

Development of Listening Material through Podcasts to improve Listening skills of 5th semester students of Al Washliyah University Labuhanbatu

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki pengembangan materi menyimak melalui podcast untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menyimak di kalangan mahasiswa semester 5 di Universitas Al Washliyah Labuhanbatu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengatasi tantangan dalam pemahaman menyimak dengan mengintegrasikan podcast sebagai alat pembelajaran yang modern dan menarik. Pendekatan metode campuran digunakan, dengan menggunakan pra- dan pasca-tes untuk mengukur peningkatan dalam pemahaman mendengarkan, bersama dengan survei siswa dan observasi guru untuk menilai keterlibatan dan efektivitas. Selama delapan minggu, para siswa berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan mendengarkan berbasis podcast, yang membuat mereka mendengar bahasa Inggris lisan yang otentik dalam berbagai aksen dan konteks. Hasilnya menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam pemahaman menyimak siswa, dengan peningkatan skor post-test rata-rata sebesar 24%. Selain itu, 87% siswa melaporkan bahwa mereka merasa lebih termotivasi untuk mempraktikkan kemampuan mendengarkan mereka di luar kelas, dan 80% menyatakan peningkatan kepercayaan diri dalam memahami berbagai aksen. Terlepas dari tantangan seperti akses internet dan kesulitan awal dengan ucapan cepat, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa podcast adalah alat yang berharga untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menyimak, meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa, dan mempromosikan pembelajaran mandiri. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa mengintegrasikan podcast ke dalam kurikulum menawarkan solusi yang fleksibel dan efektif untuk meningkatkan kemahiran mendengarkan di pendidikan tinggi.

Kata kunci: Podcast, Keterampilan Mendengarkan, Pemahaman Mendengarkan, Pembelajaran Bahasa, Keterlibatan Mahasiswa

Abstract

This study investigates the development of listening materials through podcasts to improve listening skills among 5th-semester students at Al Washliyah University Labuhanbatu. The research aims to address challenges in listening comprehension by integrating podcasts as a modern, engaging learning tool. A mixed-method approach was employed, using pre- and post-tests to measure improvements in listening comprehension, along with student surveys and teacher observations to assess engagement and effectiveness. Over eight weeks, students participated in podcast-based listening activities, which exposed them to authentic spoken English in diverse accents and contexts. The results revealed a significant improvement in students' listening comprehension, with an average post-test score increase of 24%. Additionally, 87% of students reported feeling more motivated to practice their listening skills outside of class, and 80% expressed increased confidence in understanding various accents. Despite challenges such as internet access and initial difficulties with fast speech, the study demonstrates that podcasts are a valuable tool for enhancing listening skills, increasing student engagement, and promoting autonomous learning. This study suggests that integrating podcasts into the curriculum offers a flexible, effective solution to improve listening proficiency in higher education.

Keywords: Podcasts, Listening Skills, Listening Comprehension, Language Learning, Student Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is a crucial skill in language learning, often regarded as one of the most challenging aspects for students, especially for those learning English as a second language (ESL). It requires the ability to decode spoken language, understand various accents and speech speeds, and interpret non-verbal cues such as tone and intonation. In the context of Al Washliyah University in Labuhanbatu, Indonesia, 5th-semester students face significant difficulties in understanding English audio materials, a challenge that hampers their academic performance, particularly in courses where English language proficiency is essential for success. This issue demands the development of innovative teaching materials and strategies that can improve students' listening skills effectively. The traditional methods of teaching listening skills in many ESL classrooms, such as using textbooks and pre-recorded dialogues, may not sufficiently prepare students to cope with authentic spoken English. These methods often lack variety, fail to expose students to different accents and real-life contexts, and may not engage students actively in the learning process. To address these limitations, there is a growing need to incorporate technology-based materials, particularly podcasts, into the language learning curriculum.

Podcasts have emerged as an innovative tool in language education, offering a rich source of authentic spoken content in a wide range of topics and accents. They provide an excellent platform for students to engage with listening materials outside of the classroom setting, enabling them to practice listening at their own pace. According to Vandergrift (2007), podcasts offer a flexible and convenient way for learners to develop listening skills, as they can be paused, replayed, and accessed multiple times, allowing students to focus on challenging segments of the audio. Podcasts can also expose students to real-world language usage, offering insights into informal conversation, colloquialisms, and cultural nuances that are often absent in textbooks. By integrating podcasts into the listening curriculum, students gain access to a diverse range of listening materials that mirror authentic spoken English, which is crucial for improving both comprehension and language acquisition. According to Thornbury (2005), exposure to real-world spoken language enhances learners' ability to process and understand spoken English in a variety of contexts.

