from the use of TED Talk videos as an extensive listening resource?

2. Methodology

The participants were 60 English major juniors (from 2 different classes) whose English is at intermediate level at SFL. The researcher first explained the experiment to the students and showed them how to use TED talks as an EL resource for self-study listening at home over the semester (consisting of 15 weeks). Students were required to select one of their favorite videos from a list of TED talks (found on educational websites) and complete a Listening journal form each week. Data for the present study were collected by means of questionnaires, tests, and interviews. The combination of the three approaches ensures careful insight into the research because the results of the three techniques can be supportive of each other. A questionnaire with ten questions was given to the participants at the start of the study. Interviewing was used as a data gathering tool in addition to the survey questionnaire to provide additional information. The researcher had more time to investigate participants' further opinions about the current situation of studying listening skill, the benefits, difficulties, and suggestions for using TED talks to enhance students' listening skills by using in-depth interviews, which they did not have many opportunities to express when answering close-ended questions in survey questionnaires or because of limited space in open-ended questions. Test was the third key instrument to measure the level of students before and after the experimental class started. The tests included a pre-test conducted in week 1 and a post-test applied in week 15.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Research question 1

Students usually examine six aspects while picking listening resources, according to Takaesu [9] and Renandya and Farrell [3], including duration, speaker, topic, accent, speed, and vocabulary complexity. As seen in Figure 1, the results gave information on students' perspectives on those topics.

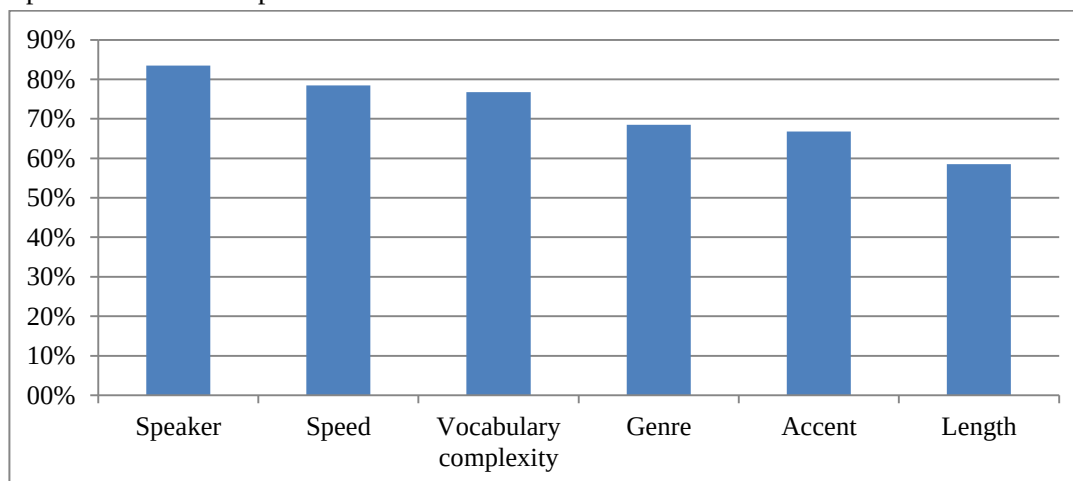


Figure 1. Factors affecting students' selection on TED Talks for EL

The bar graphs represent data concerning the results of the questionnaires. Factors to do with speaker, speed, vocabulary and genre are main reasons for the selection of TED videos. Accent and video duration are also crucial elements to consider, but not as much as the other four. As can be seen, the speaker element came out on top, with 83.5% of students choosing this choice on the survey. Native English speakers (NES) and non-native English speakers (NNES) are referred to as TED Talk speakers in this study (NNES). Although the difference was slight, students preferred to watch TED Talk videos presented by NES (58.5%) over NNES (41.5%). As a result, students in our study were more inclined to watch videos spoken by native speakers of English.

