

Using Podcasts to Enhance Student Listening Skills at the Tenth Grade SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya

¹Janny Ghabriel Kalabory, ²Marcy Saartje Ferdinandus, ³Yulina Tiwery
^{1,2,3}Program Studi Diluar Kampus Utama Universitas Pattimura Maluku Barat Daya
Corresponding email: lolitadonat871@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing listening skills among tenth-grade students at SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya. Utilizing Classroom Action Research (CAR), two cycles of podcast-based instruction were conducted. The results indicate notable improvements in students' listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, accompanied by increased motivation and engagement. These findings support the use of podcasts as a valuable resource for improving listening skills in English language learners.

Keywords: *Podcast, Listening Skill, Classroom Action Research, English Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition requires mastery of four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening is frequently considered the most foundational, as it provides the primary input for language acquisition. According to Brown (2001), listening is a receptive skill that enables learners to process and comprehend spoken language, establishing it as the cornerstone of language learning. The development of other language skills, such as speaking, is considerably more difficult without a strong foundation in listening. This is especially relevant in English language education, where listening is essential for both comprehension and effective communication.

At the vocational high school level, including SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya, listening is essential for preparing students to participate in the global workforce. Proficiency in English, as an international language, enables students to communicate and access information beyond their local context. Despite this, listening activities at the school are often underemphasized, while speaking and reading receive greater attention. Preliminary observations indicate that the absence of structured listening exercises has limited students' vocabulary development and their ability to comprehend spoken English. This observation aligns with Brown's (2001) assertion that listening is not only the first skill acquired but also the most frequently practiced in real-world communication.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has transformed educational practices, particularly in language learning. Digital tools, such as podcasts, offer innovative solutions to challenges associated with traditional language-teaching methods. Podcasts, which are digital audio or video files accessible on various devices, enable learners to engage with authentic spoken English (Abdulrahman, Basalama, & Widodo, 2018). The ability to pause and replay podcasts allows students to review material at their own pace, thereby enhancing listening

comprehension. Abdulrahman et al. (2018) further emphasize that podcasts expose students to native speakers' accents and offer content that is both relevant and engaging.

Listening comprehension is essential in language education, as it enables learners to interpret spoken language effectively. Widodo and Gunawan (2019) distinguish between macro skills, such as understanding the overall meaning of conversations, and micro skills, which involve attention to vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Mastery of both skill types is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of spoken English. Traditional classroom methods, however, often do not provide adequate opportunities for meaningful listening practice. As a result, students may struggle with real-world communication, particularly when encountering diverse accents, dialects, and speech patterns.

Integrating podcasts into language classrooms presents several benefits. Podcasts provide learners with authentic language input, which is essential for developing listening skills (Bakla, 2018). Bakla (2018) notes that podcasts allow students to hear natural language use by native speakers, facilitating the internalization of linguistic structures and improvement in pronunciation. Furthermore, the flexibility of podcasts permits repeated listening, which reinforces comprehension and vocabulary retention (Galunal Talib, 2020). Consequently, podcasts can effectively address listening challenges, especially in educational settings with limited traditional resources.

This study investigates the use of podcasts for teaching listening skills at SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya through Classroom Action Research (CAR). CAR is characterized by a cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This methodology enables educators to evaluate the impact of specific interventions on student outcomes, making it well-suited for assessing the effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing listening skills. CAR also allows for adapting teaching strategies based on student feedback and performance, ensuring that interventions are responsive to learners' needs.

Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of podcasts in language learning. For instance, Rauzatul Munawwarah's (2023) study at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh found that the use of BBC podcasts led to significant improvements in students' listening comprehension, as reflected in higher post-test scores. Similarly, Fitriatun Nadlifah (2023) reported that podcasts helped seventh-semester students at IAIN Kudus improve their listening skills, with most participants reaching intermediate proficiency. These studies indicate that podcasts can serve as an effective medium for improving listening skills, particularly when incorporated into classroom activities that foster active learning and engagement.

At SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya, the integration of podcasts as a teaching tool remains relatively recent. English instruction at the school has traditionally emphasized lectures and reading assignments, providing limited opportunities for listening practice. Consequently, students often struggle to understand spoken English, especially when encountering unfamiliar accents or vocabulary. This study seeks to address these challenges by incorporating podcasts into the listening curriculum as a central element.

