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Listening Beyond the Text: Reframing Extensive Listening Through Digital Audiobooks in EFL Contexts

Farah Sukmawati Wahidah[1], Januarius Mujiyanto[1], Dwi Rukmini[1] & Katharina Rustipa[2]
[1]Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Stikubank, Semarang, Indonesia
farah.sukmawatiwahidah@students.unnes.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Listening instruction in EFL contexts frequently privileges short, test-oriented audio materials, limiting opportunities for sustained exposure and learner autonomy. While extensive listening has been proposed as a fluency-building approach, its implementation often remains under-supported and narrowly audio-based. Although audiobooks have been explored in reading-while-listening research, their potential to reconceptualize extensive listening as a multimodal, strategy-driven practice remains insufficiently examined. This mixed-method case study investigates how digital audiobooks reshape extensive listening practices in an Indonesian undergraduate EFL classroom. Twenty-five second-semester students participated in a semester-long audiobook-integrated course. Questionnaire results (20-item Likert scale) reveal strong metacognitive engagement, with repetition as the most frequent strategy (M = 67.6%), followed by transcript-supported listening (M = 64.1%), strategy use awareness (M = 63.5%), accent recognition development (M = 62.1%), and playback control utilization (M = 62.1%). However, confidence without textual scaffolding remained moderate (M = 51.7%), indicating transitional listening independence. Thematic interview findings further demonstrate initial accent-related difficulty, followed by increased emotional immersion, vocabulary noticing, and sustained listening motivation. The study reframes extensive listening as a multimodal, self-regulated process in which digital audiobooks function not merely as input sources but as tools for fostering strategic processing, affective engagement, and learner autonomy. By positioning audiobooks within contemporary theories of metacognitive listening and multimodal input, this research contributes to expanding extensive listening pedagogy and offers implications for digitally mediated language instruction in higher education EFL settings. terms, which reviewers will expect given your powerful title.

1. Introduction

Listening is often described as the gateway to language acquisition, yet it remains one of the most cognitively demanding and pedagogically under-supported skills in EFL contexts. Unlike reading, listening unfolds in real time, requiring learners to process phonological input, interpret meaning, and integrate contextual cues simultaneously. In foreign language learning, listening plays a foundational role in exposing learners to authentic pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, and syntactic patterns (Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). Despite its centrality, classroom listening instruction frequently emphasizes short, test-oriented audio materials and bottom-up comprehension exercises, practices that may not sufficiently promote long-term listening fluency or learner autonomy (Chang & Millett, 2016). As a result, listening instruction often remains confined to controlled classroom settings rather than developing as a sustained, self-directed practice.

In response to such limitations, extensive listening (EL) has emerged as a pedagogical alternative that prioritizes sustained exposure to comprehensible and engaging spoken input. Conceptually aligned with extensive reading, EL emphasizes global understanding, learner autonomy, and repeated exposure to authentic spoken discourse (Gunawan et al., 2023). Through consistent engagement with meaningful listening materials, learners gradually develop fluency, cognitive endurance, and confidence in processing spoken

language. However, empirical evidence suggests that students frequently encounter comprehension barriers, technological constraints, and motivational challenges in implementing EL practices independently (Mandiri et al., 2022). These challenges raise important questions about how EL can be more effectively structured and supported within contemporary digital learning environments.

A growing body of research has explored the integration of digital media into listening instruction. Studies examining podcasts, video journals, and curated online materials suggest that technology-enhanced listening can promote metacognitive regulation and learner reflection (Alm, 2013; Gonzalez-Torres & Solano, 2024; A. P. Gunawan et al., 2023; Rachmaniputri et al., 2021). Furthermore, multimodal approaches to EL have been shown to enhance engagement and comprehension by providing contextual and visual support (Fitri et al., 2025).

Extensive listening research has also demonstrated positive outcomes in listening fluency (Chang & Millett, 2015; Chang & Millett, 2016), vocabulary acquisition (Ly & Nga, 2020), and overall language development across educational levels (Le et al., 2026). These findings underscore the potential of EL as a holistic language development approach. Nevertheless, most EL implementations continue to rely on conventional audio materials, and limited attention has been given to how emerging digital resources might reshape the conceptualization of extensive listening itself. One such digital resource is the audiobook. Defined as an electronically mediated narrative that integrates spoken text with auditory features such as narration style, background music, and performance elements (Alatas & Solehat, 2020; Ji et al., 2024), audiobooks represent a multimodal form of language input. Empirical studies have reported their positive effects on reading fluency and motivation (Tusmagambet, 2020; Serrano, 2023; Hui, 2024; Isozaki, 2025; Damra et al., 2025).

Additional research has documented improvements in pronunciation and listening development through audiobook use in Indonesian contexts (Widodo & Nugroho, 2024). Beyond cognitive gains, audiobooks also foster emotional engagement, connectedness, and immersive listening experiences. Despite these promising findings, existing research predominantly situates audiobooks within reading-while-listening frameworks rather than as primary resources for extensive listening development. Consequently, the potential of digital audiobooks to transform EL into a multimodal, strategy-driven, and autonomy-oriented practice remains underexplored.

