



Exploring EFL University Students Experiences in Using Podcasts for Listening Skills

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to explore EFL university students' experiences of using English podcasts as a resource for developing listening skills. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, perceptions, benefits, and challenges in podcast-based listening learning. The participants were fourth-year English Education students who regularly listened to English podcasts as part of their independent learning activities. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis approach. The findings revealed four main themes: experiences of using English podcasts, the influence of podcasts on listening development, advantages and challenges of podcast use, and students' perceptions of podcasts. Students reported that podcasts supported their listening comprehension, familiarity with different accents and speaking rates, vocabulary development, pronunciation improvement, and confidence in understanding spoken English. Although students encountered challenges related to fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, slang expressions, and accent variations, they developed strategies to overcome these difficulties. The findings imply that podcasts can serve as flexible and meaningful digital learning resources that promote authentic language exposure and support independent listening development among EFL learners.

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INTRODUCTION

Listening ability has become an essential competence in English learning because effective communication in global society increasingly depends on the ability to understand spoken information. The development of listening skills is important not only for academic success but also for students' participation in international communication, digital learning environments, and professional contexts. However, many English learners still experience difficulties in

understanding authentic spoken English due to rapid speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, pronunciation variations, and different accents. This issue requires serious attention because weak listening comprehension may limit learners' confidence and opportunities to engage in real communication. Previous studies indicate that providing meaningful exposure to authentic spoken English can support learners' development by improving their familiarity with natural language input and communication patterns (Alamri, 2025; Kochkorova, 2025; Al-Mohawes, 2023). Therefore, improving listening learning practices is important for preparing learners to face real-world communication demands.

In contemporary education, digital technology provides opportunities to create more flexible and meaningful English learning experiences. Podcasts represent one of the digital learning resources that have gained popularity among students because they allow learners to access authentic English materials anytime and anywhere. The use of podcasts is considered valuable because it provides continuous exposure to natural pronunciation, vocabulary, expressions, and different speaking styles that are rarely available in traditional classroom materials. Research has shown that podcasts can increase students' engagement and provide opportunities for independent learning beyond classroom boundaries (Noor & Daulay, 2023; Erniwati et al., 2025; Bielova et al., 2026). Furthermore, podcast-based learning supports students in developing deeper learning experiences by connecting classroom knowledge with authentic language use. Therefore, exploring students' experiences in using podcasts is important to understand how digital resources contribute to sustainable English learning practices.

Despite the increasing availability of digital resources, listening remains one of the most challenging skills for many Indonesian EFL learners. In many educational contexts, listening instruction still depends heavily on textbook-based recordings that are carefully designed and often lack natural communication features. Such materials may not adequately represent real spoken English, causing students to struggle when encountering authentic conversations outside the classroom. This condition creates a gap between classroom listening practices and real-world language demands. Students frequently face difficulties related to unfamiliar accents, fast speech rates, limited vocabulary knowledge, and maintaining concentration during listening activities. Previous studies suggest that authentic materials, including podcasts, can address these challenges by exposing learners to more realistic language environments (Alamri, 2025; Damayanti & Hadi, 2023; Hoang, 2025). However, students' actual learning processes and experiences when engaging with podcasts remain insufficiently explored.

In the Indonesian EFL context, the use of podcasts has gradually become a learning alternative among university students who seek additional exposure to English outside formal classes. Many students independently listen to English podcasts through digital platforms to improve their listening comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation awareness. However, their experiences are not always positive because they may encounter difficulties in understanding native speakers, unfamiliar expressions, and complex topics. Students often need to develop personal strategies, such as repeated listening, selecting appropriate podcast levels, taking notes, or using transcripts to overcome these barriers. Previous research has identified positive perceptions toward podcasts as listening resources, but limited attention has been given to how students experience the entire learning process in authentic settings (Gunawan et al., 2023; Sotlikova & Haerazi, 2023; Nurzamani et al., 2026). Understanding these experiences is necessary to provide deeper insights into effective podcast integration in EFL learning.