Two students stated in a follow-up interview that their preference for NESs was due to practical factors. They said native speakers communicated with more precision and clarity, making it easier for them to understand the content of the speeches. The second most important factor was speed or speech rate, which was mentioned by 78.5 percent of learners. Faster speech rates, according to Renandya and Farrell [3], can have a negative impact on students' comprehension. Unsurprisingly, 60% of students agreed that they preferred to listen to TED Talk videos at a slower speaking rate; however, 40% of students did not believe that a quicker rate was a serious worry. This data suggests that, while students enjoyed listening to NESs, they preferred NESs who spoke at the proper speed. A large percentage of students (76.8%) believed that the language density of the speeches influenced their choice of TED materials. TED Talks with simpler vocabulary words were preferred by 63.4% of students over those with more complicated vocabulary words (36.7%). It's worth mentioning that the TED website does not provide information about the videos' difficulty levels. Therefore, teachers should present students with a list of TED materials that have been pre-selected based on their levels of difficulty to enable students choose TED Talks that fit their levels of competency. Topic ranked fourth with a proportion of 68.5%. According to the results of the survey, 63.4% of students stated that they preferred non-educational TED Talks to educational ones (36.6%). It is encouraging to see that learners appear to be interested in a wide range of subjects. Research shows that extensive listening can assist students' speech understanding by increasing their world knowledge in the long term [10]. Figure 1 reveals that accent came in fifth place, with 66.8% of students preferring this option. From the questionnaire responses, students tended to agree that they preferred to listen to TED Talk videos by speakers with an American accent (50%), and British accent (33.4%), whereas only 16.6% of students said they had no problem listening to people with non-UK and US accents. The length of the video came in last, with 58.5% of students opting for it. According to the questionnaire results, students preferred to listen to TED Talks that were shorter than 12 minutes long (63.4%). Bloomfield, Wayland, Blodgett, and Linck [11] suggest that the longer the listening passages are, the less students would be interested in them. Hamouda [12] supports this statement by arguing that length could be a major problem in listening because listeners tend to "lose focus after concentrating too long on the listening". This means that the longer the listening section, the greater the chance that students would miss the primary point of the information.

3.2. Research question 2

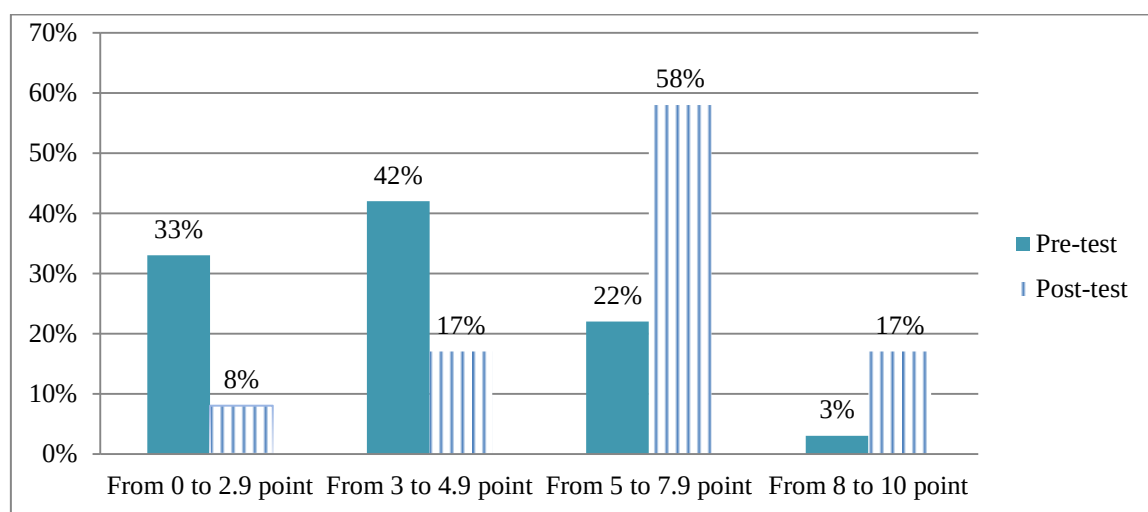


Figure 2. Pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group

As shown in Figure 2, the experimental group's pre-test scores were exceedingly poor. 75% students scored under 5 point, 33% of whom scored under 3. The percentage of students who received 5 to 7.9 points was quite low, accounting for only 22% of the total. Furthermore, just 3% of students received 8 to 10 points. At the start of the semester, the learners' listening skills were considered to be quite poor. The results of the post-test demonstrated the experimental group's progress after 15 weeks. More than half of the students received a score of 5 or higher, with 17 percent receiving excellent grades (from 8 to 10). When compared to the pre-test score, this figure increased by 50%. Furthermore, the percentage of pupils scoring below 3 reduced to 8%, down from 25% on the pre-test. In summary, comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test revealed that students' listening skills had improved dramatically.

Since TED talk listening projects are conducted within students' self-study time outside classroom, other data collection tools beside tests were used in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects. As data collected from the questionnaires and interviews, most students admitted that watching TED talk videos helped them enhance their listening skills. Learners indicated that their vocabulary range and background knowledge had expanded. Additionally, they had opportunities to expose to various English accents which is advantageous in listening exams.