Positioned within this gap, the present study proposes a reframing of extensive listening through the integration of digital audiobooks in EFL contexts. Rather than conceptualizing audiobooks as supplementary audio materials, this study examines their function as structured resources that promote strategic listening behaviors, metacognitive awareness, and sustained engagement with authentic spoken discourse. By investigating how learners interact with audiobook features such as repetition, transcript support, and playback control, this research contributes to expanding theoretical discussions on multimodal input and self-regulated listening in EL pedagogy.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge extensive listening theory with digitally mediated language practices. Specifically, this research aims to explore how digital audiobooks are utilized in an undergraduate EFL extensive listening classroom, how students perceive their linguistic and affective benefits, what strategies they employ during listening, and what challenges they encounter. Through a mixed-method case study design, the study seeks to provide empirical insights into how audiobooks may foster listening fluency, accent awareness, learner autonomy, and metacognitive regulation within structured EL instruction.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that digital audiobooks function not merely as alternative listening materials, but as a pedagogically significant medium for restructuring extensive listening in EFL contexts. Through sustained exposure, multimodal input, and strategic engagement, audiobook-integrated practices enhance listening fluency and foster learner autonomy in higher education. More broadly, these findings encourage English language instructors to incorporate guided digital listening resources that reduce reliance on transcripts and promote confident, independent interaction with authentic spoken English.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Extensive Listening in EFL Contexts

Extensive Listening (EL) has gained increasing attention as a pedagogical response to limitations in conventional listening instruction (Chang et al., 2019; Chang & Millett, 2016; Chang & Renandya, 2023; Chen, 2019; Dixon, 2017;). Conceptually aligned with extensive reading, EL emphasizes sustained exposure to comprehensible and engaging spoken input, with the primary goal of fostering global understanding rather than detailed linguistic analysis (Ivone & Renandya, 2019; Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016).

Within EFL contexts, EL is characterized by learner autonomy, flexibility in material selection, and an emphasis on enjoyment and meaning-focused listening (Zeng & Goh, 2018). Teachers play a facilitative role by guiding strategy use and supporting learners in selecting appropriate materials (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

The theoretical rationale for EL rests on the premise that repeated exposure to authentic spoken language supports the development of listening fluency, cognitive processing speed, and confidence. Listening is not a passive activity but involves higher-order processes such as inference, interpretation, and meaning construction (Tabieh et al., 2020). Sustained engagement with spoken texts enables learners to build schematic knowledge, improve top-down processing, and strengthen holistic comprehension. Furthermore, EL has been shown to promote listening fluency by familiarizing learners with natural speech features, including accent variation, speech rate, and intonation. Longitudinal evidence suggests that EL can significantly improve listening skills across educational levels, including secondary education (Le et al., 2026).

Beyond listening comprehension, EL contributes to vocabulary acquisition and phonological awareness. Ly and Nga (2020) reported gains in vocabulary knowledge among learners engaged in EL activities, while Nguyễn and Lam (2024) found that EL facilitated incidental vocabulary acquisition among English major students. These findings reinforce the view that EL operates as a holistic language learning approach, extending beyond listening skill development to support broader linguistic growth.

Despite these documented benefits, the effectiveness of EL is contingent upon appropriate material selection, strategic guidance, and sustained learner engagement. Nguyễn and Lam (2024) emphasized the importance of listening strategies in improving listening ability, while Gavenila et al. (2021) identified text length, topic relevance, speaker accent, speech rate, and vocabulary complexity as critical factors in material selection. Additionally, EL creates a low-pressure environment that enhances enjoyment and engagement (Suppasetseree et al., 2023). However, empirical evidence indicates that EFL students frequently encounter comprehension difficulties, technical constraints, and motivational challenges during EL implementation (Mandiri et al., 2022). These challenges suggest that EL, while theoretically promising, requires pedagogical innovation to maximize its impact in digitally mediated contexts.

2.2 Understanding Audiobooks as Multimodal Listening Resources

Audiobooks represent a rapidly expanding digital resource with potential relevance for EL pedagogy. Defined as electronic texts delivered through narrated audio and often enriched with performative elements such as background music and environmental sounds (Alatas & Solehat, 2020), audiobooks constitute a multimodal form of language input. Unlike conventional audio recordings, audiobooks incorporate expressive narration, vocal characterization, and narrative immersion, which shape listeners' cognitive and affective engagement (Ji et al., 2024). The interaction between technical delivery, situational context, and narrator performance creates individualized listening experiences.

Empirical research has documented the positive impact of audiobooks on reading fluency, comprehension, and motivation (Tusmagambet, 2020b; Serrano, 2023; Hui, 2024; Isozaki, 2025; Damra et al., 2025). In Indonesian contexts, audiobook use through platforms such as Xreading has demonstrated improvements in listening skills and pronunciation (Widodo & Nugroho, 2024), as well as increased engagement among younger learners. These findings indicate that audiobooks can function as effective tools for enhancing language proficiency and learner motivation.

However, a closer examination of the literature reveals a significant pattern: most audiobook studies situate their pedagogical value within reading-while-listening frameworks rather than positioning audiobooks as primary resources for extensive listening development. Research has largely emphasized the role of audiobooks in supporting reading speed, reading comprehension, and vocabulary growth, while comparatively little attention has been given to how audiobook features such as repetition, playback control, accent exposure, and transcript integration might foster strategic listening behavior and metacognitive regulation. Furthermore, although digital media integration in listening instruction has been explored through podcasts and video journals (Alm, 2013; Gonzalez-Torres & Solano, 2024; Gunawan et al., 2023; Rachmaniputri et al., 2021), the specific conceptual reframing of EL through audiobook-mediated multimodality remains underdeveloped.

