
EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PODCAST-BASED READING TASKS IN ENHANCING READING SKILLS

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Abstract- *This study explores students' perceptions of podcast-based reading tasks in enhancing reading skills among fourth-semester English Department students at a private university in Malang. Using a qualitative case study approach, twelve intermediate-level students participated in podcast-based reading activities, followed by semi-structured interviews. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in students' experiences. The findings reveal that students experienced improved reading comprehension when listening to podcasts before reading transcripts, particularly in initial text understanding, word recognition, attention to textual details, and active engagement with intentionally gapped transcripts. Despite minor challenges related to speech clarity, students reported increased reading confidence and expressed interest in continued use of this method. The integration of listening and reading through podcasts demonstrates potential for enhancing EFL students' reading development and engagement with English texts.*

Keywords: *Podcast-based tasks; Reading comprehension; EFL students; Student perceptions; Multimedia learning*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most important skills for students learning English as a foreign language (Ochildinovna, 2021). It helps them expand their vocabulary, understand new ideas, and make sense of how the language works in real contexts. At the university level, especially for students studying English, being able to read well is essential. They need to deal with academic texts, journal articles, and other materials that often require not just a basic understanding but also deeper analysis. However, many students still struggle with reading (Mansoor, 2022). They find it hard to stay focused,

understand complex sentences, or remember what they've read problems that can slow down their learning and affect their confidence. This situation is not unique, but it is especially noticeable in some private universities, including the one in Malang where this research took place.

Before the main research began, the researcher carried out informal observations during regular reading classes involving fourth-semester English Department students who later became the study participants. Throughout several sessions, it became clear that many students were not actively engaged. They tended to stay quiet during discussions and seemed to struggle with understanding the texts. In casual conversations, some students admitted they often just guessed the meaning of what they read, while others said they found the textbook-based activities repetitive and uninteresting.

To address this, the researcher began trying out podcasts as a different way to support reading. In these initial sessions, students listened to short podcast episodes that were related to the reading topics they were studying. After listening, they were given printed transcripts to follow along and discuss in class. While these early activities weren't formally recorded as research data, student reactions were noticeably more positive. Several mentioned that listening first made it easier to understand the text, and others said it made them more curious to explore the topic. These early impressions helped shape the direction of this research. The use of textbooks alone doesn't always help students connect with what they're reading, and that's where a different approach could make a real difference (Smith et al., 2021).

In today's digital age, there are so many tools that can help students learn in more interactive and enjoyable ways. One of those tools is the podcast audio programs that cover all kinds of topics, from storytelling to education (Nuraini, 2023). Podcasts are already widely used for improving listening skills, but recently, more teachers have started using them as part of reading lessons, too. The idea is simple: students listen to a short podcast, then read a transcript of it, and do tasks based on the content. This combination allows them to connect what they hear with what they read, making the whole process more engaging and meaningful (Dang et al., 2022).

Even though podcasts are becoming more popular in classrooms, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings (Chaves-Yuste & de-la Peña, 2023), there's still not much research on how they affect students' reading skills. Most studies so far

have focused on how podcasts help with listening or speaking, but not on how they can be used to improve reading. For example, Rabie (2023) investigated the effectiveness of podcasts in developing EFL secondary students' listening and speaking skills, as well as their motivation, and found significant improvements in both areas. Similarly, Syahabuddin and Rizqa (2021) conducted a study using podcasts to improve students' listening abilities, reporting positive effects on students' comprehension and engagement. However, very few researchers have explored how podcasts might support reading development or examined students' own perceptions of using podcasts in that way. In the Indonesian context, and more specifically in private universities, this is still a fairly new idea. That means there's a clear gap in the research and a real opportunity to explore something valuable

This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on how students perceive the use of podcasts in reading activities. The research involved a group of fourth-semester students from the English Department of a private university in Malang. They listened to selected short podcasts, read transcripts that include intentional gaps or small errors, and then took part in interviews to share their thoughts about the experience. This kind of study is important because understanding how students feel about a learning method can be just as useful as measuring how much they improve. If students enjoy the method and find it helpful, they're more likely to stay motivated and engaged (Chi, 2021)

