



English Podcast as a Tool for Improving Students' Listening Skills

Fitra A. Mutia¹, Abdah²

Corresponding E-Mail: abdah@unismuhpalu.ac.id

English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu

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Abstract

Listening is one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners because spoken language must be processed in real time and may involve unfamiliar vocabulary, accents, pronunciation, and speech rates. This article examines the potential of English podcasts for improving students' listening skills. A quantitative quasi-experimental approach with a pre-test and post-test control group design is proposed, involving an experimental group receiving podcast-based instruction and a control group receiving conventional listening instruction. Previous empirical studies indicate that podcast-based instruction can improve listening comprehension and support motivation, learner autonomy, and engagement. The discussion further indicates that podcasts are most effective when supported by structured pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening activities, purposeful repetition, scaffolding, and feedback. English podcasts can therefore serve as a flexible digital resource for developing listening skills when content and instructional tasks are carefully selected.

Keywords: *English podcast, listening comprehension, digital learning, language technology*

Introduction

English has become an important means of international communication in education, science, technology, business, and professional contexts. Consequently, English language learners are expected not only to develop their reading and writing abilities but also to understand spoken English in a variety of communicative situations.

Among the four major language skills, listening plays a particularly important role because it provides learners with linguistic input through which they develop their understanding of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, and meaning.

Listening, however, is frequently regarded as one of the most difficult skills for second and foreign language learners. Unlike written language, spoken language occurs in real time, which requires learners to process linguistic information immediately. Learners may encounter difficulties because of unfamiliar vocabulary, connected speech, pronunciation, different accents, speech rate, and limited background knowledge. These difficulties can make listening comprehension cognitively demanding, particularly for EFL learners who have limited opportunities to interact with English outside the classroom.

The difficulty of listening is also associated with the nature of spoken input. Learners cannot always control the speed at which information is delivered, and they may lose important information when they fail to recognize particular words or expressions. Recent research continues to demonstrate that listening is an important but challenging component of second language learning. Therefore, listening instruction requires appropriate materials and instructional strategies that can provide learners with meaningful and manageable exposure to spoken English.

In many EFL contexts, classroom exposure to spoken English remains relatively limited. Traditional listening instruction frequently depends on coursebooks and teacher-selected audio recordings. Although such materials remain useful, they may not provide sufficient exposure to the variety and authenticity of English used in contemporary communication. This situation highlights the importance of providing learners with additional opportunities to encounter spoken English outside the classroom.

The development of digital technology has created new possibilities for language learning. Learners can now access English-language materials through smartphones, computers, streaming platforms, and other digital devices. Among these resources, podcasts have become increasingly relevant to language education because they provide accessible audio content covering a wide range of topics, speakers, accents, and communicative contexts.

An English podcast can provide learners with authentic or semi-authentic spoken language and expose them to naturally occurring expressions, pronunciation patterns, vocabulary, stress, rhythm, and intonation. More importantly, podcasts can be accessed repeatedly and independently. Such characteristics make podcasts particularly suitable for extensive listening and autonomous learning.

Empirical research has provided evidence supporting the pedagogical potential of podcasts. For example, Abdulrahman, Basalama, and Widodo found that Indonesian EFL students who received podcast-based listening instruction

achieved significantly better post-test results than students in the control group. The students also reported positive attitudes toward podcast-based learning and perceived podcasts as authentic, interesting, and motivating learning resources.

Similarly, Gonulal investigated extensive listening through podcasts and vodcasts among college-level EFL learners over a year. The study found significant progress in students' overall listening skills, while podcasts were preferred more frequently than vodcasts by the participants.

Research has also emphasized the importance of repetition when using podcasts. Şendağ, Gedik, and Toker examined the effects of podcast length, repeated listening, and listening aids on EFL listening comprehension. Their findings indicated that repeated listening improved listening comprehension and attention, although learners sometimes perceived repetitive listening as boring.

More recently, Abu Rmelah and Pornwiriyaakit examined the use of a repetition technique with podcasts among university students and reported improvements in English listening comprehension following the intervention.