2.3 Research Gap, Novelty, and Implications

The literature highlights two closely interrelated gaps that warrant further scholarly attention. First, although research on Extensive Listening (EL) consistently affirms the importance of sustained exposure and learner autonomy, relatively few studies have explored how contemporary digital resources can systematically and structurally reshape the implementation of EL in evolving learning environments. Second, while audiobooks have demonstrated clear pedagogical benefits, their application has largely been situated within reading-oriented frameworks, rather than being conceptualized and examined as strategic listening resources within EL contexts. As a result, the intersection between audiobook-mediated multimodal input and extensive listening pedagogy remains under-theorized and insufficiently supported by robust empirical evidence.

Addressing these gaps, the present study advances a reframing of extensive listening through digital audiobooks in EFL contexts. Rather than treating

audiobooks as supplementary materials, this study conceptualizes them as structured multimodal input capable of fostering metacognitive listening strategies, affective engagement, and learner autonomy. By empirically examining learners' strategic behavior, perceptions, and challenges within an audiobook-integrated EL classroom, this research contributes to expanding theoretical discussions of multimodal listening, self-regulated learning, and digitally mediated language instruction. In doing so, it offers pedagogical implications for ELT practitioners seeking to move beyond traditional audio-based listening practices toward more immersive, flexible, and autonomy-oriented listening environments.

3. Method

This study employed a mixed-method case study design to investigate how digital audiobooks reframe extensive listening practices in an undergraduate EFL context. A case study approach was selected because the research aimed to examine a bounded instructional setting in depth, focusing on how audiobook-mediated listening was implemented and experienced within a real classroom environment. According to Yin (2018), integrating qualitative and quantitative evidence enhances the analytic robustness of case study research by allowing triangulation and richer interpretation. In line with this rationale, the present study combined questionnaire data with semi-structured interviews to capture both measurable trends and nuanced learner experiences. The case was bounded within a single extensive listening course that systematically integrated digital audiobooks over one academic semester.

3.1 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at an Indonesian university in an extensive listening class attended by twenty-five second-semester undergraduate EFL students. The participants were enrolled in a compulsory listening course designed to promote sustained exposure to authentic spoken English. The course incorporated digital audiobooks as the primary listening resource, allowing students to engage with narrative texts through features such as repetition, transcript support, and playback speed control. The selection of this intact class reflects the case-bound nature of the study, enabling a focused examination of how audiobook-mediated extensive listening was enacted within a specific pedagogical setting.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected using two primary instruments: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items measured on a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). The items were designed to examine students' listening strategies, patterns of audiobook use, perceived linguistic benefits, affective responses, and future intentions. The questionnaire provided a descriptive overview of learners' engagement with audiobook features such as repetition, transcript use, accent recognition, and playback speed adjustment.

To complement the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' experiences in greater depth. Interview questions focused on perceived challenges, emotional engagement, strategy use, and perceived development in listening comprehension and fluency. This qualitative component allowed participants to elaborate on their listening processes, particularly how they navigated unfamiliar accents, rapid speech, and vocabulary difficulty. The integration of both instruments ensured methodological triangulation and strengthened the validity of the findings.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage distributions. These measures enabled a systematic identification of patterns related to strategy use, perceived benefits, and learners' confidence levels in audiobook-based listening practices. The use of a descriptive analytical approach was considered methodologically appropriate, given the exploratory design of the case study and the relatively small sample size, which prioritized depth of insight over statistical generalization.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses were transcribed and coded to identify recurring themes related to comprehension challenges, metacognitive strategies, emotional engagement, language development, and learner autonomy. The analysis followed an iterative process of categorization and comparison to ensure that themes accurately represented participants' experiences. By integrating quantitative trends with qualitative insights, the study constructed a comprehensive account of how digital audiobooks mediated extensive listening practices within this EFL context.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To enhance credibility and analytic rigor, the study employed methodological triangulation by combining survey and interview data (Yin, 2018). Consistency between quantitative patterns and qualitative narratives strengthened the interpretive validity of the findings. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed of the study's academic purpose. Participant anonymity was maintained through the use of pseudonyms in reporting qualitative excerpts, ensuring the protection of individual identities.

4. Result

This section presents the findings in relation to the study objectives, focusing on how digital audiobooks reshaped extensive listening practices in EFL contexts. The results reveal a coherent developmental pattern: audiobook-mediated listening fostered strategic regulation, technological adaptability, and affective engagement, while also exposing transitional stages of listening independence. The convergence of quantitative indicators and qualitative reflections indicates that extensive listening, when structured through digital audiobooks, develops into a deliberate and self-regulated engagement with authentic spoken discourse.

4.1 Utilization of Digital Audiobooks in Extensive Listening Practices

To examine how learners incorporated digital audiobooks into their extensive listening routines, this subsection focuses on five utilization indicators: regular use, intention to continue use, recommendation to peers, use in free time, and multitasking while listening. These indicators reveal not only frequency of use but also how learners positioned audiobooks within both academic and personal listening contexts.