Previous studies have demonstrated that podcasts provide various benefits for improving English listening skills. Damayanti and Hadi (2023) found that podcast activities helped students improve their understanding of spoken English, while Masitah et al. (2023) revealed that podcast exposure supported listening development through repeated practice and contextual vocabulary learning. Similarly, studies by Indriana and Saori (2024) and Nhi (2024) showed that podcasts could enhance listening comprehension by providing meaningful and accessible language input. Other research has also highlighted that students perceive podcasts positively because they offer flexibility, authentic content, and opportunities for autonomous learning (Andriani et al., 2024; Mohammed & Khadawardi, 2024; Romualdez et al., 2025). These findings confirm the potential of podcasts as an effective listening medium. However, most previous studies emphasize effectiveness, achievement improvement, or general perceptions rather than exploring students' lived experiences and learning processes.

Although existing research has provided valuable evidence regarding podcast effectiveness, several limitations remain. Previous studies have rarely investigated how university EFL students incorporate podcasts into their daily learning routines, how they negotiate listening difficulties, and how their experiences influence gradual listening development. Research focusing on students' challenges and strategies is still limited, even though these aspects are essential for understanding successful independent listening practices. For example, Selviani and Ardiana (2025) identified challenges faced by EFL students when listening to podcasts, while Dimasanti and Inayati (2025) examined students' perceptions of extensive podcast listening. However, these studies provide limited explanation of the relationship between students' experiences,

strategies, and learning growth over time. Therefore, further investigation is needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of podcast-based listening experiences among Indonesian EFL university students.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on students' lived experiences of using English podcasts as an informal listening learning resource outside classroom activities. Rather than only measuring improvement or examining perceptions, this research explores how students experience podcast-based learning, including their motivations, learning practices, challenges, and adaptation strategies. This perspective provides a more holistic understanding of how digital authentic materials function in real learning environments. By examining students who regularly engage with English podcasts, this study highlights the process of learning through experience and interaction with authentic language resources. Such understanding is important because effective technology integration in language education should consider not only the availability of digital tools but also learners' experiences, responses, and strategies when using those tools.

This study is guided by the research problem of how EFL university students experience learning listening skills through English podcasts. Based on the assumption that meaningful learning develops through interaction between learners and their environment, podcast-based learning may provide opportunities for students to construct knowledge through authentic language exposure, reflection, and continuous practice. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' experiences in using English podcasts for listening learning, including how they use podcasts, the benefits they obtain, the difficulties they encounter, and the strategies they apply to overcome challenges. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching understanding of experiential learning in digital EFL contexts and practically by providing insights for teachers and learners regarding effective podcast integration as an alternative listening learning resource.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore university students' experiences in using English podcasts for listening learning. A qualitative approach was selected because the purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, perceptions, challenges, and strategies based on their own perspectives rather than measuring variables numerically. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate for investigating educational phenomena where researchers seek to describe participants' experiences within their natural learning contexts. In the context of English listening development, exploring learners' experiences with digital

resources such as podcasts requires attention to personal interpretations, learning practices, and interactions with authentic language input (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Erniwati et al., 2025; Rmelah & Pornwiriyaakit, 2023). The study was conducted at an English Education Program at a university in Indonesia. This location was selected because English Education students have continuous exposure to English learning activities and are expected to develop independent language learning strategies. Furthermore, university students commonly use digital resources outside classroom settings, making them suitable participants for examining podcast-based listening experiences (Andriani et al., 2024; Gunawan et al., 2023).

