

From Play to Proficiency: Using English Podcasts to Sharpen Listening Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of English podcasts as a medium for improving the listening comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Banawa Tengah. Motivated by students' low listening proficiency and limited exposure to authentic English audio, this research applied a quantitative quasi-experimental design with two groups: an experimental class that received podcast-based instruction over six sessions, and a control class that did not use podcasts. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests to measure listening gains. The results showed that the experimental group's mean post-test score increased from 37 to 52, with nine students meeting the minimum passing standard, while the control group's scores remained largely unchanged. A t-test revealed a significant difference ($t = 7.39 > t\text{-table} = 2.009$, $p < 0.05$). These findings demonstrate that integrating podcasts into English instruction can significantly enhance students' listening comprehension.

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1. Introduction

Listening comprehension is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. It underpins students' ability to understand, process, and respond to spoken language in authentic contexts (Field, 2008). However, in Indonesian junior high schools, students often struggle with listening tasks due to limited exposure to authentic spoken English and a lack of varied listening materials in the classroom.

Listening comprehension is widely recognized as a fundamental component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it provides the basis for effective communication. It enables learners to decode sounds, recognize vocabulary, and grasp meaning in order to respond appropriately in various real-life situations. Through listening, students not only acquire language input but also develop essential skills for understanding accents, intonation, and context, which are crucial for building fluency (Amelia et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2019; Kyeongjae et al., 2025). As an active process, listening requires learners to focus, interpret, and connect spoken language with prior knowledge, making it central to their overall language development and proficiency.

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Developing listening comprehension requires consistent access to meaningful, context-rich audio input. According to Vandergrift and Goh (2012), learners need frequent interaction with spoken texts to enhance their ability to decode, interpret, and retain auditory information. Unfortunately, traditional classroom instruction often lacks sufficient time and resources to provide such exposure (Siegel et al., 2025; Kaharuddin et al., 2025; Youngsun et al., 2024). Therefore, alternative resources such as digital media and online platforms can serve as valuable tools to enrich students' listening practice. By engaging with diverse audio materials, learners are exposed to authentic language use that reflects real

communicative situations. This exposure not only strengthens comprehension but also builds confidence in applying listening skills beyond the classroom.

In response to this issue, technology-enhanced tools such as podcasts have gained attention in language education. Podcasts provide learners with access to real-life English conversations, varied accents, and opportunities for self-paced learning. Constantinescu (2017) and Hasan & Tan (2020) reported that podcasts help learners become familiar with natural speech patterns, improve their vocabulary recognition, and develop better comprehension strategies.

Moreover, podcasts have been shown to increase students' motivation and engagement. Ainun (2024) notes that students who engage with podcasts regularly demonstrate more interest in listening activities and improved retention of information. The flexible nature of podcasts also allows them to be used both inside and outside the classroom, making them suitable for promoting learner autonomy. Despite the growing body of research globally, studies focusing on podcast use at the junior high school level in Indonesia are still limited. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the effectiveness of English podcasts in improving the listening comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Banawa Tengah.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research method using a quasi-experimental design. It involved two classes: an experimental group that received treatment using podcast media, and a control group that was taught using conventional methods. The study was conducted over six meetings at SMP Negeri 1 Banawa Tengah, with a total of 52 eighth-grade students participating.

The research instrument used in this study was a listening comprehension test in the form of multiple-choice, true-false, and short answer items. Both the pre-test and post-test were administered to measure students' listening performance before and after the treatment. The podcast materials used for the experimental group were selected from educational sources such as Lingokids, and focused on expository texts appropriate for junior high school learners.

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher prepared the test items based on standard indicators of listening comprehension and consulted with English teachers for expert validation. The tests assessed various listening sub-skills, including identifying main ideas, specific information, and inference.

Data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine mean scores, standard deviation, and improvement between the two groups. Additionally, a t-test was conducted to examine the statistical significance of the difference in scores between the experimental and control groups. The hypothesis testing followed Arikunto's (2013) formula and statistical procedures based on Muijs (2004) for interpreting results in educational research.

3. Result and Discussion

This section outlines the key findings of the research based on the objectives set at the beginning of the study. The data presented include results from the pre-test and post-test administered to both the experimental and control groups. These findings are examined to evaluate the impact of using podcast media on students' listening comprehension. Each stage of the analysis is described under specific subheadings to ensure clarity and organization.

3.1. Pre-Test Results

Before the treatment began, both the experimental and control groups were given a pre-test to determine their initial listening comprehension levels. In the experimental class, only two out of twenty-six students achieved the minimum passing score of 60. The scores ranged from a lowest of 18.00 to a highest of 73.00.