Another reason why this study is timely is because of how much education has changed in recent years. The shift toward online and hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important it is to use digital tools effectively (García-Martín, Rico, & García-Martín, 2023). Even now, with face-to-face learning back in place, students are more open to using technology to support their studies. Podcasts are easy to access, low-cost, and available in a wide range of topics and difficulty levels, making them a great option for teachers who want to diversify their reading materials. Although podcasts are increasingly used in language classrooms, there is still limited research focusing on their role in enhancing reading skills. Most studies highlight their value in listening or speaking development, while their use in reading tasks remains underexplored. Furthermore, student perceptions, an essential factor in the success of any teaching method are often overlooked when evaluating the effectiveness of podcast-based learning (Sotlikova & Haerazi, 2023).

From these observations, two problems can be identified: there is a lack of research that specifically examines how podcast-based tasks are used to support EFL students' reading comprehension, and students' perceptions and experiences of using podcasts as part of reading tasks have not been widely studied, especially in the context of private universities in Indonesia. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of using podcasts in reading tasks and how these tasks may support their reading development. The goal is to better understand the potential of podcasts as a learning tool and to provide insights that could help improve reading instruction in EFL classrooms, particularly in private universities.

METHODS

Research design

This study uses a qualitative research approach, specifically a case study design, to explore how students perceive the use of podcasts in reading tasks (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative method is suitable for this research because it allows the researcher to dig deeper into students' personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Since the focus is not just on the results of using podcasts, but on how students experience and respond to them, a case study is the most appropriate design. The research was conducted at a private university in Malang, Indonesia. The participants were twelve fourth-semester students from the English Department who have taken reading-related courses and are familiar with basic reading strategies.

Data Collection

The main instrument for data collection in this study was a semi-structured interview (Dolczewski, 2022). The interview included six questions designed to allow students to express their honest opinions and experiences about the podcast-based reading tasks. Semi-structured interviews were used to guide the conversation while also giving space for participants to share freely and add detail.

The interview questions covered areas such as students' feelings about using podcasts in reading tasks, whether listening before reading helped their understanding, their experience reading the transcript after listening, how the method affected their comprehension, the most helpful parts of the task, and their interest in using this method

again in the future. The materials used in this study included three short podcast episodes, each lasting between 5 to 10 minutes. These podcasts were selected based on student proficiency level and relevance to reading topics covered in class. After listening to each podcast, students received a transcript of the audio. The transcript included intentional gaps or errors (such as missing words or incorrect grammar) to make the reading task more interactive and focused.

Data analysis

The research was carried out in several steps. First, task implementation: students first listened to each podcast, followed by completing reading tasks using the transcripts. Second, interview: each student then took part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher to discuss their thoughts, feelings, and feedback about the tasks. All interview responses were recorded with student consent, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. This means the researcher looked for patterns or themes that appeared in the students' answers. Common themes included comments about improved comprehension, increased interest, or challenges faced during the task.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1. Participants' Profiles

No	Participant Code	Reading Level
	P1	Intermediate
	P2	Intermediate
	P3	Intermediate
	P4	Intermediate
	P5	Intermediate
	P6	Intermediate

Before discussing the thematic results, it is important to briefly describe the nature of the podcast-based reading tasks assigned to the students. Each participant completed a series of structured activities involving three selected podcast episodes. For each episode, students first listened to the audio without the transcript to gain initial exposure to the content. Next, they were given a printed transcript that included intentional gaps (missing words or slight grammar errors). Their task was to read the transcript carefully, correct or complete the gaps based on what they remembered from

the audio, and reflect on the meaning of the text. This activity was designed not only to improve reading accuracy and vocabulary awareness, but also to enhance deeper comprehension by linking listening and reading processes.