The participants of this study were fourth-year students enrolled in the English Education Program. They were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: students who had experience using English podcasts for listening practice and regularly listened to English podcasts approximately two to five times per week outside classroom activities. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient experience to provide meaningful information regarding podcast use, learning benefits, difficulties, and personal strategies. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire distributed online using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of eleven questions focusing on students' listening habits, podcast preferences, learning contexts, perceived improvements in listening comprehension, vocabulary development, confidence, challenges, and strategies for overcoming difficulties. Open-ended questions were selected because they enabled participants to provide detailed explanations about their experiences and reflections. Previous studies examining podcast use in EFL contexts have also emphasized the importance of exploring students' voices to understand how learners engage with podcasts as authentic listening resources (Dimasanti & Inayati, 2025; Selviani & Ardiana, 2025; Samudro et al., 2025).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), which include systematic identification and interpretation of patterns within qualitative data. The analysis process consisted of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and data verification. During data condensation, the researchers selected, simplified, and categorized relevant responses related to students' experiences, benefits, challenges, and strategies in using podcasts. In the data display stage, the categorized information was organized into themes and sub-themes to facilitate interpretation of students' learning experiences. Finally, data verification was conducted by reviewing the identified themes, comparing patterns across participants' responses, and ensuring that the interpretations accurately represented the collected data. Ethical considerations were maintained

throughout the research process by informing participants about the research objectives, obtaining voluntary participation, ensuring confidentiality, and using pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. This process supported the credibility of the findings and provided a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences in podcast-based listening learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

As a result of the research, it was found that all the participants had a positive experience using English podcasts to improve their listening skills. The participant listened to podcasts regularly in various situations and for different purposes. The participants claimed that podcasts helped them understand English better, to learn new vocabulary, and to get used to natural conversations in English. Despite certain difficulties in listening, the participant still considered podcasts as an effective learning tool. Based on the data analysis, four themes were identified: (1) Experiences of Using English Podcasts, (2) The Influence of Podcasts on Listening Development, (3) The Advantages and Challenges of Using Podcasts, and (4) Participants' perception of podcasts.

Experiences of Using English Podcasts

The data show that all participants had a good experience using English podcasts. They listened to podcasts regularly as they found that the content is interesting and thought that podcasts would help them improve their English skills. Most of the participants preferred to listen to podcasts during their spare time since podcasts were easy to access and could be listened to at any moment.

Listening Habits and Learning Situations

Most of the participants listened to English podcasts several times a week or even every day. The participants usually listened to podcasts while studying, when they travelled, did housework, or went to bed. Therefore, listening to podcasts became a part of participants routine.

"I listen to English language podcasts more than five times a week. I usually listen to them almost every day because they help me improve my listening skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, and understanding of natural English conversations." (P2)

This extract shows that listening to podcasts became part of the participant's daily routine. Routine listening to podcasts helped the participant improve listening skills, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Another participant also shared a similar experience.

"I usually listen to English podcasts during my free time, while commuting, doing household chores, or before going to bed." (P3)

This statement shows that listening to podcasts is convenient for the student as he/she can listen whenever and wherever he/she wants.

Preferred Podcast Genres

The participants listened to different genres of podcasts depending on their interests. They mentioned educational podcasts, storytelling, motivation, comedy and podcasts with daily conversation. Choosing interesting themes made learning more enjoyable and encouraged them to continue listening.

"I used to listening comedy podcast or about life (motivation). It helps me so much for knowing the correct pronunciation and I can also get new vocabulary." (P1)

The participant stated that interesting podcast themes help them make the learning process more fun and improve the pronunciation and vocabulary.

Another participant also shared a similar opinion.

"I find educational, self-improvement, and storytelling podcasts the most helpful because they use clear language and introduce new vocabulary in real-life contexts." (P2)

The participant believed that educational podcasts are helpful because they use simple language and it introduce new words in daily life situations.

Overall, it is possible to conclude that participants found listening to podcasts is interesting and beneficial. The possibility to choose podcasts according to their interests made participants practice their listening skills more frequently.

The Influence of Podcasts on Listening Development

Participants believed that routine listening to podcasts helped them improve their listening skills. Participants reported that podcasts helped them understand English conversations better, recognize different accents, and become more confident in listening to English.

Understanding Natural Spoken English

Most participants believed that listening to podcasts helped them understand natural English conversations better and improved their concentration on listening because of the lack of visual distractions.