In comparison, none of the students in the control group passed the pre-test. Their scores ranged between 10.00 and 50.00. These results suggest that, prior to the intervention, the overall listening abilities of students in both groups were below the expected proficiency level.

Table 1. Pre-Test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Students Passed	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Mean Score
Experimental	26	2	73.00	18.00	37.00
Control	26	0	50.00	10.00	27.00

Based on the data presented above, the experimental group demonstrated a slightly higher average score than the control group. However, both groups remained below the minimum passing standard.

3.2. Post-Test Results

Following the implementation of podcast-based learning in the experimental group, both groups completed a post-test to measure their listening comprehension progress. In the experimental group, 9 out of 26 students met the minimum passing grade. The highest score achieved was 85.00, while the lowest was 27.00, reflecting a considerable improvement from the pre-test results.

In contrast, the control group, which did not receive any specific treatment, still had no students who passed the post-test. The score range for this group was 13.00 to 58.00, indicating only a slight increase from the pre-test performance.

Table 2. Post-Test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Students Passed	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Mean Score
Experimental	26	9	85.00	27.00	52.00
Control	26	0	58.00	13.00	27.00

These results demonstrate that students in the experimental group showed notable improvement in their listening comprehension after using podcast media, while those in the control group made minimal progress.

3.3. Deviation and Squared Deviation

The following table presents the total deviation and squared deviation scores calculated from the difference between the pre-test and post-test results.

Table 3. Deviation and Squared Deviation

Group	Total Deviation	Total Squared Deviation	Mean Deviation
Experimental	386	701.40	14.84
Control	11	1768.35	0.42

The data above shows that the experimental group had a higher total and squared deviation compared to the control group. This indicates that students in the experimental class experienced more noticeable changes in their listening scores. Although not all students achieved the passing grade, the mean deviation of 14.84 suggests that the use of podcast media contributed positively to their listening comprehension progress.

3.4. Hypothesis Testing

To determine whether there was a significant difference between the two groups, a t-test was conducted based on the mean deviation and squared deviation scores.

Table 4. T-Test Summary

Variable	Value
Mean Deviation (Experimental)	14.84
Mean Deviation (Control)	0.42
Total Squared Deviation (Experimental)	701.40
Total Squared Deviation (Control)	1768.35
t-count	7.39

t-table ($\alpha = 0.05$, $df = 50$)	2.009
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The result of the analysis shows that the t-count (7.39) is greater than the t-table value (2.009) at the 0.05 level of significance with 50 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This suggests that there is a statistically meaningful difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups after the treatment.

3.5 Discussion

The statistical results indicate a significant difference between the experimental and control groups, with the experimental group showing an increase in both mean scores and the number of students who reached the minimum passing grade, while the control group demonstrated no meaningful progress. This suggests that the use of podcasts had a positive impact on students' listening comprehension, likely because of repeated exposure to authentic spoken English. By allowing learners to replay content, control the pace, and engage with real-life language input, podcasts helped students improve their understanding of pronunciation, vocabulary, and meaning, supporting Rahimi and Soleymani's (2015) claim that podcasts provide flexible and accessible listening practice.

Motivation also played an important role, as Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argue that engaged learners are more likely to improve; in this study, students in the experimental group showed greater interest and attention during listening tasks, perhaps due to the novelty and interactive nature of podcasts. While not all students achieved the passing score, the overall progress suggests that carefully selected materials relevant to learners' level and needs can enhance comprehension and retention (Field, 2008). These findings highlight the potential of podcasts as an effective supplementary resource in listening instruction, though their success depends on thoughtful integration with teacher guidance and classroom interaction (Renandya & Farrell, 2011).

In addition to improving comprehension and motivation, podcasts also encourage learner autonomy by allowing students to take control of their own learning outside the classroom. Since podcasts can be accessed anytime and anywhere, students are not limited to practicing during school hours but can engage with listening materials at their own convenience. This flexibility promotes independent learning habits, which are essential for long-term language development. Moreover, exposure to a variety of podcast topics introduces learners to diverse cultural and contextual knowledge, helping them connect language use with real-world communication. Such benefits make podcasts not only a tool for enhancing listening comprehension but also a medium for fostering lifelong learning skills in EFL contexts.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that English podcasts are an effective medium for enhancing listening comprehension among eighth-grade students. The experimental group's significant improvement compared to the control group highlights the benefits of using authentic, accessible audio materials in English lessons. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate podcasts into listening activities to foster students' engagement and self-paced practice. Further research could explore combining podcasts with other interactive strategies to maximize learning outcomes.

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