This assignment was included in the research to explore how podcast-based reading tasks could engage students differently than traditional textbook-only reading. The use of both audio and interactive transcripts aligns well with the nature of case study research, which emphasizes in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences. By focusing on students' perceptions of the task, what helped them, what challenged them, and how they responded, the study gains rich qualitative insights suitable for a case study design. The following sections present the themes that emerged from the interview data.

1. Listening Helped with the Initial Understanding of the Text

Several students said that listening to the podcast before reading the transcript helped them get the general idea of the topic. This made the reading part feel easier because they were already familiar with what the passage was about.

"After I listened, I already knew the story, so when I read, I didn't feel confused," said Participant 3.

The audio gave students a kind of preview. It helped them form expectations and made the reading less difficult, especially when the topic was unfamiliar. They didn't need to guess as much because they had already heard the main points.

"It's like I understand the topic first, then the reading becomes clearer," said Participant 6

This suggests that listening can act as a support tool, especially for students who struggle to get the main idea from reading alone.

2. Connecting Spoken and Written Words Helped with Word Recognition

Another common point was that students found it useful to hear the words first and then see them in written form. This seemed to help them notice how certain words are used and spelled.

"When I heard the word and then saw it written, I understood it better. I could remember it more," said Participant 2.

For students who sometimes guess the meaning of words, this process helped them make more accurate connections between pronunciation and written vocabulary. It also made it easier to recognize keywords when reading the text.

"Some words I only know how to say, but not how to spell. This task showed me both," added Participant 1.

This shows that the method supports word-level reading skills, especially in terms of recognizing and remembering new vocabulary.

3. More Focus on Details When Reading the Transcript

When asked about reading the transcript after listening, most students said they paid more attention to the smaller details. This included checking grammar, finding specific information, and noticing sentence patterns.

"I read more carefully because I wanted to see if I missed anything when I listened," explained Participant 4.

Students said that reading felt more focused because they were checking what they had heard earlier. This helped them concentrate on things like the structure of sentences or the use of certain words.

"I saw how the speaker used the words in full sentences, and it helped me understand how to use them," said Participant 5.

This kind of close reading encouraged more attention to form and meaning, which could help develop deeper reading skills over time.

4. Reading with Gaps or Errors Made Students Read More Actively

The transcripts used in the tasks had small gaps or errors. Students were asked to correct or complete them based on what they heard. Most participants said this made them read more actively.

"I didn't just read. I had to find what's missing, so I focused more," said Participant 6.

This task required students to compare the audio with the text, which made them think about what they were reading, not just go through it quickly. It also encouraged them to notice grammar and word forms.

"It made me check the sentences carefully. I tried to remember what I heard and match it," added Participant 2.

Although some students found this part a bit difficult at first, they said it helped them stay alert and think more about the text content and structure.

5. Challenges Faced During Reading Tasks

Some students mentioned small difficulties, especially at the beginning. These included not catching every word in the podcast or feeling unsure about some of the errors in the transcript.

"Sometimes I didn't hear the word clearly, so I couldn't fill the gap in the transcript," said Participant 3.

However, students also said that after doing the task more than once, they became more confident and were able to complete the reading part with better focus.

"I had to listen again a few times, but after that, I read with more understanding," said Participant 1.

This shows that while the reading tasks weren't always easy, students adjusted and saw improvement over time.

6. Interest in Continuing the Method

Despite the initial difficulties, nearly all students expressed a strong interest in continuing to use podcast-based reading tasks in the future. They appreciated the interactive nature of the method and felt more motivated during reading activities. "I think it's better than just using the textbook. I want to use this again," said Participant 5. Students noted that the flexibility to listen more than once, pause, or go back made them feel more in control of their learning. "It helped me understand more because I can listen at my own speed," added Participant 4. This positive attitude indicates that the podcast-based approach not only supported their comprehension but also increased their engagement and willingness to participate in reading tasks.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that integrating podcasts into reading tasks offers several practical benefits for EFL students, especially those who struggle with traditional reading materials (Oslawski-Lopez & Kordsmeier, 2021). Based on student feedback, one of the clearest advantages of podcast-based reading tasks is that the audio

provides a helpful foundation for understanding the text. Listening before reading gave students a sense of the main idea, which made it easier for them to approach the transcript with more confidence.