Other research has investigated podcasts as part of specific listening tasks. A study published in the *International Journal of Listening* found that podcast-based pre-listening tasks significantly promoted EFL learners' listening performance compared with other task conditions.

Despite these findings, several issues remain insufficiently explored. Previous research has examined podcasts in different educational contexts, but some studies have focused primarily on students' perceptions, while others have investigated specific podcast activities or extensive listening. For example, research involving Indonesian pre-service teachers has shown positive perceptions of podcasts as a medium for improving listening skills, motivation, and confidence. However, positive perceptions alone do not necessarily demonstrate measurable improvement in listening performance.

This situation indicates a research gap concerning the need to examine podcast use not only from the perspective of learner attitudes but also from the perspective of measurable listening achievement. Furthermore, the effectiveness of podcasts may depend on how they are pedagogically integrated into the learning process. Podcasts should therefore not be viewed simply as audio files but as instructional resources that require appropriate task design, repetition, scaffolding, and feedback.

Based on this research gap, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of English podcasts in improving students' listening skills. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether students' listening comprehension improves significantly after participating in podcast-based instruction and whether students who receive podcast-based instruction demonstrate greater improvement than those who receive conventional listening instruction.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant improvement in students' listening skills after they receive English podcast-based instruction?
2. Is there a significant difference in listening achievement between students who receive podcast-based instruction and those who receive conventional instruction?
3. What pedagogical factors may explain the effectiveness of English podcasts in developing students' listening skills?

Method

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental research design. A pre-test and post-test control group design is proposed to examine the effectiveness of English podcast-based instruction.

Two groups of students are involved: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group receives listening instruction using English podcasts, whereas the control group receives conventional listening instruction using the materials normally employed in the course.

The research design is presented below:

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental	O ₁	X	O ₂
Control	O ₃	C	O ₄

Where:

- O₁ = experimental group pre-test
- O₂ = experimental group post-test
- O₃ = control group pre-test
- O₄ = control group post-test
- X = English podcast-based instruction
- C = conventional listening instruction

The quasi-experimental design is appropriate because intact classes can be used while still allowing the researcher to compare changes in listening performance between the two groups.

Participants

The participants are undergraduate students enrolled in an English Education Program. The proposed sample consists of approximately 60 students divided into two groups of 30 students.

The participants should have relatively comparable English proficiency levels. If intact classes are used, their initial equivalence can be examined through pre-test scores.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument is a listening comprehension test administered before and after the treatment.

The test measures several dimensions of listening comprehension:

1. Identifying the main idea
2. Identifying specific information
3. Understanding detailed information
4. Understanding vocabulary in context
5. Identifying the speaker's purpose
6. Making inferences and understanding relationships among ideas.

The test may consist of multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, information-matching activities, and contextual listening tasks.

Content validity should be established through expert judgment. Reliability should also be examined statistically before the instrument is used for the main study.

Podcast-Based Treatment

The treatment should be implemented systematically over several instructional sessions.

Pre-listening Activities

Before listening, the lecturer introduces the topic and activates students' prior knowledge. Key vocabulary and potentially difficult expressions may also be introduced. Students are then asked to predict the content of the podcast.

The purpose of this stage is to establish contextual expectations and reduce unnecessary cognitive difficulty during listening.

While-listening Activities

1. During the listening stage, students listen to the podcast for specific purposes.
2. During the first listening, students focus on understanding the general idea.
3. During the second listening, students identify specific information.
4. During subsequent listening, students may focus on vocabulary, pronunciation, expressions, or other details.

This repeated listening procedure is supported by previous research indicating that repetition can improve EFL listening comprehension and attention.

Post-listening Activities

After listening, students complete comprehension questions, summarize the podcast, discuss its content, identify new vocabulary, or provide personal responses to the topic.

These activities allow students to transform listening input into meaningful language use.

Data Collection

Data are collected through pre-tests and post-tests. The pre-test is administered before the treatment to establish students' initial listening proficiency. The post-test is administered after the treatment to determine changes in listening performance.

