



Article

Increasing Students' Motivation for Listening Comprehension in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract: Listening comprehension is one of the most demanding components of foreign-language learning because learners must process spoken input in real time while dealing with reduced forms, unfamiliar vocabulary, speech rate, accents, and limited opportunities for repetition. These challenges can weaken students' confidence and reduce their willingness to participate in listening activities. This article examines how teachers can increase and develop students' motivation for listening comprehension in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. Drawing on research on second-language motivation, self-determination, the L2 Motivational Self System, metacognition, and listening pedagogy, the article argues that listening motivation should not be treated as a fixed learner characteristic. Rather, it can be developed through purposeful instructional design that strengthens autonomy, competence, relevance, emotional safety, and visible progress. The discussion integrates motivational principles with listening-specific practices, including pre-listening preparation, prediction, selective attention, repeated listening, metacognitive reflection, extensive listening, authentic materials, learner choice, collaborative tasks, and formative feedback. A practical framework is proposed in which motivational support is embedded in all three stages of a listening lesson: before, during, and after listening. The article concludes that effective listening instruction requires more than increasing the difficulty or quantity of audio input; it requires creating conditions in which learners understand why listening matters, experience attainable success, and gradually become independent listeners outside the classroom.

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1. Introduction

Listening is a central component of second- and foreign-language development because learners encounter a large proportion of language through spoken interaction. Rost characterizes listening as a complex real-time process in which listeners combine bottom-up processing of the incoming signal with top-down use of prior knowledge and expectations [1]. For EFL learners, however, classroom listening is often associated with a narrow sequence: play a recording, answer questions, check the answers, and move to the next exercise. When this pattern is repeated without sufficient attention to learners' goals, emotions, strategies, and interests, listening can become an activity that students complete for assessment rather than a skill they actively want to develop.

Motivation is therefore not an optional addition to listening pedagogy. In language learning, motivation influences learners' initiation of effort, persistence, attention, and willingness to engage with difficult material. Dörnyei describes motivation as a major

factor shaping the rate and success of L2 learning and emphasizes that classroom practices can either strengthen or weaken students' willingness to invest effort [2]. From the perspective of self-determination theory, students are more likely to sustain high-quality motivation when learning environments support autonomy, competence, and relatedness [3]. These principles are particularly relevant to listening, where learners often experience a strong sense of failure because the spoken message disappears immediately and cannot easily be controlled by the listener.

The purpose of this article is to synthesize motivational and listening research and translate it into practical principles for EFL teaching [4]. The central argument is that students' motivation for listening comprehension can be developed when listening tasks are meaningful, appropriately challenging, strategically scaffolded, emotionally supportive, and connected to learners' real or imagined future selves. The article does not present original experimental data; instead, it offers a research-informed pedagogical framework that can be adapted to secondary-school, university, and adult EFL contexts [5].

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative literature-based research design to examine pedagogical approaches to increasing students' motivation for listening comprehension in EFL classrooms. The analysis focused on scholarly literature concerning second-language motivation, listening comprehension, metacognitive awareness, learner autonomy, self-determination, and listening strategy instruction.

The materials analyzed included theoretical works, empirical studies, books, and peer-reviewed journal articles addressing L2 motivation and listening pedagogy. Particular attention was given to studies concerning self-determination theory, the L2 Motivational Self System, metacognitive listening strategies, extensive listening, and motivational instructional design.

Qualitative content analysis and thematic synthesis were used to identify recurring pedagogical principles and practices associated with learner motivation and listening development. The identified approaches were classified according to their instructional function, including goal setting, pre-listening preparation, explicit strategy instruction, repeated listening, learner choice, authentic and multimodal materials, supportive feedback, and integration of listening with communicative activities.

Based on the thematic analysis, the identified motivational and pedagogical principles were subsequently synthesized into a three-stage instructional framework corresponding to the pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening phases. The framework was developed to demonstrate how motivational support can be systematically integrated into ordinary EFL listening lessons and adapted to learners at different proficiency levels.

3. Results

The analysis of the reviewed literature identified several recurring pedagogical factors associated with increased motivation for listening comprehension in EFL classrooms. The findings indicate that learner motivation is strengthened when listening instruction combines clear and meaningful goals, appropriate task difficulty, strategic preparation, repeated exposure, learner choice, authentic materials, supportive feedback, and opportunities for reflection. These factors contribute to learners' sense of competence and control over the listening process [6].

