



Research Article

**HOW TO GRAB THEM BY THE E.A.R?
– IMPROVING STUDENTS’ MOTIVATION IN LISTENING CLASSES**

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ABSTRACT

In mixed-level English classes, the differences in students’ proficiency pose huge challenges for teachers. Surveys at intensive listening classes at International University show that over 40% of the students require multiple times of listening. Meanwhile, the rest find 1 or 2 times sufficient and thus feel demotivated with every repetition of the listening passage. To increase students’ motivation for the third time of listening, we propose a strategy called E.A.R: Extension and Rewards. 130 students participate in this mixed-method research. The research shows E.A.R has positive results and can also be applied in other skill classes.

Keywords: extension, listening, motivation, rewards, tiered activities.

Enhancing students’ motivation is our main focus in this research. We do believe that teachers play a vital role in strengthening their students’ motivation. Moreover, we cannot ignore the fact that teachers are also responsible when the highly motivated students begin to feel bored in the class. “Whatever level of motivation your students bring to the classroom will be transformed, for better or worse, by what happens in that classroom.” (David, 1993, p. 193)

1. Motivation

Before further discussion in this aspect, it is necessary to define motivation. Motivation is defined as “the reason why somebody does something or behaves in a particular way” (Oxford dictionary). In other words, motivation is the driving force that enables people to continue and achieve their goals in whatever they choose to do. That a 6-year-old boy manages to wake up early in the morning to go to school despite his laziness

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requires some certain amount of motivation. This can be because of his mother's promise to give him an ice-cream cone as a reward. This can also be due to his own willingness to go to school for knowledge. These different reasons give rise to the classification of two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

1.1. Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation comes from outside factors such as the feelings and attitudes of family, friends and society. Some certain rewards or punishment can also affect a person's desire to do something. In the context of education, extrinsic motivation is the motivation that students have from outside the classroom. (Harmer, 2017). An example of this is a high school male student manages to study hard and pass the university entrance exam to receive an expensive gift – a new motorbike – from his parents.

1.2. Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation has been the centre of study by social and educational psychologists for half a century (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2011). Intrinsic motivation comes mainly from inside a person's own will, when the driving force for performing an activity is mainly because of happiness and enjoyment. At schools, intrinsic motivation can be triggered mainly by what the teacher does in the classroom. More specifically, it is the teaching method, classroom activities, and students' self-awareness of success and failure that can generate intrinsic motivation (Hammer, 2017).

2. Literature review

While it is difficult to find ways for increasing students' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, it is even more challenging to sustain it during the course. There are a variety of reasons for students to lose motivation. One of those factors is mixed-level classrooms. In mixed-level classrooms, students come from different age groups, family backgrounds and most importantly, different academic levels. To solve this problem, numerous research studies have been done. Maddalena proposed using high level students to work as teaching assistants (TAs) in a mixed-level class (Maddalena, 2002). The result is that the majority of students felt highly motivated and agreed that the TAs play a valuable role in assisting the low-level students in the class. In 2015, a group of researchers proposed that scaffolding could be of great help in multilevel classrooms. In construction, scaffolding refers to the metal structures which are set up against the building to help builders reach to high places. Likewise, in education, scaffolding describes support that teachers make and adjust according to students' needs (Pol et al., 2015). The result is positive but its tremendous limitation is time constraint for both teachers and students involved.

Despite numerous ways of dealing with mixed-level classes, the most widely used method is differentiating instructions in the classroom or tiered activities. The first research

that came up with this term is Tomlinson (1999). She proposed the first ideas of differentiating instruction to tailor students' specific needs.

In 2001, Heacox wrote a book with templates and ideas drawn from Bloom's taxonomy and Gardner's multiple intelligences to suggest different ways to tier activities. Tiered activities mean designing different materials for students in different groups of levels. This method of teaching ensures that teachers can meet the needs of all students and thus increase and maintain students' motivation. Richard & Omdal conducted a research with 7 control classrooms receiving the same instructions and 7 treatment classrooms receiving three levels of tiered instructions. They witnessed a clear difference in the achievement of the low-level students who did not receive special treatment and those who received tiered instruction (2007).