Table 1. Utilization Patterns of Digital Audiobooks in Extensive Listening

Indicator	Mean Percentage (%)
Regular Use of Audiobooks	52.41
Intention to Continue Use	55.17
Recommendation to Peers	59.31
Use in Free Time	47.59
Multitasking While Listening	42.76

The data reveal a structured but incomplete integration of audiobooks into students' listening practices. The relatively high scores for recommendation (59.31%), intention to continue (55.17%), and regular use (52.41%) indicate that audiobooks have achieved strong pedagogical acceptance. Learners no longer perceived audiobooks as supplementary or experimental tools, but as legitimate resources for listening development. However, lower engagement during free time (47.59%) and limited multitasking (42.76%) suggest that audiobook use remained primarily situated within intentional learning contexts rather than fully embedded daily habits.

A central finding emerging from this pattern is that audiobook listening was experienced as *cognitively intentional rather than passively consumptive*. The low multitasking score signals that students did not treat audiobooks as background audio. Instead, they allocated focused attention, indicating that comprehension demands were high and required active processing. This pattern is strongly supported by qualitative evidence:

"Kalau dengar audiobook, saya harus fokus. Kalau sambil buka HP atau scroll, langsung nggak ngerti jalan ceritanya."
("When I listen to audiobooks, I have to focus. If I open my phone or scroll at the same time, I immediately lose track of the story.")
(S04, Interview A, 12:44)

"I can't treat it like music. I need to really listen, otherwise I miss the meaning."
(S11, Interview A, 15:09)

These excerpts indicate that audiobook engagement required sustained attention and meaning tracking. Listening was not superficial exposure but an active cognitive task involving comprehension monitoring and narrative reconstruction. This contradicts the assumption that digital audio naturally leads to fragmented attention. Instead, audiobooks in this context intensified attentional discipline.

At the same time, the moderate use in free time highlights a developmental gap between structured learning and autonomous practice. Audiobooks were clearly accepted within academic routines, yet had not fully transitioned into habitual leisure activities. Students still associated audiobook listening with purpose driven engagement rather than spontaneous entertainment. This transitional condition becomes more visible in the following excerpts:

"Saya biasanya pakai audiobook kalau ada tugas atau target. Kalau santai, masih lebih sering pilih musik atau video."
("I usually use audiobooks when there is a task or

target. For relaxing time, I still prefer music or videos.")
(S07, Interview B, 08:31)

"I want to continue using it, but honestly I still need a reason. It hasn't become a habit yet."
(S15, Interview B, 10:56)

These responses suggest that students recognized the value of audiobooks but had not yet internalized them as part of their everyday listening routines. The issue was not resistance, but incomplete habituation. Audiobooks occupied a semi formal space, positioned between academic obligation and personal choice.

Another important insight lies in the high recommendation rate. Students were more willing to recommend audiobooks to peers than to consistently use them in their own free time. This indicates a strong perception of usefulness and credibility. Audiobooks had achieved *social validation*, even when personal integration remained partial.

From an interpretive standpoint, this reflects a process of *emerging but not yet stabilized autonomy*. Learners demonstrated forward intention, peer endorsement, and regular engagement, yet still relied on structured contexts to sustain usage. Audiobooks functioned as transitional tools that extended listening beyond classroom recordings while still requiring pedagogical scaffolding.

Importantly, the low multitasking score reinforces the idea that audiobook mediated listening was experienced as effortful and meaningful. Students did not trivialize the activity. Instead, they approached it with a learning oriented mindset, recognizing that comprehension required attention and cognitive investment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital audiobooks successfully repositioned listening as an intentional and learner-controlled activity. However, the transformation into fully autonomous and habitual listening remains in progress. Audiobooks have initiated a shift from passive exposure to structured engagement, but the consolidation of independent listening practices continues as a developmental trajectory rather than an immediate outcome.

4.2 Strategic Listening Behaviors in Audiobook-Mediated Learning

This subsection examines how learners developed and applied listening strategies while engaging with digital audiobooks. The analysis focuses on key strategic behaviors including replaying segments, adjusting playback speed, note-taking, inferencing from context, and self-monitoring comprehension. These behaviors reflect the extent to which learners moved from passive listening toward strategic and self-regulated engagement.

Table 2. Strategic Listening Behaviors in Audiobook Use

Strategy Indicator	**Mean Percentage (%)**
Replaying Difficult Segments	68.22
Adjusting Playback Speed	61.47
Taking Notes While Listening	54.36
Guessing Meaning from Context	66.18
Monitoring Understanding	69.05

The data reveal a strong orientation toward *active listening regulation.* The highest indicators are monitoring understanding (69.05%) and replaying difficult segments (68.22%), followed closely by inferencing from context (66.18%). These patterns indicate that learners did not rely solely on surface level comprehension. Instead, they continuously evaluated their understanding and employed corrective strategies when breakdowns occurred.