The analysis further showed that pre-listening preparation plays an important motivational role. Activities such as prediction, activation of prior knowledge, focused vocabulary preparation, and identification of the communicative purpose of a listening task can reduce cognitive difficulty and increase learners' readiness to engage with spoken

input. During listening, explicit strategy use, including selective attention, inferencing, monitoring, and repeated listening with different purposes, helps learners manage comprehension difficulties more effectively [7].

Learner autonomy and choice also emerged as important motivational components. Providing students with opportunities to select listening materials according to their interests and proficiency levels, particularly through extensive listening activities, can encourage engagement beyond the classroom. Authentic and multimodal materials were found to be particularly useful when their linguistic and cognitive difficulty was appropriately matched to learners' abilities [8].

Based on the thematic synthesis, the identified motivational principles were organized into a three-stage instructional framework. The first stage, "Prepare and Personalize," focuses on establishing a meaningful purpose, activating prior knowledge, encouraging prediction, and providing appropriate learner choice [9]. The second stage, "Listen Strategically," involves repeated listening with differentiated goals, monitoring comprehension, making inferences, and comparing interpretations. The third stage, "Reflect and Extend," requires learners to evaluate their comprehension, identify successful strategies, recognize remaining difficulties, and apply the information obtained from listening in subsequent communicative activities [10].

The resulting framework demonstrates that motivation can be incorporated systematically into the entire listening process rather than treated as a separate classroom activity. The synthesis suggests that the combination of strategic scaffolding, attainable challenges, learner autonomy, formative feedback, and metacognitive reflection can create conditions that support sustained engagement with listening activities and gradually encourage independent listening practice [11].

LISTENING COMPREHENSION AS A MOTIVATIONAL CHALLENGE

Listening is frequently perceived by language learners as more difficult than activities that allow greater control over the input. Field's work highlights the importance of teaching learners to attend to how spoken language is actually processed, rather than assuming that comprehension will automatically emerge from repeated exposure. Speech is transient; words are connected, reduced, and pronounced with varying rhythms and accents. A learner who understands the written form of an expression may still fail to recognize it in connected speech. Such experiences can lead to a negative cycle: difficulty reduces confidence, low confidence reduces attention and participation, reduced practice slows improvement, and continued difficulty further lowers motivation [12].

Research on learner variables supports the view that successful listening depends on multiple interacting capacities. Vandergrift and Baker identify vocabulary knowledge, auditory discrimination, working memory, metacognitive awareness, and other learner characteristics as relevant to L2 listening comprehension [13]. This complexity has motivational consequences. When a student believes that success depends mainly on possessing an ability they do not have, the student may adopt an avoidance orientation. By contrast, when the teacher makes the listening process visible and teaches strategies that learners can control, difficulty becomes an opportunity for learning rather than proof of inability.

Listening anxiety is another important factor. Chon's study of adolescent EFL learners found relationships among academic motivation, metacognitive listening strategy use, and listening proficiency; it also reported that person knowledge reflecting listening anxiety could be detrimental to listening performance [14]. Thus, motivation should not be conceptualized simply as making activities entertaining. A highly entertaining task can still demotivate students if they repeatedly experience incomprehension, public embarrassment, or unclear expectations. Motivational listening pedagogy must combine engagement with psychological safety and a realistic pathway to success.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING LISTENING MOTIVATION

Self-determination and the quality of motivation

Self-determination theory distinguishes between different forms of motivation and emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness [15]. In listening instruction, autonomy can be supported when learners have some meaningful choice: they can select between podcasts, short videos, interviews, songs, stories, news reports, or topic-based recordings, or choose which question to investigate. Competence can be supported when tasks are sequenced from accessible to more demanding input and when progress is made observable. Relatedness can be developed through pair prediction, collaborative reconstruction of meaning, peer explanation, and supportive teacher interaction.

The implication is that teachers should move away from a purely compliance-oriented listening model. Saying "Listen because it will be on the test" may produce short-term effort but does not necessarily create durable engagement. Instead, teachers can explain the communicative purpose of the skill: understanding announcements, following lectures, enjoying films, communicating with international speakers, or accessing professional and academic knowledge. Relevance converts a classroom exercise into a meaningful act.