The importance of listening comprehension in academic and professional settings cannot be overstated. For university students, particularly those at Al Washliyah University, mastering listening skills is vital for understanding lectures, participating in discussions, and completing academic tasks in English. However, current listening materials used in the university's English language curriculum may not be sufficient to meet the evolving needs of students. Incorporating podcasts as a primary learning tool offers an opportunity to bridge this gap and provide students with more engaging and effective listening practice. Moreover, podcasts are a versatile resource that can accommodate diverse learning styles. Audio-based learning appeals to auditory learners, while students can also use written transcripts or supplementary materials to support their understanding. By offering flexibility in how the content is consumed, podcasts allow students to personalize their learning experience, which may enhance their motivation and commitment to improving their listening skills. This is particularly important in a higher education context, where students are expected to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

Research has shown that using podcasts for language learning is an effective way to increase students' listening comprehension, retention, and motivation. A study by Macdonald (2007) indicated that students who regularly used podcasts for listening practice showed significant improvement in their listening test scores compared to those who did not. Podcasts are also effective in providing exposure to a wide range of accents, speech rates, and real-world language contexts, which are often difficult to simulate in a traditional classroom setting. This research suggests that podcasts could be an effective tool for improving listening skills in the context of Al Washliyah University. However, despite the promising potential of podcasts, challenges exist in integrating them effectively into the curriculum. Some students may face difficulties with internet access, or they might struggle with understanding fast speech or unfamiliar accents. Additionally, teachers may need to be trained on how to effectively incorporate podcasts into their lessons and assess student progress. These challenges underscore the importance of careful planning and support to ensure the successful integration of podcasts into the language learning process.

This study aims to develop a podcast-based listening material specifically designed for 5th-semester students at Al Washliyah University in Labuhanbatu. By focusing on authentic spoken content that reflects real-world situations and varying accents, the study intends to improve students' listening comprehension and offer them an engaging, flexible, and effective way to practice their listening skills outside the classroom. In doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the development of innovative, student-centered teaching materials that can enhance the language learning experience for university students in Indonesia. In conclusion, the development of listening materials through podcasts offers a promising solution to the challenges faced by 5th-semester students of Al Washliyah University in improving their listening skills. By providing authentic, accessible, and engaging audio content, podcasts can foster active learning, enhance motivation, and contribute to more effective listening practice. The findings of this study will help shape the future of listening instruction at the university and may offer valuable insights for other institutions seeking to integrate podcasts into their language teaching curriculum.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study on the development of listening materials through podcasts to improve listening skills among 5th-semester students of Al Washliyah University Labuhanbatu. The findings are discussed in terms of their impact on students' listening comprehension, engagement, and the overall effectiveness of podcasts as a learning tool.

1. Improvement in Listening Comprehension

The primary objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of podcasts in improving listening comprehension skills. Pre- and post-test scores were compared to evaluate student progress. Results showed a significant improvement in the students' listening comprehension abilities. The average score of students in the pre-test was 58%, while the post-test average increased to 82%. This 24% improvement indicates that students were better able to understand various accents, identify main ideas, and extract key details from spoken texts. This finding aligns with Vandergrift's (2007) study, which showed that exposure to authentic listening materials, such as podcasts, can enhance students' ability to process spoken language and improve comprehension. Similarly, Thornbury (2005) emphasized that real-world language exposure through spoken materials plays a critical role in developing language skills, as it reflects natural speech patterns, slang, and cultural nuances that are often absent in textbooks. In this study, podcasts provided students with the opportunity to practice listening to English as it is spoken in real-world contexts, which significantly contributed to their improvement in comprehension.

2. Increased Motivation and Engagement

Motivation and engagement were central to the study, as podcasts offer an engaging, flexible, and student-centered learning experience. Data collected from student surveys revealed that 87% of students reported feeling more motivated to practice their listening skills with podcasts compared to traditional classroom activities. Many students appreciated the flexibility that podcasts offered, allowing them to listen at their own pace and revisit difficult segments of the material. The ability to pause and replay audio helped students better understand fast speech or challenging accents, which they found particularly beneficial. The high level of engagement can be attributed to the diverse and interesting content available through podcasts. Topics ranged from academic discussions to current events and popular culture, which kept students engaged and allowed them to learn about subjects outside the classroom. This aligns with the findings of Macdonald (2007), who found that the diversity of content in podcasts can lead to increased motivation, as students have the opportunity to choose materials that align with their interests and academic needs. The findings also reflect Prensky's (2001) assertion that multimedia and technology-based materials can enhance students' engagement, especially for digital-native learners who are accustomed to interactive and on-demand content.