"Podcasts are much better for improving spoken English because they focus entirely on pure listening without visual distractions. They feature natural, unscripted conversations, which helps you catch real-life intonations, everyday vocabulary, and spontaneous expressions." (P1)

The participant believed that podcasts helped improve listening skills because of natural conversations used in daily life.

Another participant expressed the same point of view.

"Podcasts help me focus on listening because there are no visual distractions. They also contain natural conversations and different accents, which improve my understanding better than songs or movies." (P2)

Therefore, listening to podcasts allows students to pay more attention to spoken English and to understand conversations better.

Understanding Different Accents and Speaking Speed

Listening to podcasts was also reported by participants as helpful tools for understanding different English accents and speaking speed. Listening to podcasts daily allowed participants to understand conversations without word-for-word translation.

"Regularly hearing this helps you naturally catch different intonations and match the speaker's speed without needing to translate word-by-word." (P1)

The participant explained that listening to podcasts regularly helped them understand English conversations naturally and avoid the need to translate every word.

Another participant also experienced similar improvement.

"After listening regularly, I have become more comfortable understanding different accents and faster speech. For example, I can now understand American and British speakers more easily than before." (P3)

In this extract, participant claims that listening to podcasts regularly has increased the ability to understand different accents and faster speaking speed.

Increasing Listening Confidence

Besides improving listening skills, participants also became more confident when listening to English. The participants thought that regular practice made English easier to understand and reduced their nervousness.

"Listening to podcasts has boosted my confidence because it closes the gap between textbook English and how people actually talk in real life." (P1)

The participant explains that podcasts have helped them to become more familiar with real English conversations, which is it increased their confidence.

Another participant also shared the same opinion.

"Listening to podcasts regularly has made me more confident because I can understand spoken English more easily and feel less nervous when communicating in English." (P2)

The participant believes that increasing listening ability made him/her more confident when communicating in English.

Overall, the results show that the use of podcasts positively affected the development of listening ability of students. Listening to podcasts regularly improved their ability to understand spoken English, identify different accents and increased their confidence when listening to English.

The Advantages and Challenges of Using Podcasts

The findings show that all participants found many advantages from listening to English podcasts. In addition to improving the listening skill, the use of podcasts helped them to learn new vocabulary, improved their pronunciation, and increased their ability to understand spoken English. However, the participants also met some challenges related to listening to podcasts, such as the speakers talked too fast, used unfamiliar words, and different accents.

Advantages of Using Podcasts

Most participants believed that podcasts were useful for learning new vocabulary and improved their pronunciation. They explained that they usually learned new words during listening to podcasts and understood their meaning by checking a dictionary or using them in daily communication. Moreover, regular listening improved their pronunciation of English words.

"It helps me so much for knowing the correct pronunciation and I can also get new vocabulary." (P1)

This response indicates that the podcast helped with improving pronunciation and getting new vocabulary at the same time. Listening to podcast regularly made it easier to remember new words.

Other participants also shared similar experience and stated that podcasts stimulated them to learn new words and use them when speaking or writing.

"When I hear unfamiliar words or expressions, I usually look up their meanings and try to use them in my daily conversations or writing." (P2)

It means that the participant did not only learn new words but also tried to use them while communicating with others. It helped the participant to remember the new vocabulary better.

Overall, the results showed that podcasts helped students to improve vocabulary and pronunciation due to regular listening. Participants found that they had learned English naturally because of the words that they heard in a real conversation.

Challenges of Using Podcasts

Even though the participants liked listening to podcasts, there were also certain challenges. The main challenges included fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, slang, and different English accents. These problems sometimes made understanding of podcasts rather hard.

"The biggest challenges are rapid speech and unfamiliar slang that textbooks don't teach." (P1)

As can be seen from the extract, fast speech and slang made certain podcast episodes rather difficult to understand.

Similar experience had other participants, who mentioned that sometimes they had trouble understanding the speaker because of fast speech or unfamiliar words.

"Sometimes I find it difficult to understand fast speech or unfamiliar vocabulary." (P2)

The result shows that fast speech and unfamiliar words were among the main challenges of participants.