The L2 Motivational Self System

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System offers another useful perspective. The ideal L2 self refers to the learner's image of becoming a person who can use the additional language successfully. Listening tasks can activate this future-oriented dimension when learners imagine specific situations in which strong listening ability will matter. A student who visualizes studying abroad, working with international colleagues, watching professional content without subtitles, or participating in global online communities has a concrete reason to improve listening.

Teachers can incorporate this perspective through short goal-setting activities. At the beginning of a term, learners can write a "future listening profile" describing what they want to understand in English six months later. At regular intervals, they can compare their current performance with this profile. The motivational function is not merely inspirational; it helps connect present effort with a personally meaningful future identity. Research on the L2 motivational self system has emphasized the role of self-related vision and learning experience in shaping motivated behavior.

Motivational design and classroom conditions

Keller's ARCS model organizes motivational design around Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. The model can be translated effectively into listening lessons. Attention may be captured with a prediction question, an unusual sound, a short authentic clip, or a problem that students need to solve. Relevance can be established through topics connected to students' lives, academic studies, professional interests, or cultural curiosity. Confidence grows through clear goals, graded tasks, pre-teaching of only essential language, and opportunities to listen again. Satisfaction results when students can see what they have learned and use the newly acquired skill for a meaningful purpose.

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING MOTIVATION IN LISTENING LESSONS

Make listening goals visible

A common weakness of listening exercises is that learners know what to do but not why they are doing it. Every listening task should therefore begin with a concrete communicative goal. Instead of "Listen and answer five questions," a teacher can state: "Listen to identify the speaker's main problem and decide which solution is most realistic." Clear goals direct attention and give learners a reason to listen selectively. This is consistent with the view of listening as goal-oriented processing.

Goals should be achievable at the level of the task. A lower-intermediate learner may not understand every word in a two-minute recording, but can often identify the topic, speaker attitude, key numbers, or sequence of events. When the teacher defines success in these terms, students learn that comprehension does not mean recognizing every lexical item. This reduces unnecessary frustration and promotes strategic listening.

Use pre-listening tasks to build readiness

Pre-listening is one of the most powerful motivational stages because it activates knowledge, creates curiosity, and reduces the cognitive load of the recording. Learners can inspect a title or image, predict content, brainstorm relevant vocabulary, identify possible speakers, or formulate questions. Prediction transforms listening from passive reception into hypothesis testing. During the recording, students listen to confirm, reject, or revise their predictions.

The teacher should avoid turning pre-teaching into a long vocabulary lecture. Instead, only language that is genuinely necessary for access to the task should be highlighted. Excessive preparation can remove the challenge that makes listening purposeful. A balanced approach gives students enough support to experience control without revealing the entire message in advance. Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari's empirical work supports the value of process-based listening instruction involving prediction or planning, monitoring, evaluation, and problem solving.

Teach listening strategies explicitly

Students are more likely to persist when they have tools for dealing with breakdowns. Strategy instruction can include predicting, selective attention, inferencing, identifying key words, monitoring understanding, using context, and evaluating comprehension. The MALQ developed by Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari identifies dimensions such as planning and evaluation, directed attention, problem solving, mental translation, and person knowledge. These dimensions show that listening is not simply a matter of hearing sounds accurately; successful listeners regulate how they approach the task.

Explicit strategy instruction should be integrated into real listening rather than taught as a list of definitions. For example, before listening, students can write two predictions; while listening, they mark evidence; after listening, they explain which prediction was supported and what strategy helped them recover when comprehension broke down. The reflection makes the process visible and gives students a sense that improvement is controllable. This is especially important for weaker learners, who may otherwise interpret listening failure as a stable personal limitation.

Use repeated listening productively

Repeated listening can be motivational when each repetition has a different purpose. The first listening can focus on global meaning; the second on selected details; the third on confirming uncertain interpretations or noticing pronunciation and connected speech. This prevents repetition from becoming punishment. Students gradually discover that comprehension improves when they change their attention rather than simply "try harder."

Repeated listening also provides visible evidence of progress. A learner who initially identifies only the general topic may later recognize supporting details, speaker stance, or specific expressions. Teachers can ask learners to keep a short record of what they understood on each pass. Such records help transform listening from an invisible mental activity into measurable progress.

Introduce extensive listening and learner choice

Extensive listening expands the quantity and variety of comprehensible input beyond the classroom. Renandya and Farrell argue for an extensive listening approach, particularly as a complement to strategy-focused classroom work. The motivational

benefit is considerable because learners can select materials according to interest and listen for pleasure, information, or personal development rather than only for test completion.