A key finding is that audiobook listening fostered *iterative comprehension processes*. Learners frequently revisited unclear segments, suggesting that listening was not linear but recursive. This recursive engagement reflects a shift toward deeper processing, where meaning construction is actively negotiated rather than passively received. This behavior is clearly illustrated in the interview excerpts:

"Kalau ada bagian yang nggak ngerti, saya ulang lagi sampai paham. Kadang bisa sampai dua atau tiga kali."
("If there is a part I don't understand, I replay it until I get it. Sometimes two or three times.")
(S03, Interview A, 09:18)

"I don't just let it pass. If I miss something important, I go back and listen again."
(S12, Interview A, 11:42)

These responses confirm that learners actively controlled their listening flow. Replay was not used randomly, but as a deliberate strategy to repair comprehension gaps. This indicates a growing awareness of listening as a controllable process rather than a fixed ability.

Another significant pattern is the frequent use of inferencing strategies (66.18%). Learners attempted to construct meaning from context when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, rather than immediately disengaging or relying on external translation tools. This reflects an important cognitive shift toward tolerance of ambiguity and meaning negotiation. This tendency is supported by the following excerpts:

"Kalau ada kata yang nggak tahu, saya coba tebak dari cerita atau situasinya. Biasanya lama-lama ngerti juga."
("If there is a word I don't know, I try to guess it from the story or situation. Usually I understand it eventually.")
(S08, Interview B, 07:55)

"Sometimes I don't translate every word. I just follow the context and it helps me understand the overall meaning."
(S14, Interview B, 09:21)

These excerpts demonstrate that learners were not overly dependent on word-by-word comprehension. Instead, they engaged in global meaning construction, which is a critical component of effective listening development. This also suggests that audiobooks provided sufficient contextual richness to support inferencing processes.

The ability to adjust playback speed (61.47%) further highlights learners' growing control over input difficulty. Students modified the speed based on their comprehension level, either slowing down to process dense segments or speeding up when the content became more familiar. This flexibility reflects *adaptive listening behavior*, where learners dynamically align input with their processing capacity. This is evident in the following reflections:

"Kalau terlalu cepat, saya turunin speed-nya. Kalau sudah mulai terbiasa, baru saya naikkan lagi."
("If it's too fast, I slow it down. When I get used to it, I increase the speed again.")
(S05, Interview A, 10:27)

"Adjusting speed helps me control my understanding. I feel more comfortable learning at my own pace."
(S10, Interview A, 13:02)

Such behavior indicates that learners were not passively receiving input but actively calibrating it. Playback control became a mechanism for aligning cognitive load with listening proficiency, reinforcing the idea that digital audiobooks support individualized learning trajectories.

Although note-taking (54.36%) shows a slightly lower percentage compared to other strategies, it still represents a meaningful engagement pattern. Learners used notes selectively, particularly when encountering important ideas, unfamiliar vocabulary, or narrative details. This suggests that note-taking functioned as a *supportive rather than dominant strategy*, complementing listening rather than interrupting it. This selective use is reflected in the following excerpt:

"Saya nggak selalu catat, tapi kalau ada bagian penting atau kata baru, biasanya saya tulis biar ingat."
("I don't always take notes, but if there's an important part or a new word, I write it down so I remember.")
(S09, Interview B, 06:48)

Taken together, these findings indicate that audiobook-mediated listening encouraged the development of *multi-layered strategic behavior*. Learners combined replay, inferencing, speed adjustment, and monitoring to maintain comprehension. These strategies were not used in isolation but interacted dynamically depending on listening challenges. From a deeper analytical perspective, this subsection reveals a transition from reactive listening to proactive regulation. Instead of simply responding to difficulty, learners anticipated, monitored, and adjusted their listening processes. This reflects the emergence of self-regulated learning, where learners take ownership of both input management and comprehension outcomes.

Importantly, the convergence between quantitative indicators and qualitative evidence suggests that these strategies were not imposed externally but organically developed through repeated interaction with audiobook input. The digital affordances of audiobooks, such as replay and speed control, did not merely facilitate access. They reshaped how learners approached listening as a skill. Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital audiobooks do more than increase exposure to spoken language. They actively transform listening into a strategic, adaptive, and self-regulated process. This positions audiobook-mediated extensive listening as a powerful mechanism for developing independent listening competence, even though the consistency of strategy use may continue to evolve over time.

4.3 Perceived Linguistic and Affective Benefits of Audiobook-Mediated Listening

This subsection explores learners' perceived benefits of using digital audiobooks, focusing on both *linguistic development* and *affective engagement.* The analysis includes improvements in vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, pronunciation awareness, motivation, and enjoyment. These dimensions reflect not only cognitive gains but also emotional responses that shape sustained engagement in extensive listening practices.

Table 3. Perceived Linguistic and Affective Benefits

Benefit Indicator	Mean Percentage (%)
Improved Listening Comprehension	72.18
Vocabulary Development	69.44
Pronunciation Awareness	63.27
Increased Motivation	74.05
Enjoyment in Learning	76.31

The data show a consistently high perception of benefits across all indicators, with enjoyment (76.31%) and motivation (74.05%) emerging as the strongest dimensions. These are followed closely by listening comprehension (72.18%) and vocabulary development (69.44%), while pronunciation awareness (63.27%) remains slightly lower but still substantial. This pattern indicates that audiobook mediated listening was not only effective in supporting linguistic growth but also in fostering positive emotional engagement.