3. Aim and purpose of research

While tiered instructions yield positive results, there is a lingering problem that must be considered: students are divided into groups based on their level differences, which results in discrimination. For students in low-level groups, they may feel intimidated and inferior. On the other hand, students in high-level groups may find the other groups a sizable hindrance in the lesson development. This can greatly affect students' motivation. Furthermore, the students in each group may have no motivation to change their class status. They may simply accept their position in their labelled groups or feel satisfied with the instructions designed specifically for their levels. Realizing this problem, we propose a method that can aim at dealing with mixed-level classes but at the same time creating less discrimination among students: Extension and Rewards (E.A.R).

This research aims at using E.A.R to deal with students from different level groups. The research questions for this study are:

- (1) Will students feel more motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically?
- (2) Will this method benefit both the low-level students and high-level students in class?
- (3) Is the problem of discrimination solved by using E.A.R?

We also expect that this method, with less discrimination in the classroom, will enable the low-level students to try harder and harness their skills rather than accept that they are only in the low-level group. The high-level students will also benefit from the extension activities and feel happier during the course.

4. Definition, Procedures, and Materials

4.1. Definition

4.1.1. Extension

Extension is an activity on the same materials designed for students who complete their required tasks: (1) well ahead of the allotted time (for Reading) or (2) before reaching the maximum allowed attempts (for Listening).

4.1.1. Rewards

Rewards are bonus marks given to encourage students who accomplish the extension activities successfully.

4.2. Procedures

The actual process of handling extension activities in the classroom can be broken down into the following steps:

4.2.1. Without rewards (Weeks 3-6)

Teacher (T) conducts warm-up activities + introduces the topic of the lesson → teaches new vocabulary → delivers the extension activities and explains the tasks in the textbook → requires students to listen and finish the tasks in the textbook before moving on to the extension activities → play the audio file 3 times → corrects the textbook activities and the extension activities.

4.2.2. With rewards (Weeks 7 - 8)


The process above is kept the same, but this time, teacher gives bonuses to students who have correct answers for both the extension activities and the exercises in the textbook.

After the midterm, both procedures are repeated, with four more weeks without rewards and the last two weeks with rewards.

4.3. Materials

In International University, the textbooks for IE1 listening classes are *Northstar 1: Listening and Speaking* (3rd edition) and *Northstar 2: Listening and Speaking* (4th edition).

The extension activities are designed with the same listening script as in the textbooks. This guarantees that students will listen to the same audio file for both the textbook's tasks and the extra tasks. The students who finish the tasks in the books will move on to the extra materials while those of lower level should continue to listen to the tape and complete the textbook exercises. Below is one example taken from listening 1, unit 6, *Northstar 1: Listening and Speaking* (3rd edition), pages 139-140 (Figure 1).

2  Listen to the news report again. Choose the best word or phrase to complete each sentence.

1. Diana is having a difficult time because of the (*jellyfish bites / sharks*).
2. Diana feels sick, but she doesn't want to (*go back to Cuba / give up*).
3. Long distance swimming is difficult because the swimmer (*is alone in the water / doesn't have a team of helpers*).
4. To swim long distances, Diana trains her body and her (*mind / breathing*).
5. Diana uses a kind of meditation¹ to help her to (*enjoy swimming more / continue swimming for a very long time*).
6. Diana doesn't give up easily because she enjoys (*setting a record / having a challenge*).
7. Diana is very (*determined / afraid*) to reach her goal.
8. Diana is a great example for many people who want to (*set a new goal in their life / become amazing swimmers*).

Figure 1. Listening 1, Unit 6, Northstar 1

This task only checks for detail comprehension. It is worth mentioning that the listening is preceded by a short reading passage which provides a background story for the lesson, which makes it quite easy to predict the correct answer for all the questions in the book. Thus, more than half of the students need only two times to finish the two tasks (see *Figure 3*). Still, a high percentage of students require three times or more than three times of listening. In the third time of listening, we encourage students who already finish the two tasks in this unit to move on to the extra tasks in the handout. Below is an example extension activity for Unit 6 mentioned above (*Figure 2*).

UNIT 6: RISK AND CHALLENGE

Listening 1:

Listen to two sports reporters talking about Diana Nyad on the radio. Complete the summary using ONE WORD AND/OR A NUMBER for each blank.