Additional data, such as students' listening logs or questionnaires, may be collected to provide supplementary information concerning students' engagement and perceptions.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data are analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive statistics include:

1. Mean
2. Standard deviation
3. Minimum score and Maximum score.

Normality and homogeneity tests are conducted before inferential analysis.

If the data satisfy the assumptions of parametric testing, a paired-samples *t*-test can be used to determine whether there is a significant improvement between pre-test and post-test scores within each group.

An independent-samples *t*-test or ANCOVA may then be used to compare the performance of the experimental and control groups. Effect size should also be calculated because statistical significance alone does not indicate the practical magnitude of the treatment effect.

Results and Discussion

The numerical results below are illustrative and must be replaced with actual research data before publication.

Improvement in Students' Listening Performance

The hypothetical findings indicate that students who participated in podcast-based instruction demonstrated greater improvement in listening performance than students who received conventional instruction.

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Gain
Experimental	62.40	78.60	16.20
Control	61.90	69.80	7.90

The hypothetical increase of 16.20 points in the experimental group compared with 7.90 points in the control group suggests that podcast-based instruction may provide additional benefits for listening development.

This potential improvement is consistent with previous empirical findings.

Abdulrahman et al. reported a statistically significant difference between podcast and control groups among Indonesian EFL students, with the podcast group achieving better listening comprehension outcomes.

Similarly, Bakhsh and Pourhosein Gilakjani investigated podcasting among Iranian intermediate EFL learners and compared podcast-based instruction with traditional instruction using pre-test and post-test listening measures.

These findings suggest that podcast-based listening instruction may provide advantages beyond conventional listening practices when the technology is accompanied by systematic instructional procedures.

Podcasts as Sources of Authentic Listening Input

One of the strongest pedagogical advantages of podcasts is their ability to expose students to diverse forms of spoken English.

Students can encounter different speakers, speech patterns, vocabulary, accents, and communicative purposes. Such exposure may help learners become more flexible listeners.

Traditional classroom audio materials are often deliberately designed to make comprehension easier for language learners. Although this simplification can be useful at beginning levels, excessive reliance on simplified input may limit students' ability to deal with naturally occurring spoken English.

Podcasts can therefore function as a bridge between classroom English and real-world listening.

This argument is supported by Indonesian research showing that students perceived podcasts as providing authentic materials and meaningful listening activities.

Repetition and Listening Comprehension

Repeated listening represents another important mechanism underlying the potential effectiveness of podcasts.

Listening comprehension involves multiple processes, including recognizing sounds, segmenting speech, identifying words, constructing meaning, and integrating information with prior knowledge. Students may not successfully complete all of these processes during a single exposure.

Repeated listening allows learners to allocate attention to different aspects of the same input.

For example, the first listening may focus on the general meaning, while the second may focus on specific details. A third listening may allow students to notice unfamiliar vocabulary or pronunciation features.

Empirical evidence supports this approach. Şendağ et al. found that repeated listening improved EFL podcast comprehension and attention, although excessive repetition could negatively affect students' perceptions of enjoyment.

Therefore, repetition should be purposeful rather than mechanical.

Podcast-Based Pre-listening Tasks

Another important finding from previous research is that podcast effectiveness may be enhanced when podcasts are incorporated into structured listening tasks.

Research involving 63 university-level EFL learners found that podcast-based pre-listening tasks significantly promoted listening performance.

This finding challenges the assumption that simply exposing students to more English automatically improves listening.

Instead, learners need to know what they are listening for and how they should process the information.

Pre-listening activities can activate background knowledge, introduce important vocabulary, and establish expectations. Consequently, students enter the listening task with a clearer cognitive framework.

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary knowledge is closely connected to listening comprehension. When learners cannot recognize key lexical items in spoken input, their ability to construct meaning is compromised.

Podcasts provide vocabulary in meaningful contexts rather than isolated word lists. Students can hear how vocabulary items are pronounced and how they function within complete utterances.

Repeated exposure to vocabulary across different podcast episodes may also contribute to lexical development.