A simple extensive listening program can require 10–15 minutes several times per week, with students choosing from teacher-curated sources at an appropriate difficulty level. Learners can maintain a listening log containing the title, source, approximate length, main idea, one new expression, and one reflection. Evaluation should focus on consistency and reflection rather than testing every minute of listening. This keeps the activity sustainable and supports autonomy.

Integrate authentic and multimodal materials

Authentic material can increase relevance because learners see and hear forms of English associated with real communication. However, authenticity should not be equated with maximal difficulty. Authentic content must be graded by topic, length, speech rate, task demand, and availability of support. Short interviews, vlogs, instructional videos, podcasts, public announcements, and conversational clips can be more motivating than long textbook recordings when they connect to learners' interests.

Subtitles and transcripts should be used strategically rather than automatically. A useful sequence is listen without text, identify the main idea, listen again with selective transcript support, and finally listen once more without the text. This procedure keeps the auditory channel central while giving learners a route to recover missed information. Field emphasizes the need to address the actual processes involved in understanding spoken language rather than relying exclusively on traditional comprehension questions.

Reduce fear of mistakes and comparison

Listening classrooms can become demotivating when students are required to produce answers publicly before they have had enough processing time. A more supportive sequence is individual thinking, pair comparison, and whole-class feedback. The teacher can normalize partial comprehension by explaining that successful listeners often build meaning from incomplete evidence. Students should be encouraged to explain the evidence behind an answer, not merely state whether they were right or wrong.

Feedback should emphasize strategy and progress. Instead of "You missed this because you do not know enough vocabulary," a teacher can say, "You identified the speaker's problem correctly; next time, listen for the contrast marker before the second example." Such feedback reinforces competence and gives learners an actionable next step, consistent with motivational principles emphasizing confidence and supportive learning conditions.

Connect listening with speaking and real-world action

Listening becomes more meaningful when it leads to a communicative outcome. Students can listen to an interview and then summarize it for a partner, listen to travel information and plan a route, hear different opinions and take a position, or listen to instructions and complete a practical task. Integrated tasks make listening instrumental: comprehension is needed in order to accomplish something.

This approach also reflects the interdependence of listening and other language skills. Listening supports vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation awareness, interactional competence, and spoken production. When students notice that better listening makes another activity easier, they receive direct evidence of the skill's value. Such evidence can strengthen motivation more effectively than abstract statements about the importance of English.

A THREE-STAGE MOTIVATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR LISTENING LESSONS

Based on the literature reviewed above, a practical listening lesson can be organized around three motivational stages: preparing the learner, supporting engagement during listening, and consolidating success after listening. The framework is deliberately simple so that it can be used within ordinary classroom constraints.

Stage 1: Prepare and personalize. The teacher presents a meaningful purpose, activates relevant knowledge, gives a focused prediction task, and allows limited choice where possible. The key motivational questions are: Why should I listen? What do I already know? What can I reasonably expect to understand? This stage supports relevance, readiness, and confidence.

Stage 2: Listen strategically. Students complete at least two listening cycles with different goals. They monitor comprehension, make inferences, and compare their interpretations with peers. The teacher should intervene mainly to model strategies or draw attention to useful cues rather than interrupting constantly. The goal is to move students from answer hunting toward active meaning construction.

Stage 3: Reflect and extend. After the listening, students check answers, explain evidence, identify a successful strategy, and note one remaining difficulty. A brief reflection such as "What helped you understand?" or "Which part became clearer on the second listening?" develops metacognitive awareness. The task can end with an application activity such as a short discussion, summary, role-play, or real-world decision. This creates satisfaction through successful use of the information.

The framework also creates a natural link to autonomous learning. Once students understand the cycle of prediction, focused listening, monitoring, and reflection, they can apply it to podcasts, videos, lectures, and conversations outside class. This is a crucial motivational shift: the learner begins to see listening development as an activity they can control rather than a performance they passively receive.

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK AS MOTIVATIONAL TOOLS

Assessment strongly influences what students believe is worth doing. If listening is assessed only through high-stakes tests, learners may focus on obtaining correct answers rather than developing long-term listening ability. Formative assessment can provide a better motivational balance. Teachers can assess strategy use, progress across repeated listening, ability to identify main ideas, and quality of reflection in addition to item accuracy.