Two sports reporters are talking about Diana Nyad. They are doing it from a (1) _____ in a place between Cuba and Key West. The reason is Diana is making effort for the 4th time to swim from Cuba to Florida. She has been swimming for (2) _____ hours and the weather is not very good. The wind makes Diana swim much longer to get to Florida. Also, jellyfish bites all over her body. She is swimming slowly and her body is (3) _____. Normally, a swimmer would give up after being bitten by jellyfish. But Diana is not giving up. From Diana's point of view, long distance swimming is the "(4) _____ sport in the world". It is also a boring sport since she has to move her body the same way again and again during such a long time. In order to do that, Diana has to(5) _____ not only her body but also her mind. In fact, she does a kind of meditation. While swimming, she counts from 1 to 1000 in 4 different languages: English, French, Spanish and German. She also sings. Diana also says that long distance swimming "is not a young person's game". Diana has no fear even when there are (6) _____ in this ocean. This is also amazing that she is now 62 but she still wants to set a new long-distance swimming (7) _____ for the 4th time. She wants to show people, especially the old people, that it's never too late to have a (8) _____.

Figure 2. Sample extension activity for Listening 1, Unit 6, Northstar 1

We call this practice: the Extension. Students will listen to the same audio for listening 1 in the book, but they have an extra task to do. This task is more demanding in the way that students must synthesize all the information to complete the summary.

5. Research method

5.1. Participants

This research population is 130 first-year students from IE1 Listening classes at International University. The timescale for this research is from September 16th to December 30th, 2018.

The students are placed in IE1 levels based on their scores in the placement test. (TOEFL iBT-oriented test). The maximum score is 120. Those who score 0-35 will be put into level IE1. This leads to a considerable gap in their English proficiency.

5.2. Data collection

The data is collected via questionnaires which are delivered in the beginning, middle and final stages of the course (at weeks 3, 8, and 14, respectively.) Written feedback is also carried out at the end of the course.

The questionnaires are written in English, but there is explanation accompanying the distribution. This is to ensure that all the students can interpret the questions in the same way. There is also an online version of the questionnaire (Monkey Survey). The questionnaires are all anonymous.

6. Results

The return rates for the questionnaires are 78%, 98%, and 65%, in that same order. The first half of Questionnaire 2 is a repetition of Questionnaire 1, and the first half of Questionnaire 3 replicates the later half of Questionnaire 2. The purpose is to check the consistency of students' opinions. Although the response rates differ quite greatly, it is clear that the distribution of their answer choices follow the same pattern throughout. Below are Figures 3-8 which compare the results of each question between the two questionnaires.

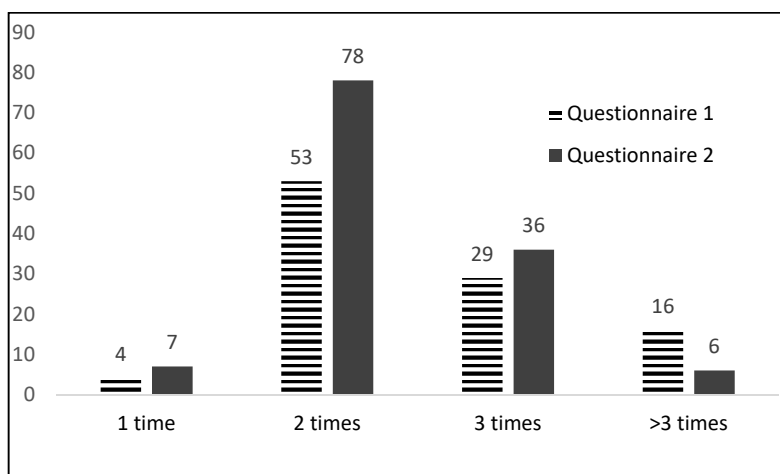


Figure 3. How many times of listening do you need for each practice?

It is clear to see that for both questionnaires, the majority of students (51.9 % for Questionnaire 1 and 61.4% for Questionnaire 2) state that they need an average of two times of listening. The second largest group is those who need three times of listening (28.4% and 28.3%).

