

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN USING PODCASTS TO ENHANCE ENGLISH LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

In order to comprehend spoken language and effectively engage in communication, listening is a crucial English language acquisition ability. However, a lack of exposure to real listening materials, new terminology, and pronunciation variations make it challenging for many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to comprehend spoken English. Podcasts have become a popular educational tool that offers meaningful listening experiences and real listening input. The purpose of this study is to investigate how students use podcasts to improve their listening comprehension of English. This study used a qualitative descriptive design. Five pupils from a secondary school in Garut, West Java, Indonesia, took part. Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used to gather data. The interactive model put forth by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, was used to examine the data. The findings revealed four major themes: podcasts enhanced students' listening comprehension, podcasts created enjoyable learning experiences, students encountered challenges during podcast listening activities, and podcasts increased students' confidence in learning English. The findings indicate that podcasts provide meaningful listening exposure that supports listening development while creating a more engaging learning environment. Although students experienced difficulties related to unfamiliar vocabulary and pronunciation, they generally perceived podcasts as beneficial for improving listening comprehension. Therefore, podcasts can be considered an effective learning medium for supporting English listening instruction in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Podcasts, Listening Comprehension, Students' Experiences, EFL Learners.*

ABSTRAK

Untuk memahami bahasa lisan dan terlibat secara efektif dalam komunikasi, mendengarkan merupakan kemampuan penting dalam pemerolehan bahasa Inggris. Namun, kurangnya paparan terhadap materi mendengarkan yang sebenarnya, terminologi baru, dan variasi pengucapan membuat banyak pembelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) kesulitan memahami bahasa Inggris lisan. Podcast telah menjadi alat pendidikan populer yang menawarkan pengalaman mendengarkan yang bermakna dan masukan mendengarkan yang nyata. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki bagaimana siswa menggunakan podcast untuk meningkatkan pemahaman mendengarkan bahasa Inggris mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Lima siswa dari sebuah sekolah menengah di Garut, Jawa Barat, Indonesia, berpartisipasi. Wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi kelas digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data. Model interaktif yang dikemukakan oleh Miles dan Huberman, yang mencakup reduksi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, digunakan untuk memeriksa data. Temuan mengungkapkan empat tema utama: podcast meningkatkan

pemahaman mendengarkan siswa, podcast menciptakan pengalaman belajar yang menyenangkan, siswa menghadapi tantangan selama kegiatan mendengarkan podcast, dan podcast meningkatkan kepercayaan diri siswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa podcast memberikan paparan mendengarkan yang bermakna yang mendukung pengembangan kemampuan mendengarkan sekaligus menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih menarik. Meskipun siswa mengalami kesulitan terkait kosakata dan pengucapan yang tidak familiar, mereka umumnya menganggap podcast bermanfaat untuk meningkatkan pemahaman mendengarkan. Oleh karena itu, podcast dapat dianggap sebagai media pembelajaran yang efektif untuk mendukung pengajaran mendengarkan bahasa Inggris di kelas EFL.

Kata kunci: *Podcast, Pemahaman Mendengarkan, Pengalaman Siswa, Pembelajar EFL.*

INTRODUCTION

Listening represents one of the core language abilities crucial to learning English, as it introduces learners to proper pronunciation, rich vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and authentic language use. In an ideal foreign language learning environment, listening comprehension is expected to function as a solid foundation for overall language acquisition, enabling students to absorb linguistic input seamlessly before developing productive skills such as speaking and writing (Ahmed et al., 2023; Bal et al., 2024). A well-designed instructional setting ideally facilitates active engagement, where learners easily decode spoken utterances, capture essential information, and adapt to natural speech rates. The harmonious integration of effective learning media, clear instructional strategies, and learner motivation is viewed as a vital pillar for fostering cognitive resilience, boosting linguistic agility, and ensuring overall academic success in foreign language education. Through consistent exposure to structured oral input, every learner is expected to master listening comprehension effortlessly, developing high confidence and strong communicative competence in English without experiencing cognitive overload or learning fatigue (Amina & F.A., 2026; Qilicheva, 2025; Sadiqzade, 2024).