Self-assessment can be particularly useful when students work with clear descriptors. For example, learners may rate whether they can understand the topic, identify the speaker's purpose, follow key details, infer unfamiliar words from context, and maintain attention despite missing some information. These descriptors can be reviewed monthly. A learner who moves from "I cannot understand English audio" to "I can identify the main idea and key details in short familiar topics" gains concrete evidence of development.

Research on metacognitive awareness suggests that structured reflection is relevant to listening success. At the same time, motivation research warns against assuming that a single motivational technique will work equally well for all learners. Dörnyei and Ushioda emphasize the dynamic and context-dependent nature of L2 motivation. Teachers therefore need to observe which combinations of challenge, choice, collaboration, feedback, and authenticity help particular students sustain effort.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION FOR DIFFERENT LEARNER LEVELS

For beginner and lower-intermediate learners, motivation depends heavily on attainable success. Audio should be short, context-rich, and supported by visuals, predictable routines, and limited task demands. The teacher can prioritize global

understanding, key words, and simple inferences. Repeated listening and highly familiar topics can provide frequent experiences of improvement.

For intermediate learners, teachers can increase authenticity and reduce scaffolding gradually. Students can compare speakers, infer attitudes, distinguish main ideas from examples, and work with moderately fast speech. Learner choice becomes increasingly important because adolescents and university students differ widely in interests. At this stage, extensive listening can be expanded and students can begin creating personal listening goals.

For advanced learners, motivational challenges should move toward intellectual engagement. Students can analyze stance, rhetorical purpose, implicit meaning, discourse organization, and variation in accents or registers. Academic lectures, interviews, debates, documentaries, and professional content can be incorporated. At high levels, motivation may depend less on “fun” and more on authenticity, intellectual challenge, identity, and the opportunity to use English for personally valuable purposes.

4. Discussion

The reviewed literature suggests that listening motivation and listening proficiency are mutually reinforcing rather than independent. Students who experience successful comprehension are more likely to believe that effort is worthwhile, while motivated students are more likely to practice, monitor, and persist. This does not mean that motivation alone guarantees improvement. Listening is constrained by linguistic knowledge, processing speed, working memory, auditory discrimination, and task characteristics. Motivational support must therefore be combined with sound listening instruction.

A second implication is that motivational problems should not automatically be attributed to learner attitudes. When many students lose interest in listening, the teacher should examine the design of the task: Is the purpose clear? Is the audio too difficult? Are students expected to understand every word? Do they have a chance to listen again? Is there enough preparation? Can they connect the topic to their lives? Do they receive useful feedback? Research on L2 motivation increasingly views motivation as situated in interaction between people and context, making classroom design a legitimate part of motivational intervention.

A third implication concerns autonomy. Extensive listening and learner choice can be highly motivating, but autonomy does not mean abandoning structure. Students often need curated options, recommended levels, clear goals, and simple procedures for reflection. The teacher’s role changes from controlling every listening activity to designing an environment in which learners gradually take responsibility. This direction is consistent with contemporary work on motivation, autonomy, and language learning.

Finally, listening motivation should be developed over time rather than expected to appear after a single engaging lesson. Teachers can build routines around weekly listening goals, learning logs, strategy reflection, and small celebrations of progress. Such routines turn motivation into sustained participation. The most important outcome is not that students enjoy one recording; it is that they become willing and able to seek English listening opportunities independently.

5. Conclusion

Increasing students’ motivation for listening comprehension requires a shift from viewing motivation as a psychological trait to viewing it as a quality of the learning environment that teachers can influence. Listening is difficult because spoken language is transient and cognitively demanding, but these difficulties become more manageable when students understand the purpose of a task, receive strategic support, experience

attainable success, and are given opportunities to make choices. The most effective motivational approach is therefore integrated. Teachers should make goals meaningful, activate prior knowledge, teach listening strategies, use repeated listening with different purposes, incorporate extensive and authentic input at appropriate levels, provide supportive feedback, and create opportunities for reflection and learner autonomy. The theoretical principles of self-determination, the L2 Motivational Self System, and motivational design provide a coherent explanation for why these practices can work, while listening research shows how they can be embedded in actual classroom processes. Ultimately, students become motivated listeners when they experience listening as both possible and worthwhile. The teacher's task is to create a progression in which learners move from "I cannot understand spoken English" to "I know how to approach difficult input, I can see my progress, and I can continue improving beyond the classroom." That progression is the foundation of durable motivation and independent listening development.

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