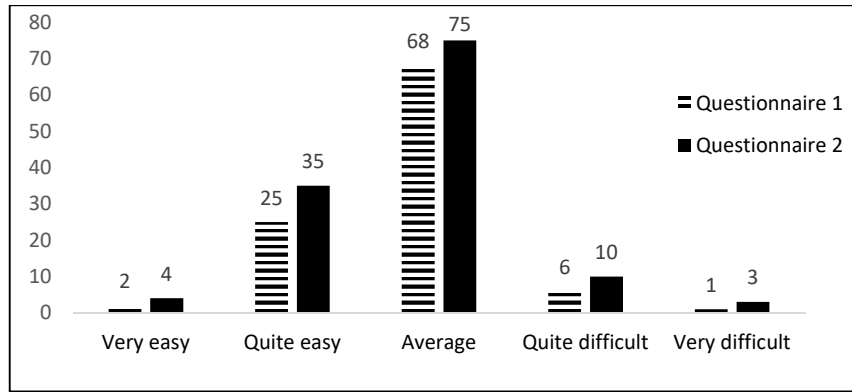


Figure 4. How do you judge the level of difficulty of the listening tasks in Northstar 1?

The distribution of students' answer choices follows the same pattern in both questionnaires, which suggests that the materials in the textbook are not very challenging to the majority of students.

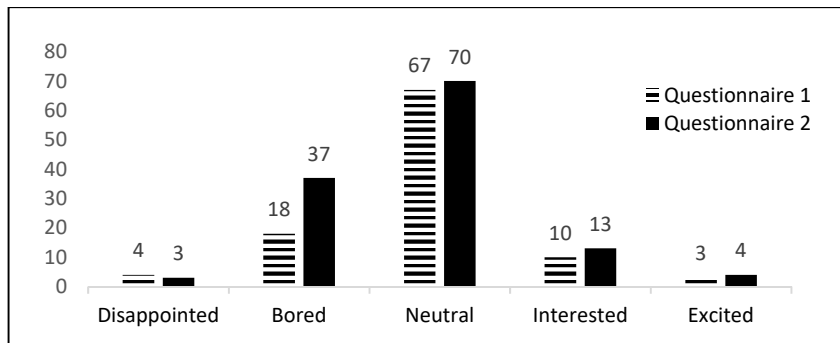


Figure 5. How do you feel when you have to listen to the passage for the third time?

For the three largest groups, the patterns are the same for both questionnaires. The patterns are reversed for “disappointed” and “excited”, but the difference is too small (1) to take any real notice.

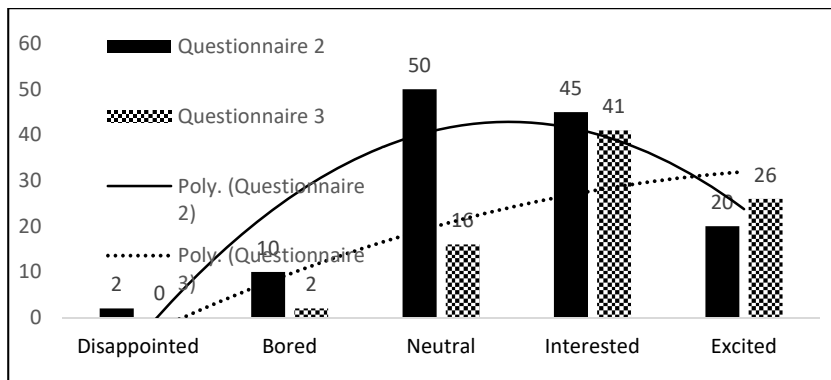


Figure 6. How do you feel when the teacher designs extra activities for the third listening time?

Questionnaire 2 shows that the most common type of feelings for the extension activities is “neutral” (39%). However, the general impression of the students is heavily on the positive side - “interested” and “excited” (51%), more than 5 times of the negative side.

Meanwhile, questionnaire 3 reveals that there is a great shift towards the positive side. To be specific, “neutral” comes down to third position, falling from 39% to 18.8%. That discrepancy of 21% shifts to “interested” and “excited”.