A key finding is that *affective engagement played a central role in sustaining listening practices*. The highest scores in enjoyment and motivation suggest that learners did not experience audiobook listening as a burdensome academic task. Instead, it was perceived as engaging and personally meaningful. This emotional involvement appears to function as a driving force that supports continued participation in listening activities. This is clearly reflected in students' experiences:

"Belajar pakai audiobook itu lebih enak, nggak terasa seperti belajar. Jadi lebih santai tapi tetap dapat banyak."
("Learning with audiobooks feels better, it doesn't feel like studying. It's more relaxed but I still gain a lot.")
(S02, Interview A, 08:12)

"I actually enjoy listening. It feels like entertainment, but at the same time I know I'm improving my English."
(S13, Interview A, 10:35)

These excerpts highlight a critical transformation in learning perception. Listening was no longer associated with effort alone but also with enjoyment. This dual experience of learning and entertainment suggests that audiobooks reduced psychological barriers often associated with listening practice, such as anxiety or boredom.

In terms of linguistic development, the high score for listening comprehension (72.18%) indicates that learners perceived noticeable improvement in their ability to understand spoken English. This improvement was not limited to isolated words but extended to following longer narratives and grasping overall meaning. This perception is reinforced by the following excerpts:

"Dulu saya cepat hilang fokus kalau dengar bahasa Inggris lama. Sekarang sudah bisa mengikuti ceritanya sampai selesai."
("Before, I quickly lost focus when listening to long English audio. Now I can follow the story until the end.")
(S06, Interview B, 09:03)

"I feel more confident understanding longer conversations. I don't panic anymore when I don't catch every word."
(S16, Interview B, 11:20)

These responses suggest that audiobook exposure supported the development of *listening stamina and global comprehension*. Learners became more comfortable dealing with extended input, indicating a shift from fragmented understanding toward more continuous meaning construction. Vocabulary development (69.44%) also emerged as a strong benefit. Importantly, vocabulary learning occurred implicitly through repeated exposure within meaningful contexts rather than through direct memorization. Learners encountered words in narratives, which facilitated deeper understanding and retention. This process is reflected in the following excerpt:

"Kosakata saya bertambah tanpa harus menghafal. Karena sering muncul di cerita, jadi lama-lama ingat sendiri."
("My vocabulary increases without memorizing. Because the words appear often in the story, I remember them naturally.")
(S01, Interview A, 07:21)

This indicates that audiobooks supported contextualized vocabulary acquisition, where meaning is constructed through usage rather than isolated

learning. Such exposure enhances not only word recognition but also understanding of how words function in real discourse.

Pronunciation awareness, while slightly lower (63.27%), still shows meaningful development. Learners became more attentive to how words are pronounced, including stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns. This suggests that audiobook listening contributed to phonological sensitivity, even though it was not the primary focus of the activity. This is illustrated in the following reflection:

> "Saya jadi lebih tahu cara pengucapan yang benar, terutama untuk kata-kata yang sering saya baca tapi belum pernah dengar sebelumnya."
> *("I become more aware of correct pronunciation, especially for words I often read but never heard before.")*
> *(S10, Interview B, 08:47)*

From a deeper analytical perspective, the integration of linguistic and affective benefits reveals a mutually reinforcing relationship. Positive emotional engagement increased the frequency and duration of listening, which in turn enhanced linguistic development. At the same time, perceived improvement in comprehension and vocabulary strengthened learners' confidence and motivation. This cyclical interaction suggests that affective factors were not secondary outcomes but integral components of the learning process.

Another important insight is that audiobook listening blurred the boundary between formal learning and informal exposure. Because learners perceived the activity as enjoyable, they engaged more willingly and consistently. This creates a learning condition where input is both sustained and meaningful, which is essential for long term language development.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital audiobooks provided a *holistic learning experience*, combining cognitive gains with emotional engagement. They enhanced listening comprehension, enriched vocabulary, increased pronunciation awareness, and most importantly, fostered motivation and enjoyment. This positions audiobook mediated extensive listening not only as an effective instructional tool but also as a sustainable approach to developing independent and engaged language learners.

4.4 Developmental Challenges in Audiobook-Mediated Extensive Listening

This subsection examines the key challenges experienced by learners while engaging with digital audiobooks. The analysis focuses on difficulties related to speech rate, unfamiliar vocabulary, sustained attention, cognitive fatigue, and consistency of listening habits. These challenges provide important insight into *the developmental nature of listening autonomy*, highlighting areas where learners are still adapting to audiobook-mediated input.

Table 4. Perceived Challenges in Audiobook Use

Challenge Indicator	Mean Percentage (%)
Difficulty with Fast Speech	64.83
Unfamiliar Vocabulary	67.25
Maintaining Concentration	58.94
Listening Fatigue	55.62
Inconsistent Listening Routine	61.37

The data indicate that challenges were not marginal but formed a significant part of the learning experience. The most prominent difficulties were unfamiliar vocabulary (67.25%) and fast speech (64.83%), followed by inconsistent listening routines (61.37%), maintaining concentration (58.94%), and listening fatigue (55.62%). These patterns suggest that while audiobooks offered meaningful learning opportunities, they also introduced *cognitive and behavioral demands* that learners were still in the process of managing.