In order to deal with these challenges, participants replayed the podcast episodes, slowed down audio, used transcripts, or searched for the meaning of words. All these strategies helped participants understand the content better.

Overall, the findings revealed that there were several challenges for participants while listening to English podcasts. However, participants did not give up listening but used various strategies to help them understand the podcast and continue learning.

Participants' perception of podcasts

All participants had positive attitudes toward English podcasts. They believed that podcasts were helpful, easy to access, and fun. Moreover, they thought that podcasts contributed to their listening skills development since they could listen whenever they wished and choose topics according to their interests.

Podcasts as an Effective Learning Tool

Most participants believed that podcasts were an effective tool to improve listening skills. As they stated, podcasts provided more opportunities to hear English conversation in the context of daily communication.

"Podcasts expose you to genuine, unscripted English with natural speeds, slang, and diverse accents." (P1)

The participant stated that podcasts allowed students to hear the real English usage in daily context, this made it became easier for students to get accustomed to various types of English speech.

Other participants shared the same opinion. They thought that podcasts were useful since they could listen whenever they wished.

"Podcasts are more effective because they provide authentic English and can be accessed anytime. However, classroom activities are still important because teachers can provide explanations and feedback." (P2)

This quote reveals that the participant considered podcasts as an effective learning tool. However, the participant did not think that classrooms were useless. The participant thought that class sessions were also important since teachers could explain the materials and give feedback.

Recommendations for Other English Learners

Most participants recommended English podcasts to other students. They suggested listening regularly, choosing interesting topics, and replaying difficult parts if it was needed.

"Choose topics that you enjoy, listen regularly, and don't be afraid to replay difficult parts." (P3)

The participant thought that students should choose interesting podcast topics since it would help them to stay motivated to continue their learning process.

Another participant had positive experience with podcasts as well.

"Overall it's fun. I can learn while being entertained." (P4)

As the participant said, podcasts were fun. Learning was entertaining when it's fun and therefore it made the participant motivated to continue learning English.

Overall, the findings showed that participants had positive opinions towards English podcasts. They thought that podcasts were helpful, flexible and fun. Although they faced some challenges, participants believed that the advantages were significantly bigger than the challenges. That is why they recommended podcasts as one of the learning resources to improve listening skills in English.

Discussion

This study explored EFL university students' experiences of using English podcasts to support their listening learning. The findings indicate that students generally had positive experiences because podcasts provided flexibility, authentic English exposure, and enjoyable learning opportunities. Unlike previous studies that mainly examined the effectiveness or general perceptions of podcast use, this study highlights students' daily practices, personal

experiences, and strategies for overcoming listening difficulties. These findings support previous research showing that podcasts provide meaningful opportunities for authentic language exposure and learner engagement in EFL contexts (Erniwati et al., 2025; Andriani et al., 2024; Zhao & Hua, 2025). Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of how podcasts function as a learning resource beyond formal classroom activities.

One important finding was that participants integrated podcast listening into their daily routines. Students reported listening while studying, travelling, doing household activities, or during free time. This finding indicates that podcasts were not only viewed as classroom materials but also as flexible learning resources that supported independent listening practice. The accessibility of podcasts allowed students to increase their exposure to English without being restricted by classroom schedules. This result is consistent with Damayanti and Hadi (2023), who found that podcasts provide opportunities for learners to practice listening outside the classroom. Similarly, Masitah et al. (2023) emphasized that podcasts encourage autonomous learning because students can control when and how they engage with learning materials. The present study extends these findings by showing how students incorporated podcast activities into their everyday learning experiences.

Another significant finding was that participants selected podcast content based on their personal interests, including educational topics, storytelling, motivation, comedy, and daily conversations. Students explained that interesting topics increased their motivation and encouraged continuous listening practice. This finding suggests that learner autonomy plays an important role in podcast-based learning because students can select materials that match their preferences and learning goals. Previous studies have also shown that engaging podcast content increases students' motivation and participation in listening activities (Gunawan et al., 2023; Dimasanti & Inayati, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Furthermore, Andriani et al. (2024) reported that students perceived podcasts positively because relevant and enjoyable topics made listening activities more meaningful. This study contributes by demonstrating that personal interest influences students' commitment to practicing English listening beyond classroom requirements.