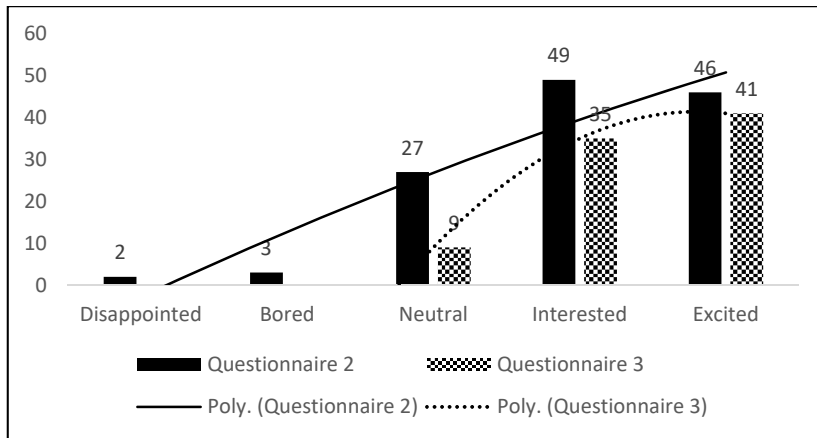


Figure 7. How do you feel about the bonus marks given for the extra activities?

The general trends in both Questionnaires are nearly the same, with the majority of students feel “interested” and “excited” (74,7% for Questionnaire 1 and 89.3% for Questionnaire 3). This again shows high unity in their answers.

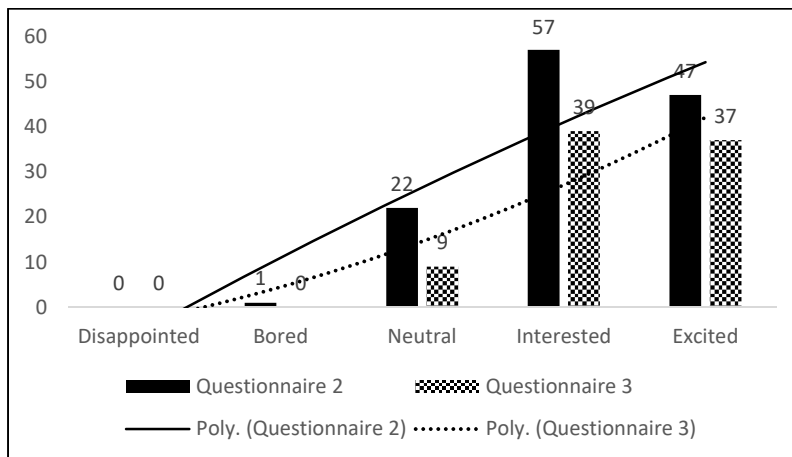


Figure 8. How do you feel about this listening class (with extra activities and bonus marks?)

The answers for this question in both questionnaires show great consistency with similar rising patterns.

For the written feedback, students are required to describe their feelings. Various expressions are used to depict their feelings, but the answers can be classified into 5 groups. The majority of the participants (83.5%) claim that they have an enjoyable experience in their listening classes, using terms such as “excited”, “interested”, “happy”, “wonderful”, “fun”, “attracted”, “great”, “satisfying”, etc., and thus can be categorized into the group “Happy”. Three of them feel the classes are “alright” or “OK”. The same number of students are not quite sure of their feelings, because they state that sometimes “I feel bored”, but other times “I am happy.” One student gives a negative answer to this question, attributing the reason to the lack of chances for him/her to earn bonus points because he/she is not as good at listening as other students who are quicker in submitting the answers to the teacher. Seven students choose not to give an answer.

Table 1. Results of question 5 of questionnaire 3

Question 5: What can be done to make this listening class more exciting?	
No answer	37
More bonus marks	11
More music or films/ videos	11
More games	9
More extra activities	8
No change	7
More discussion	2
Change textbook	2
More homework	1
More discussion	1
More teamwork	1
More tips for listening practice	1
More role plays	1
More students chosen for bonus marks	1

7. Discussion

As can be seen from *Figure 5*, most students did not feel very motivated when they had to listen to the passage in the textbook for the third time. However, reducing the number of listening time to two times was not an option, because the number of students who needed three times of listening or more still account for a large part. Therefore, extension activities and rewards came in as a solution to this problem.

There is a phenomenon that less students find it necessary to listen to the files more than 3 times in questionnaire 2 - week 8 (see *Figure 3*). The possible reason could be that a part of the students who had difficulty in listening at first were more accustomed to the

listening tasks in the textbook, and therefore, got a grasp of the tasks and needed less times of listening. As notable as it may be, this phenomenon actually reassures our aims and purposes of research - that most students do not need a third time of listening, but they have to, and they need something else for them to do during the third time of listening.