However, a significant gap persists between the ideal goals of listening mastery and the objective reality observed in actual instructional settings. While the ideal condition expects students to process spoken English fluently and confidently, empirical observations reveal that many foreign language learners face severe difficulties in comprehending spoken texts. This gap is exacerbated by frequent encounters with unfamiliar vocabulary, rapid rates of speech, diverse accent variations, and limited exposure to authentic listening materials during classroom instruction. The absence of interactive and flexible learning tools often leads to widespread learning passivity, decreased motivation, and persistent anxiety when students attempt to extract key information from auditory texts. If this methodological limitation and lack of meaningful language exposure continue without structured instructional interventions, students' listening comprehension abilities will continue to decline, ultimately impeding their overall communicative progress and academic development in foreign language learning (Hidayah & Gunawan, 2025; Hnatyk et al., 2026; Sadiqzade, 2024).

This gap between ideal listening competence and actual classroom difficulties is clearly reflected in the learning experiences of foreign language students. In this instructional setting, the research subjects—who are EFL students engaging in English listening comprehension—frequently confront complex challenges when processing spoken English. Initial observations indicate that these research subjects experience persistent difficulties in understanding natural speech, managing real-time listening tasks, and maintaining confidence during listening



exercises. The lack of flexible, self-paced listening resources leaves the research subjects vulnerable to auditory fatigue and disengagement during standard classroom tasks. The prevalence of these comprehension hurdles among the research subjects underscores an urgent need to explore alternative, highly adaptable digital media that can provide authentic language exposure tailored to their specific learning needs without being restricted by traditional classroom boundaries (Al-Khasawneh & Al-Khasawneh, 2023; Insani et al., 2024; Shoirah, 2026).

To address these learning challenges and bridge the comprehension gap among the research subjects, the implementation of digital audio podcasts offers a highly promising pedagogical alternative. Podcasts provide authentic spoken input, exposing learners to natural pronunciation, intonation, and conversational expressions while offering the flexibility to access and replay audio materials according to individual learning paces. Most prior studies on podcasts in language education have predominantly focused on quantitative learning outcomes, instructional effectiveness, or general classroom implementation. Specific investigations that deeply examine the nuanced qualitative experiences, personal perspectives, challenges, and confidence development of EFL students during podcast-based listening activities remain relatively limited. Uncovering these subjective learning experiences is crucial, as listening development is reflected not only in formal academic scores but also in the learners' personal engagement, self-assurance, and coping strategies throughout the learning process (Ebadi et al., 2023; Hnatyk et al., 2026; Wang & MacIntyre, 2021).

Building upon this background and problem formulation, the present study offers novel value and innovation by providing a comprehensive exploration of students' lived experiences with podcast-based listening activities. The innovative aspect of this research focuses on unpacking how digital podcasts shape learners' perspectives, identifying the practical benefits and challenges they encounter, and examining the extent to which flexible audio exposure enhances their learning confidence. The research subjects in this study are EFL students engaging in English listening comprehension activities, without being bound to specific school names or academic year formats. The novelty of this research lies in presenting a holistic framework that connects authentic digital media exposure with internal student perception and confidence building, a practical dimension often overlooked by previous researchers. Through scientific inquiry into these research subjects, the findings are expected to offer practical insights for designing responsive, student-centered language instruction.

METHOD

In order to investigate how students use podcasts to improve their English listening comprehension, this study used a qualitative descriptive research approach. Because it allows researchers to gather detailed accounts of participants' experiences and viewpoints in their natural environments, qualitative descriptive research was chosen. Additionally, researchers can comprehend how participants interpret and make meaning of their experiences during the learning process by using qualitative inquiry. In Garut, West Java, Indonesia, a secondary school served as the study's site. Five students that were chosen using purposive sampling made up the participants. Because it enables researchers to choose people with relevant experiences related to the issue under investigation, purposeful sampling was used. During the research procedure, the chosen participants were willing to share their learning experiences and had actively engaged in podcast-based listening activities. Participants in qualitative research are typically



selected based on their capacity to offer comprehensive and insightful information about the research issue.

Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used to gather data. Students' involvement and reactions during podcast-based listening exercises were observed in the classroom. In the meantime, semi-structured interviews were used to gather detailed information about students' perceptions, experiences, advantages, and difficulties in using podcasts in listening instruction. The interactive paradigm put forth by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three simultaneous tasks data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing—was used to analyze the gathered data. In order to reduce data, pertinent information from observations and interviews has to be chosen and arranged. To make understanding easier, the data were then presented in a methodical manner. Lastly, recurrent themes and patterns that emerged from the participants' comments were used to derive conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Podcasts Enhance Students' Listening Comprehension

The findings demonstrate that integrating podcasts into English language instruction significantly enhances students' listening comprehension skills. Students reported that regular exposure to authentic podcast audio enabled them to acquire new vocabulary, comprehend natural spoken conversations, and identify subtle pronunciation patterns. Through consistent listening exercises, participants became increasingly familiar with spoken English, which made classroom listening tasks feel noticeably easier compared to traditional learning methods. Observation data corroborated these student reports, showing that learners became much more adept at identifying crucial information and recognizing acoustic differences between words with similar sounds. This regular engagement with authentic audio input effectively bridged the gap between simplified classroom exercises and real-world language use. Ultimately, podcast-based instruction served as a powerful educational tool that improved the overall ability of students to interact with, interpret, and process complex spoken English input systematically.