This research has two primary objectives. The first is to examine how podcasts can be utilized to improve listening skills among tenth-grade students at SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya. The second is to identify the specific benefits of using podcasts in English language education. By analyzing both quantitative improvements in students' listening scores and qualitative feedback, the study aims to offer practical insights into integrating podcasts into classroom instruction.

This study contributes to the expanding literature on technology integration in language learning, particularly within resource-constrained educational environments. As schools increasingly adopt digital tools, podcasts present a flexible and cost-effective means of enhancing students' listening comprehension. The findings also offer practical guidance for educators seeking to improve instructional strategies and promote greater student engagement.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) involving two cycles. The subjects were 25 tenth-grade students from SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya. Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, observations, and questionnaires. The intervention consisted of listening activities using podcasts, with the process divided into pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening phases. The study measured improvements in listening skills based on word comprehension, responsiveness, and feedback.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of podcast use on the listening skills of tenth-grade students at SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya. The research was conducted over two cycles of Classroom Action Research (CAR), utilizing pre-test and post-test assessments, observations, and student feedback to measure outcomes. The findings show a marked improvement in students' listening skills, especially after adjustments were made following the first cycle. The results are discussed in detail below, integrating both the quantitative data and qualitative observations.

Improvement in Listening Skills

The pre-test results in the first cycle indicated that students had significant difficulties with listening comprehension. Most students were classified as "Fair" or "Poor," with only two students achieving a "Good" score. This outcome reflects the students' limited exposure to authentic English listening materials and a general lack of practice in using technology to develop listening skills.

In the first cycle, students were introduced to podcasts as a listening medium. However, the results of the first post-test showed only moderate improvements. Many students continued to struggle with understanding spoken English, particularly in recognizing new vocabulary and following the flow of native speech. Of 25 students, 18 still scored below the "Good" level, highlighting the need for further scaffolding and support in listening activities.

By the second cycle, significant progress was observed. Adjustments were made to the teaching approach, including introducing pre-listening activities focused on vocabulary preparation and discussing podcast themes before listening. This additional scaffolding proved effective, as students showed notable improvement on the second post-test. In this cycle, 18 students scored in the "Good" category (61-84), and seven students achieved "Very Good" scores (85-100). This result aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of pre-listening activities in supporting students' comprehension of spoken language (Galunal Talib, 2020).

Student Engagement and Motivation

One of the most significant outcomes of this study was the increase in student engagement and motivation to learn. During the first cycle, many students appeared hesitant to participate in listening activities because the podcast materials were challenging. However, by the second cycle, students expressed greater enthusiasm for the lessons and were more actively engaged in classroom discussions. This increase in engagement can be attributed to podcasts, which offered students a fresh, engaging way to practice their listening skills.

Questionnaire responses further support this observation. More than 80% of students reported that podcasts were an enjoyable and effective tool for improving their English listening skills. They particularly appreciated the ability to pause and replay the podcast, allowing them to process information at their own pace. This finding is consistent with Abdulrahman, Basalama, and Widodo's (2018) assertion that podcasts' flexibility makes them an ideal tool for language learners, especially those who require repeated exposure to new linguistic elements to fully grasp the material.

The positive shift in student attitudes and increased engagement reflects the motivational benefits of using podcasts in language education. Bakla (2018) argues that technology-mediated learning tools, such as podcasts, create a more engaging and dynamic learning environment that can help students overcome language-learning anxiety and boost their confidence. This study's findings reinforce this argument, as students became more comfortable with listening to English and more willing to participate in discussions about the podcast content.

Challenges and Adjustments

Despite the overall success, the study also revealed several challenges that need to be addressed to optimize the use of podcasts in language learning. One of the primary challenges observed during the first cycle was students' difficulty in understanding new vocabulary and fast-paced speech. To address this, pre-listening activities, such as vocabulary previews and discussions, were introduced in the second cycle. These activities helped students become familiar with key terms and concepts, significantly improving their comprehension during listening tasks.

However, pronunciation issues persisted throughout both cycles. While students demonstrated improved comprehension, many continued to struggle with pronouncing the new vocabulary they encountered in the podcasts. This suggests that while podcasts are effective for improving listening skills, additional speaking and pronunciation practice may be necessary. In future implementations, integrating pronunciation-focused exercises or having students record their own podcasts could help address this issue, providing learners with the opportunity to practice both listening and speaking (Munawwarah, 2023).