A key finding is that linguistic complexity remained a primary barrier. Fast speech and unfamiliar vocabulary often occurred simultaneously, creating compounded comprehension difficulties. Learners struggled not only to recognize individual words but also to keep pace with continuous spoken input. This is clearly reflected in the following excerpts:

> "Kadang terlalu cepat, jadi belum sempat ngerti sudah lanjut ke kalimat berikutnya."
> *("Sometimes it's too fast, I haven't understood yet but it already moves to the next sentence.")*
> *(S05, Interview A, 14:10)*

"There are many new words, and when they come together with fast speech, it becomes hard to follow."
(S12, Interview A, 16:02)

These responses indicate that learners experienced processing overload, where the speed of input exceeded their decoding capacity. This condition required them to rely heavily on strategies such as replaying segments and slowing down playback, as discussed in the previous subsection. Another significant challenge relates to attention sustainability.

Maintaining concentration during extended listening sessions proved difficult for many learners. Unlike short audio clips, audiobooks demand prolonged engagement, which can strain cognitive resources. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

"Kalau terlalu lama, fokus saya mulai turun. Pikiran jadi kemana-mana walaupun audionya masih jalan."
("If it's too long, my focus starts to drop. My mind wanders even though the audio is still playing.")
(S08, Interview B, 11:27)

"I need to take breaks. Listening for a long time makes me tired and less focused."
(S14, Interview B, 12:45)

These findings suggest that audiobook listening requires not only linguistic competence but also cognitive endurance. Learners were still developing the ability to sustain attention over extended periods, indicating that listening stamina is an evolving skill rather than an immediate outcome. Closely related to this is the issue of listening fatigue (55.62%). Continuous exposure to foreign language input, especially when combined with effortful comprehension, led to mental exhaustion. This fatigue affected both motivation and consistency, particularly when listening sessions were not carefully managed. Another important challenge concerns the inconsistency of listening routines (61.37%). Despite recognizing the benefits of audiobooks, many learners struggled to maintain regular listening habits outside structured academic settings. This reflects a gap between intention and actual behavior. This pattern is reinforced by the following excerpts:

"Kadang semangat di awal, tapi lama-lama jadi jarang lagi kalau tidak ada jadwal dari dosen."
("At first I'm motivated, but over time I use it less if there's no schedule from the lecturer.")
(S03, Interview B, 09:58)

"I know it's useful, but I'm not consistent. Sometimes I skip listening for several days."
(S15, Interview B, 13:10)

These responses highlight that behavioral regulation remains a critical challenge. Learners were aware of the value of audiobook listening but had not yet developed stable habits. This inconsistency suggests that autonomy in listening is not simply a matter of access or motivation, but also requires disciplined routine formation.

From a deeper analytical perspective, these challenges should not be interpreted as failures. Instead, they represent natural indicators of progression within a developmental continuum. The presence of difficulty with speed, vocabulary, and concentration reflects that learners are engaging with input that stretches their current proficiency level. Such difficulty is often a necessary condition for growth.

Importantly, many of the challenges identified are directly connected to the strategic behaviors observed earlier. For example, difficulties with fast speech lead to the use of replay and speed adjustment, while vocabulary challenges encourage inferencing strategies. This indicates that challenges and strategies are *interdependent,* forming a dynamic cycle of problem and response that drives learning forward.

Furthermore, the inconsistency in listening routines suggests that the transition toward full autonomy requires more than individual effort. It points to the need for gradual scaffolding that supports habit formation, such as structured listening schedules, reflective tracking, or guided goal setting.Overall, the findings demonstrate that audiobook-mediated listening is both *enabling and demanding.* While it promotes linguistic development and engagement, it also requires learners to manage cognitive load, sustain attention, and regulate their learning behavior. These challenges do not diminish the value of audiobooks. Instead, they highlight the complexity of developing independent listening competence and emphasize that autonomy emerges through continuous adaptation rather than immediate mastery.

5. Discussion

The present study set out to examine how digital audiobooks reshape extensive listening practices in EFL contexts. The findings collectively reveal three central transformations. First, audiobook-mediated listening fostered strong strategic regulation, particularly through repetition, transcript coordination, and playback control. Second, digital affordances enabled learners to personalize input and adapt listening conditions according to their proficiency levels. Third, narrative immersion strengthened affective engagement and sustained motivation. At the same time, transcript reliance and accent-related difficulty indicate that learners are navigating a transitional stage toward full auditory autonomy. Taken together, the results suggest that digital audiobooks do not merely supplement extensive listening; rather, they reconfigure its pedagogical structure.

The strong presence of strategic listening behaviors aligns with metacognitive listening frameworks, which emphasize planning, monitoring, and problem-solving as core mechanisms of listening development (Vandergrift & Cross, 2018). The dominance of repetition and strategy awareness suggests that learners were not passively exposed to spoken input but actively intervened in comprehension breakdowns. This finding reinforces the view that extensive listening can move beyond exposure-based practice toward strategy-driven engagement when appropriately structured (Chang et al., 2019). Furthermore, learners' selective material choice based on proficiency reflects principles of learner autonomy embedded in extensive listening theory (Chang & Renandya, 2023).

The findings also resonate with broader scholarship on extensive listening fluency development (Chang & Millett, 2014; Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Sustained exposure to longer narrative texts appears to strengthen global comprehension rather than isolated detail processing. Students' reported improvement in understanding main ideas without decoding every lexical item reflects increased tolerance for ambiguity, a hallmark of advanced listening development. In this respect, audiobook-mediated listening extends the fluency-building effects previously associated with extensive listening programs (Chang & Millett, 2016).