2. Podcasts Create Enjoyable Learning Experiences

Beyond technical skill improvement, the research revealed remarkably favorable student opinions regarding the enjoyable learning environment created by podcasts. Participants described podcast activities as entertaining, fascinating, and deeply captivating, noting that the dynamic media felt refreshingly different from repetitive conventional classroom instruction. Students explained that the diverse and accessible content made listening exercises less intimidating, thereby fostering a relaxed atmosphere that naturally stimulated their interest. Observational data supported these findings, highlighting increased student attention, enthusiastic participation, and spontaneous engagement during class tasks. The flexibility and relevance of podcast topics successfully motivated learners to engage fully in listening courses rather than passively receiving information. Consequently, this positive affective response created a supportive educational environment where students felt eager to participate actively, demonstrating that podcast-based learning effectively boosts both student motivation and classroom interaction.

3. Students Encounter Challenges During Podcast Listening Activities

Despite the overwhelmingly positive learning experiences, students encountered several notable linguistic challenges during podcast listening activities. Interview data revealed that the most frequent obstacles included unfamiliar terminology, confusion over similar-sounding

words, and a general lack of prior exposure to authentic spoken English. Several participants expressed difficulty when processing new vocabulary in real time, occasionally requiring additional teacher explanations and guidance on specific pronunciation patterns before fully grasping the audio content. Observations confirmed that processing rapid, unedited spoken language and interpreting foreign linguistic input placed a heavy cognitive load on learners, leading some to request supplementary support. However, these obstacles did not diminish the students' overall enthusiasm or willingness to learn. Instead, participants demonstrated remarkable persistence, continuing to engage actively in the tasks because they recognized that the long-term communicative benefits of authentic listening far outweighed these temporary instructional hurdles.

4. Podcasts Increase Students' Confidence in Learning English

A prominent theme emerging from the data was the significant increase in students' self-confidence when learning English through podcasts. After participating in podcast-based activities, students reported feeling far more assured in their listening abilities and noticeably less anxious during classroom tasks. Increased familiarity with natural spoken English directly reduced learners' reluctance, empowering them to respond to comprehension questions and contribute to class discussions with greater ease. Participants stated that feeling capable of understanding real-world audio material made them more comfortable taking intellectual risks during language exercises. As their fear of making mistakes diminished, their willingness to interact with spoken English grew proportionally. This newfound self-assurance not only enhanced their immediate performance on specific listening assignments but also fostered a long-term positive attitude toward language acquisition, encouraging students to approach future English learning activities with optimism and proactive dedication.

5. Pedagogical Implications for Integrating Podcasts in EFL Classrooms

The combined findings of this study offer valuable pedagogical insights into the strategic integration of podcasts within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. While podcasts serve as an exceptional medium for improving listening comprehension, fostering enjoyment, and building student confidence, educators must carefully scaffold the instructional process to address the linguistic challenges learners face. Teachers should implement pre-listening activities, such as pre-teaching complex vocabulary and highlighting key pronunciation patterns, to alleviate the cognitive strain caused by fast, authentic speech. Additionally, selecting culturally relevant and level-appropriate podcast materials ensures that the content remains accessible without sacrificing authenticity. By balancing interactive, engaging audio input with structured teacher facilitation, educators can maximize the benefits of digital media. Ultimately, incorporating podcasts into the language curriculum transforms traditional listening instruction into a student-centered, highly effective, and sustainable learning experience.

Discussion

The integration of digital audio resources into language instruction offers profound pedagogical implications for target language acquisition. Exposure to authentic auditory input enables learners to decode complex phonological structures, discern subtle tonal variations, and construct robust mental representations of unfamiliar lexical items. Through persistent engagement with real-world discourse, individuals gradually dynamicize their cognitive processing capacities, transitioning from superficial acoustic recognition to deeper semantic interpretation. This gradual linguistic acclimation significantly reduces cognitive load during auditory processing tasks, making complex verbal communication vastly more accessible.