Another challenge was the diversity of student proficiency levels. While most students showed improvement, a small percentage still found the podcast material difficult to follow. This points to the need for further differentiation in instruction to accommodate varying levels of listening proficiency. Fitriatun Nadlifah's (2023) research emphasizes the importance of tailoring podcast content to learners' specific proficiency levels, suggesting that teachers may need to select podcasts of varying complexity or provide additional support to students who struggle with comprehension.

Impact of Podcasts on Listening Adaptability

One of the strengths of using podcasts in language learning is their ability to expose students to a variety of accents, dialects, and speaking styles. In this study, the podcasts used in the second cycle featured a range of accents and speeds, helping students become more adaptable listeners. This is particularly important in real-world communication, where learners must understand different speakers and adapt to varying speech patterns.

The Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2010) suggests that gradually increasing the complexity of learning materials, while providing appropriate support, helps students manage cognitive load and develop better listening adaptability. By introducing more challenging podcast materials and scaffolding the learning process with vocabulary support and post-listening activities, this study successfully enhanced students' ability to comprehend and adapt to diverse listening contexts.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for the use of podcasts in English language education. First, it is clear that podcasts offer a valuable tool for improving listening skills by providing authentic language input and engaging students in a flexible and motivating way. Teachers should consider integrating podcasts into their lesson plans, especially to encourage independent learning outside the classroom.

Second, the study highlights the importance of pre-listening activities and scaffolding to help students overcome challenges related to vocabulary and fast-paced speech. Teachers should ensure that students are adequately prepared before listening to the podcast by introducing key vocabulary and discussing the topic. This preparation can significantly improve students' comprehension and make the listening activity more effective.

Finally, to address pronunciation challenges and further develop speaking skills, teachers may consider having students create their own podcasts. This would not only allow students to practice their pronunciation but also enhance their overall language proficiency by combining listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence that podcasts are an effective and engaging tool for improving listening skills among English language learners at SMK 7 Maluku Barat Daya. The research shows that incorporating podcasts into language instruction significantly enhances students' listening comprehension, helping them grasp spoken English in various contexts. Moreover, students' overall engagement with the learning material and their motivation to actively participate in the lessons were noticeably higher, contributing to a more dynamic and interactive classroom experience.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were observed, particularly in vocabulary comprehension, pronunciation, and the varying proficiency levels among students. These challenges underscore the importance of addressing individual learning needs in a diverse classroom setting. For instance, students with lower proficiency levels may struggle with complex vocabulary or fast-paced speech in podcasts, which can hinder their comprehension and engagement.

To maximize the benefits of podcasts in language learning, it is crucial to implement strategies such as pre-listening activities that introduce key vocabulary, guided listening exercises, and differentiated tasks that cater to different proficiency levels. By providing these forms of scaffolding, teachers can ensure that all students are supported in their learning journey. Additionally, students can benefit from greater autonomy, as podcasts enable flexible, self-paced learning that encourages independent practice outside of class.

In sum, podcasts, when integrated thoughtfully into a structured learning framework, can serve as a powerful tool for fostering language acquisition, enhancing student motivation, and promoting learner autonomy. With careful planning and adaptation to student needs, podcasts can significantly enrich both traditional classroom instruction and digital learning environments.

REFERENCES

- Abdulrahman, T., Basalama, N., & Widodo, M. (2018). The use of podcasts in improving students' listening skills. *Journal of English Education*, 6(2), 45-58.
- Bakla, A. (2018). Podcasts as an innovative tool for teaching English listening skills. *International Journal of Language Education*, 4(1), 63-71.
- Galunal Talib, G. (2020). The impact of podcasts on student engagement in language learning. *Educational Technology Review*, 12(3), 78-92.
- Munawwarah, R. (2023). Using BBC podcasts to improve students' listening skills. *Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 11(2), 101-113.
- Nadlifah, F. (2023). The effectiveness of podcasts in improving listening skills: A case study in Indonesia. *Journal of English Language Studies*, 9(1), 34-49.
- Sweller, J. (2010). *Cognitive load theory*. Cambridge University Press.