3.3. Research question 3

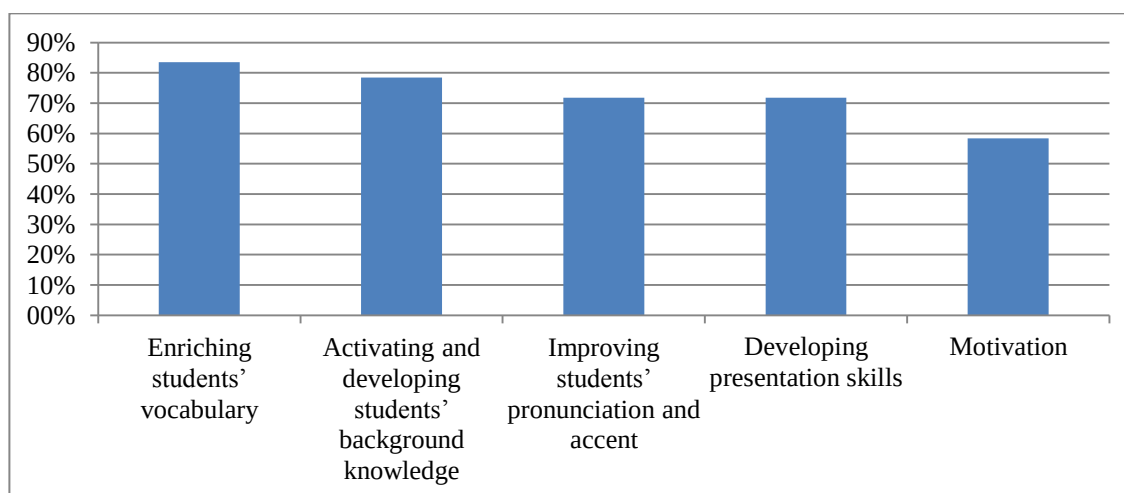


Figure 3. Other Benefits of Integrating TED Talks for EL

Figure 3 provides data regarding benefits students gain from watching TED videos apart from listening skills. It is encouraging to discover that a substantial majority of students believe that watching TED Talks improves their listening fluency as well as their other language skills. The majority of students (83.5%) appear to be serious about expanding their vocabulary. Simultaneously, they are likely to gain a thorough knowledge of any videos they find intriguing. This is also why they saw their vocabulary expanding after each TED talk. Furthermore, 78.5% of students said that watching TED videos broadened their horizons. Through this project, they were able to acquire valuable knowledge in different fields. In terms of pronunciation and accent, the majority of students (71.8%) in these groups were satisfied with their pronunciation after completing the project. In the interviews, some students added that they tried to repeat what the speakers said and dictated several easy short talks. Some others realized that they could correct a number of words that they ever pronounced in wrong ways when listening to these TED talks. Similarly, 71.8% of students express a great desire to improve their presentation skills thanks to TED Talks. Through interviews, some students revealed how much they appreciated TED Talks regarding presentation skills when presenting. They have learnt a lot about the impact of using

voices, body language, gestures, postures, examples, etc. A few students also expressed their gratitude to the lecturers, saying that they had been taught a lot from these speakers, such as their confidence, determination, speaking speed, and engagement with the audience. More than half of the students (58.4%) intended to visit TED.com after the course. Listening to well-known people share useful thoughts about intriguing and important issues provided them with a lot of motivation. Moreover, the students stated that their desire to learn English had increased after watching TED videos. Therefore, it seems that TED talks have successfully motivated them to study English and improve their skills outside class.

4. Conclusion

In brief, this study investigated the use of TED Talks videos as an authentic material to increase the students' listening skills of the fourth semester at School of Foreign Languages – Thai Nguyen University. Findings suggest that students' choice of TED Talks was guided by such factors as who the speakers were, the speech rate of the talks, the complexity of vocabulary used in the talks, the topics, the accents of the speakers, and the length of the videos. As for the perceived benefits of watching TED Talks, the majority of students reported that frequent viewing of TED videos helped them develop their listening fluency and comprehension, acquire new vocabulary, expand knowledge, enhance their pronunciation as well as presentation skills, and improve their motivation. In addition, they believed the ease of access to TED Talks and their highly stimulating contents were two of the primary motivators for them to watch more TED talks. Hence, it is suggested that TED Talks should be used as a learning tool at the university level to help students enhance their listening comprehension skills.

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