3. Improvement in Real-World Listening Skills

One of the significant advantages of using podcasts is the exposure to authentic spoken language. The podcasts included a variety of accents, speech rates, and colloquial language, which provided students with a more realistic listening experience than traditional classroom materials. The results showed that students improved their ability to understand different accents, such as British, American, and Australian English, and could better follow fast-paced conversations and informal language. This finding is consistent with Thornbury's (2005) argument that exposure to real-world language enhances students' ability to process spoken information. The use of podcasts helped students become familiar with different speaking styles and cultural contexts, which is critical for improving overall listening comprehension. Moreover, students reported feeling more confident when listening to native speakers in various contexts, as podcasts allowed them to practice listening in a non-threatening, low-stakes environment.

4. Development of Autonomous Learning Habits

The study also aimed to foster greater independence in language learning. Students were encouraged to listen to podcasts outside the classroom and reflect on the material. The flexibility of podcasts allowed students to practice at their own convenience, and 80% of students stated that they found themselves listening to English podcasts regularly outside of class to improve their skills. This self-directed learning is consistent with findings from Vandergrift (2007), who noted that podcasts offer students the opportunity to take control of their learning, setting their own pace and focus areas. It also promotes the development of autonomous learning habits, as students can choose topics that interest them, thus making the learning experience more personalized and meaningful. In line with Prensky (2001), this autonomy fosters a sense of ownership over learning, which is crucial for students in higher education who are expected to be more responsible for their academic progress.

5. Challenges in Implementation

While podcasts proved to be effective, some challenges emerged during the implementation phase. One challenge was related to internet access, as not all students had consistent access to stable internet connections, which limited their ability to listen to podcasts outside of class. Although the university provided resources, such as Wi-Fi and laptops, some students still faced difficulties in accessing podcasts regularly. Another challenge was related to students' initial struggles with fast speech and unfamiliar accents. While the ability to pause and replay podcasts was a valuable tool, some students initially found it challenging to understand certain accents or the pace of natural speech. To mitigate this, additional activities, such as guided listening exercises and discussions, were incorporated to help students become more accustomed to different speaking speeds and accents.

6. Teacher Feedback and Observations

Teachers reported positive feedback regarding the use of podcasts as listening materials. They noted that podcasts provided a unique opportunity for students to engage with authentic language outside the classroom and supported the development of critical listening skills. Teachers observed that students became more independent in their listening practices, and they appreciated the diversity of materials available through podcasts, which allowed for differentiation in teaching. Additionally, teachers found that podcasts allowed for more dynamic and interactive classroom activities. They could easily integrate podcasts into group discussions, debates, and other collaborative exercises that enhanced the overall learning experience.

The results of the study suggest that the development of listening materials through podcasts significantly improved the listening skills of 5th-semester students at Al Washliyah University. The use of authentic, flexible, and diverse content contributed to better comprehension, increased motivation, and the development of autonomous learning habits. Despite some challenges related to internet access and initial difficulties with fast speech, the benefits of podcasts as a tool for improving listening comprehension were evident.

3. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of developing listening materials through podcasts to improve listening skills among 5th-semester students at Al Washliyah University Labuhanbatu. The use of podcasts significantly enhanced students' listening comprehension, increasing their ability to understand a variety of accents, speech rates, and real-world language contexts. Additionally, podcasts boosted student motivation, engagement, and independent learning, as they offered flexibility and the opportunity for students to listen at their own pace. The findings align with previous research that suggests podcasts are a valuable tool for language learning, as they provide authentic, accessible, and diverse content. Although challenges such as internet access and initial difficulties with fast speech were encountered, the overall positive impact on student learning highlights the potential of podcasts as an effective educational resource. By offering students exposure to natural spoken English in varied contexts, podcasts can play a critical role in improving listening skills, fostering motivation, and supporting autonomous learning. Moving forward, it is recommended that the university continue to incorporate podcasts into the curriculum, addressing challenges related to access and further tailoring content to student needs.

4. REFERENCES

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