Another point worth noticing is that students seemed to respond more enthusiastically towards rewards, which is a form of extrinsic motivation, than towards extension activities, which is a more of a form of intrinsic motivation. This is certainly justifiable, as external rewards can stimulate interest and participation in which person has not had initial interest (Cherry, 2016).

Only one student gave a negative answer when being asked about his general feelings towards the listening class (see *Figure 8*). The reason he gave for his opinion is because his listening skills were so poor that he could never get a chance to finish the extension activities and submit his answer to get bonus marks. He also complained that the number of students chosen for bonus marks was very limited (5 students) and he wished there were more slots. Interestingly, though his answer was “No”, he actually thought that the extension activities and the bonus marks made the class more interesting. From this, we realize there are still some limitations in our procedures. Though the extension activities and bonus marks did blow some fresh air into our classes, there were still special students who we could not fully motivate.

The fact that students asked for more extension activities (fourth-ranking) and bonus marks (first-ranking) (see *Table 1*) speaks a great deal about our action research. It means that we were on the right track of motivating them, and that we should do more. Moreover, when taking the second and third-ranking suggestions (movies, music, and games) into consideration, we could not help thinking of new forms of extension activities. For example, we can turn the listening scripts into songs or we can let students act out and record video footage of those listening scripts. It would be interesting to see how the students respond to those activities, which opens the door for future research.

Finally, more students had positive feelings towards the extension activities in the second half of the course rather than in the first half (see *Figure 6*) can be attributed to the gradual building of their intrinsic motivation. They soon learned that the number of students who could get bonus marks is quite small (5 for each meeting), and yet, they still thought that the extension activities were interesting, even exciting. This can be evidence that they completed the extension for the sheer joy of learning.

8. Conclusion

This paper examines the role of E.A.R in enhancing students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in IE1 listening classes. The research has been successfully carried out thanks to great contributions from students and lecturers from 5 different IE1 classes. The results reveal that there is a strong correlation between E.A.R and students' motivation. We also

find out that this method, with less discrimination in the classroom, enables the low-level students to try harder and get advanced with their listening skills. The high-level students, from feeling bored with the materials, now feel more motivated. The researchers of this paper also create a by-product: a collection of extension activities for 2 coursebooks (Northstar 1: Listening and Speaking & Northstar 2: Listening and Speaking). All teachers who use these two books in their courses can use this collection as a reference. Furthermore, E.A.R can also be used in other class types. Firstly, this research suggests another approach for teachers in all types of reading and listening classes. Secondly, E.A.R can be applied in other subjects such as Math, Physics, etc. Last but not least, when students are highly motivated in the class, teachers are also happier. Further studies on the topic may include teachers' interview to see if E.A.R can actually enhance teachers' motivation.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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**LÀM SAO ĐỂ CẢI THIỆN ĐỘNG LỰC HỌC TẬP CỦA SINH VIÊN
TRONG MÔN NGHE BẰNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP E.A.R?**

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TÓM TẮT

Trong các lớp học tiếng Anh, sự khác biệt về trình độ của học viên thường là một thách thức lớn với người dạy. Khảo sát thực hiện ở các lớp kỹ năng nghe tại Trường Đại học Quốc tế cho thấy rằng trên 40% sinh viên cần nghe một bài nhiều lần. Trong khi đó, phần còn lại cho rằng chỉ cần nghe 1 hoặc 2 lần là đủ và do đó sẽ cảm thấy giảm động lực khi phải nghe đi nghe lại. Để giải quyết vấn đề này, chúng tôi đề xuất một phương pháp gọi là E.A.R: Extension and Rewards. 130 sinh viên tham dự vào nghiên cứu đa phương pháp này. Kết quả của phương pháp này cho thấy sinh viên ở các cấp độ khác nhau đều cải thiện được kỹ năng nghe rõ rệt. Kết quả khảo sát cũng cho thấy sinh viên hứng thú hơn nhiều với việc nghe một bài nhiều lần. Ngoài ra, phương pháp này có thể áp dụng ở các lớp học kỹ năng khác.

Từ khóa: động lực, hoạt động phân tầng, môn nghe, phần mở rộng, phần thưởng.