Consequently, modern multimedia tools serve as crucial scaffolding mechanisms that systematically heighten auditory competence while bridging the gap between artificial classroom drills and organic communicative encounters (Mirqodirova, 2025; Sadiqzade, 2024)

Creating an engaging and low-anxiety instructional atmosphere directly influences student receptivity and academic immersion during oral input tasks. Interactive auditory materials present diverse thematic content that diverts focus away from monotonous repetitive drills, thereby cultivating dynamic intellectual curiosity. This heightened state of emotional comfort lowers affective barriers, encouraging individuals to process target language input with greater intrinsic motivation and reduced performance apprehension. When pedagogical design emphasizes accessible and flexible learning media, participants exhibit sustained attention spans and a stronger inclination toward active participation. Ultimately, an enjoyable learning environment transforms traditional passive listening into a participatory, learner-centered experience that accelerates overall linguistic adaptation (Abduljawad, 2024; Colombia et al., 2024; Tsang & Davis, 2024)

Despite the systemic advantages of multimedia integration, structural linguistic impediments continue to complicate auditory processing for non-native learners. Complex phonological phenomena, such as continuous speech assimilation and confusing minimal pairs, frequently interrupt the continuous flow of comprehension. Furthermore, gaps in specialized vocabulary and limited background exposure to natural cadence create cognitive bottlenecks during rapid discourse interpretation. When learners encounter unfamiliar expressions in real time, their real-time decoding mechanism stalls, demanding external structural assistance or explicit clarify-and-repeat interventions. Recognizing these operational boundaries highlights the necessity of structured pedagogical support, ensuring that raw exposure to target language input is properly mediated through strategic instructional guidance (Gurzynski-Weiss et al., 2024; Journy, 2026; Muñoz et al., 2021).

Observational evidence and participant reflection collectively reinforce the transformative impact of progressive auditory exposure on individual self-efficacy. As learners progressively master complex acoustic cues and demystify natural speech patterns, their perceived linguistic competence expands correspondingly. This emerging self-assurance manifests in reduced hesitation during comprehension tasks and an increased willingness to engage directly in classroom interactions. Feeling better equipped to parse real-time speech, individuals shift from a defensive learning posture to an assertive, communicative approach. Thus, continuous interaction with authentic auditory input not only refines decoding mechanics but also instills durable psychological confidence that drives long-term academic growth (Husnawati et al., 2024; Kajiura et al., 2025; Muammar et al., 2023)

Synthesizing these pedagogical dynamic vectors demonstrates that utilizing modern listening resources establishes a holistic foundation for modern communicative competence. By simultaneously addressing cognitive processing, affective comfort, structural difficulties, and psychological empowerment, audio-based instruction reshapes the language acquisition trajectory. While phonological barriers and lexical limitations remain present challenges, the overall instructional advantages far outweigh these operational hurdles. Moving forward, educators must thoughtfully integrate targeted scaffolding strategies alongside dynamic listening exercises to maximize learning outcomes. Ultimately, modern interactive listening approaches offer a highly effective, multifaceted pathway that bridges the structural divide between theoretical classroom instruction and real-world linguistic fluency.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that students' use of podcasts as a learning medium significantly improved their English listening comprehension skills. The integration of this audio technology successfully provided exposure to authentic spoken language, enriching vocabulary and developing sensitivity to variations in native speaker pronunciation. Furthermore, the use of this digital medium successfully created a fun and interactive foreign language acquisition learning environment in the classroom. Through this entertaining learning experience, students' motivation and confidence naturally grew, reducing their anxiety when facing listening tasks. Although students encountered some linguistic challenges in the form of unfamiliar terms, the holistic benefits of using this medium proved far more significant.

The implications of this qualitative research confirm that digital-based audiolingual strategies effectively transform listening instruction into a more student-centered one. Educators are advised to implement structured pre-listening activities, introducing difficult vocabulary, to reduce the cognitive load on students caused by the rapid pace of audio speech. For future research, researchers are encouraged to explore various ways to utilize podcasts integrated with other interactive technologies. Further research should also consider expanding the number of participants and involving a more diverse geographic range of schools. A comprehensive approach through long-term observational studies is highly recommended to uncover the dynamics of the development of communicative competence and EFL learners' coping strategies in greater depth and breadth.

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