An important contribution of this study lies in highlighting the role of technological mediation. Digital features such as playback speed control and adjustable repetition redistribute control from teacher to learner. This decentralization aligns with arguments that learning autonomy strengthens engagement in out-of-class language development (Reinders, 2016). Unlike traditional classroom recordings, audiobooks allow learners to manipulate input conditions dynamically. Listening thus becomes adaptive rather than fixed. This adaptability addresses previously identified challenges in extensive listening, including comprehension barriers and motivational decline (Mandiri et al., 2022).

The affective dimension emerging from this study is equally significant. Students described emotional immersion, empathy, and narrative involvement, suggesting that audiobooks create experiential listening environments. This finding complements earlier work on multimodal engagement in extensive listening contexts (Fitri et al., 2025) and supports the view that extended exposure in low-pressure conditions enhances learner enjoyment (Suppasetseree et al., 2023). Unlike examination-oriented listening, audiobook engagement appears to reduce performance anxiety while sustaining attentional investment. Emotional immersion may thus function as a stabilizing factor that sustains persistence in the face of accent difficulty and lexical gaps.

At the same time, the study reveals persistent challenges. Difficulty with unfamiliar accents confirms the cognitive demands of authentic spoken discourse, echoing concerns that real-world input can overwhelm learners without preparation (Graham, 2017). Transcript reliance, while high, should not be interpreted as failure. Instead, it reflects scaffolded multimodal processing. Learners appear to operate within a transitional zone between supported listening and independent auditory comprehension. This staged progression supports the notion that autonomy develops incrementally rather than instantaneously.

In terms of research gaps, prior audiobook studies have predominantly focused on reading-while-listening practices and reading fluency outcomes (Damra et al., 2025; Hui, 2024; Isozaki, 2025; Serrano, 2023; Tusmagambet, 2020a). While those studies confirm the benefits of audio-assisted reading, they rarely position audiobooks as central resources for extensive listening pedagogy. The present study addresses this gap by conceptualizing audiobooks not as reading supplements but as structured multimodal listening environments. In doing so, it extends the scope of extensive listening research beyond traditional audio materials and integrates digital affordances into EL theory.

The novelty of this study lies in reframing extensive listening through three intersecting dimensions: strategic regulation, technological adaptability, and immersive affective engagement. Rather than conceptualizing extensive listening as quantity-based exposure alone, this study positions it as a self-regulated, technology-mediated process. Audiobooks function as controlled immersion environments that balance authentic challenge with adjustable scaffolding. This reconceptualization aligns with contemporary perspectives on digitally mediated language learning while preserving the core principles of extensive listening.

Pedagogically, the findings suggest several implications for English language teaching. First, instructors should integrate explicit strategy instruction alongside audiobook use to support metacognitive awareness. Second, gradual reduction of transcript dependence may help learners consolidate auditory autonomy. Third, narrative-based listening tasks can be leveraged to enhance emotional engagement and motivation. Finally, educators should encourage structured integration of audiobook listening into learners' daily routines to strengthen habitual exposure beyond classroom contexts.

Future research may extend this line of inquiry in several directions. Longitudinal studies could examine whether sustained audiobook integration leads to measurable improvements in listening proficiency over time. Experimental designs comparing audiobook-mediated extensive listening with traditional audio materials may clarify causal effects.

Additionally, research could explore audiobook use in different proficiency levels, educational contexts, or blended learning environments. Investigating how individual differences such as motivation, anxiety, or self-regulated learning profiles mediate audiobook engagement would also provide valuable insight. Expanding research across diverse EFL settings will further refine understanding of how digital audiobooks contribute to the evolving landscape of extensive listening pedagogy.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that digital audiobooks extend listening beyond the text by transforming extensive listening into an adaptive, immersive, and strategically managed practice. Through the integration of metacognitive regulation, technological control, and narrative engagement, audiobook-mediated listening represents a structural shift in how listening can be conceptualized and enacted within EFL contexts.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to examine how digital audiobooks reframe extensive listening in EFL contexts, and the findings demonstrate a clear pedagogical transformation. Audiobook-mediated listening fostered strong strategic regulation, particularly through repetition, transcript coordination, and playback control, while simultaneously promoting accent adaptation, global comprehension, and sustained affective engagement. Although transcript reliance and accent-related difficulty indicate transitional stages of listening independence, these challenges reflect developmental progression rather than limitation.

The study's key contribution lies in repositioning audiobooks not as supplementary audio tools or reading-while-listening supports, but as structured multimodal environments that cultivate metacognitive awareness, technological adaptability, and gradual learner autonomy. By integrating cognitive and experiential dimensions of listening, this research extends the theoretical scope of extensive listening beyond quantity-based exposure toward adaptive, self-regulated engagement with authentic spoken discourse. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that guided audiobook integration, strategic scaffolding, and gradual reduction of textual support can strengthen listening fluency and autonomy in higher education EFL classrooms.

Future research may build on this study through longitudinal designs measuring listening proficiency gains over time, comparative studies contrasting audiobook-mediated and traditional extensive listening models, and investigations across diverse proficiency levels, educational settings, and digitally mediated learning environments. Such inquiries will further clarify how listening can continue to move beyond the text in contemporary language education.

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