Therefore, podcast-based listening instruction can potentially produce benefits beyond listening comprehension itself.

Learner Motivation and Autonomy

Podcasts may also support learner autonomy because students can access materials independently.

Cross's case study of autonomous podcast listening demonstrated that metacognitive instruction and regular guidance helped an EFL learner develop increasingly sophisticated ways of using podcasts to improve listening ability.

This finding is important because podcast-based learning should not be reduced to technology use. The pedagogical value of podcasts depends partly on whether students learn how to use them strategically.

Students should therefore be taught how to:

1. Select appropriate podcast materials
2. Predict content
3. Identify key information
4. Use transcripts when necessary

5. Repeat difficult sections
6. Record new vocabulary
7. Monitor comprehension and Reflect on their listening progress.

In this sense, podcast-based learning can promote metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy.

Challenging the Assumption that Podcasts Automatically Improve Listening

A common assumption is that simply listening to English podcasts will automatically improve students' listening skills. This assumption should be treated cautiously.

Podcast effectiveness depends on several factors, including:

1. The difficulty of the content
2. Speech rate
3. Podcast length
4. Topic familiarity
5. Vocabulary load
6. Availability of transcripts
7. Listening repetition
8. Learner proficiency and Instructional guidance.

Research examining podcast length, repetition, and listening aids demonstrates that these variables can affect listening comprehension.

Recent research on playback speed also indicates that speech rate and learners' proficiency can influence listening comprehension.

Therefore, teachers should carefully select podcasts according to students' proficiency levels rather than simply assigning authentic podcasts without scaffolding.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings have several implications for English language teaching.

First, podcasts can be integrated into existing listening courses as supplementary authentic listening materials.

Second, teachers should select podcasts according to learners' proficiency levels. Beginning learners may benefit from shorter podcasts with familiar topics and moderate speech rates, whereas more advanced learners can gradually be exposed to longer and more complex materials.

Third, podcast activities should be structured through pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening activities.

Fourth, students should be encouraged to listen independently outside the classroom. Listening logs, reflection journals, comprehension questions, and vocabulary records can help students monitor their progress.

Finally, podcasts can be integrated with other language skills. After listening to a podcast, students can summarize its content, participate in discussions, write responses, or create their own short podcasts.

Thus, podcasting should be regarded not merely as a technological tool but as part of a broader pedagogical framework for developing communicative competence.

Conclusion

This article has examined the potential of English podcasts as a tool for improving students' listening skills. The theoretical and empirical evidence indicates that podcasts can provide valuable opportunities for learners to encounter spoken English in authentic, varied, flexible, and accessible forms.

Podcast-based instruction can support listening development through several mechanisms. First, podcasts increase learners' exposure to spoken English. Second, repeated listening allows learners to process information progressively. Third, podcasts expose students to vocabulary, pronunciation, stress, intonation, and discourse patterns in meaningful contexts. Fourth, their accessibility can promote motivation, learner autonomy, and independent learning.

Previous empirical studies provide encouraging evidence for the effectiveness of podcast-based listening instruction. Studies conducted in Indonesia and other EFL contexts have reported improvements in listening comprehension following podcast-based interventions.

Nevertheless, podcasts should not be considered a technological solution that automatically improves listening ability. Their effectiveness depends heavily on pedagogical implementation. Appropriate podcast selection, structured listening tasks, repetition, scaffolding, feedback, and learner reflection are essential components of effective podcast-based instruction.

Future research should employ larger samples, longer intervention periods, and more diverse educational contexts. Researchers should also investigate the effects of podcast length, speech rate, accent, transcript availability, repetition frequency, and students' proficiency levels.

Furthermore, mixed-methods research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of not only whether podcasts improve listening performance but also how learners experience and use podcasts during the learning process.

Overall, English podcasts represent a promising digital resource for contemporary EFL listening instruction. When carefully selected and pedagogically integrated, podcasts can extend listening practice beyond the classroom and provide learners with meaningful opportunities to develop their ability to understand spoken English.

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