The findings also revealed that podcasts supported students' listening development, particularly in understanding natural spoken English, different accents, pronunciation, and speaking speed. Participants explained that regular exposure helped them become familiar with authentic conversations and reduced their dependence on word-by-word translation. This suggests that

continuous interaction with authentic audio materials enables learners to gradually develop listening comprehension skills. Similar findings were reported by Noor and Daulay (2023), who found that podcast exposure improved students' familiarity with spoken English, and Putri et al. (2025), who demonstrated that repeated podcast listening contributed to listening improvement. However, this study provides additional insight by focusing on how students experienced gradual improvement through repeated exposure rather than only measuring listening achievement.

Beyond listening comprehension, participants reported that podcasts supported vocabulary development and pronunciation improvement. Students explained that they encountered new words while listening, searched for their meanings, and later applied them in speaking or writing activities. They also perceived that repeated exposure to spoken English helped them recognize and produce correct pronunciation. These findings indicate that vocabulary and pronunciation learning occurred naturally as part of meaningful listening activities. Previous research has shown that podcasts provide contextual vocabulary learning opportunities because learners encounter words within authentic communication settings (Masitah et al., 2023; Aziz, 2025; Sudewi & Isma, 2023). Additionally, Damayanti and Hadi (2023) highlighted that continuous exposure to accurate pronunciation through podcasts can support learners' pronunciation awareness. This study expands previous findings by explaining the learning processes students experienced while developing vocabulary and pronunciation through podcast engagement.

The study further found that regular podcast listening increased students' confidence in understanding spoken English. Participants reported feeling less anxious when listening to English conversations and becoming more comfortable with different accents and speaking styles. This suggests that confidence developed gradually through continuous exposure and successful listening experiences. Similar results were identified by Aziz (2025), who found that podcast use enhanced students' confidence through exposure to authentic English communication. Moreover, Andriani et al. (2024) reported that students experienced increased confidence after engaging with podcasts for extended periods. The current study contributes by illustrating students' personal descriptions of confidence development as part of their everyday learning journey, showing that podcasts influence not only listening ability but also learners' emotional readiness for English communication.

Despite the benefits, participants experienced several challenges, including fast speech rates, unfamiliar vocabulary, slang expressions, and different accents. However, students developed strategies to overcome these difficulties, such as repeating difficult sections, reducing playback speed, using

transcripts, and searching for unfamiliar words. These findings demonstrate that challenges in authentic listening materials can encourage learners to develop adaptive learning strategies. Similar challenges were identified by Selviani and Ardiana (2025), who reported that EFL learners often struggle with speed, vocabulary, and accent variations when using podcasts. Likewise, Alamri (2025) emphasized that authentic materials may be challenging because they reflect natural language use beyond textbook input. Overall, this study highlights that podcasts function not only as listening resources but also as environments where students actively manage difficulties and construct meaningful learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study provides important insights into how EFL university students experience podcast-based listening learning as part of their independent learning practices. The most important finding is that podcasts function not only as digital listening resources but also as meaningful learning environments that allow students to gain authentic English exposure, develop listening comprehension, expand vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and build confidence through continuous practice. Despite encountering challenges related to fast speech rates, unfamiliar vocabulary, slang expressions, and accent variations, students learned to adapt by applying various strategies, including repeating audio, adjusting playback speed, using transcripts, and searching for unfamiliar words. The main contribution of this study lies in extending previous research by providing a deeper understanding of students' lived experiences and learning processes when using podcasts outside the classroom, rather than focusing only on learning outcomes. However, this study is limited by the small number of participants from a single university and the use of self-reported questionnaire data. Future research should involve participants from diverse educational contexts and apply additional qualitative methods, such as interviews, observations, or longitudinal studies, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of podcast-based listening experiences.

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