This is particularly useful for students who often feel lost or unsure when reading on their own. Many students reported that reading the transcript after listening helped them focus more on the details. This suggests that they were not just reading passively they were checking, comparing, and confirming information. This kind of process supports more careful and meaningful reading. Rather than rushing through the text, students were more aware of word choices, sentence structure, and grammar. Some even mentioned noticing how ideas were organized, which shows that the method helped them see beyond just vocabulary (Lee & Jung, 2024)

The combination of listening and reading also seems to support word recognition. Several participants said they were able to understand and remember new words better because they both heard them and read them. For learners who often rely on guessing the meaning of words in context, this can be a valuable strategy. It gives them an extra layer of input that reinforces learning and helps improve both their spoken and written vocabulary. This finding aligns with Mayer's (2020) multimedia learning theory, which emphasizes that combining verbal (audio) and visual (text) input enhances learners' ability to process and retain information.

Another useful part of the tasks was the inclusion of small gaps or mistakes in the transcripts. While this made the task slightly more challenging, students said it helped them stay alert and encouraged them to think more critically. Instead of just reading for general understanding, they had to actively compare what they heard with what they read (Chen, 2021). This kind of task pushes students to pay close attention to grammar, word forms, and meaning. For students who are used to surface-level reading, this method can help train deeper comprehension skills.

Although some students faced challenges such as unclear pronunciation or fast speech in the podcasts, these difficulties were not long-term. Students adapted quickly and were able to complete the tasks more smoothly after a few sessions. This shows that with the right level of support and practice, podcast based reading tasks can be used successfully even with learners who aren't very confident readers (RodríguezCastro & Serrano, 2023). Most importantly, students said they would like to continue using this

method. While enjoyment is not the main goal of reading instruction, feeling comfortable and interested in the task can lead to better engagement, which often leads to better outcomes. Students who feel more in control of their learning tend to try harder and make more progress. The flexibility of podcasts being able to listen more than once, pause, and go back also gives students space to work at their own pace (Carmi, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' perceptions of using podcast-based tasks to support their reading skills in an EFL classroom. The results showed that students generally responded positively to the method. Listening to a podcast before reading the transcript helped them understand the general idea of the text, which made the reading process less overwhelming. This approach also allowed them to focus more on the details during reading, such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

One important finding was that students were able to make stronger connections between spoken and written language. Hearing the audio first gave them a better sense of pronunciation and meaning, which helped with word recognition and vocabulary retention. The tasks that included gaps or small errors in the transcript also encouraged more active reading. Rather than reading passively, students had to compare what they heard with what they read, promoting closer attention and critical thinking. Although some students experienced minor challenges, such as fast speech or unfamiliar words, these difficulties decreased with practice. Overall, students felt that the podcast-based tasks supported their reading development and expressed interest in continuing with this method in future classes.

In conclusion, using podcasts as part of reading instruction can help EFL students improve both their comprehension and engagement. More importantly, this approach supports the development of essential reading skills such as identifying main ideas, recognizing vocabulary, analyzing sentence structure, and reading for specific details. While this method should not replace all traditional reading tasks, it can be a valuable addition, especially for students who benefit from hearing language in context before interacting with the written text. The findings highlight the value of combining audio and reading to promote more focused, active, and meaningful reading experiences.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be offered for EFL teachers interested in implementing podcast-based reading tasks. First, teachers should carefully select podcasts that match students' proficiency levels to ensure that the content is accessible yet challenging. Second, providing multiple opportunities to listen to the podcast before reading may help students who struggle with speech clarity or speed. Third, gradually increasing the difficulty of transcript gap-filling activities can help build students' confidence and skills over time. For future research, it would be valuable to investigate the long-term effects of podcast-based reading tasks on students' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language proficiency. Additionally, exploring how this method works with different proficiency levels and in various educational settings could provide further insights into its versatility and effectiveness.

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