

Examining students' perceptions of Podcasts as authentic materials for self-access listening practice

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ABSTRACT

The development of listening skills has long been a topic of interest in the field of language teaching and learning. In recent years, there has been a growing trend in utilizing Podcasts as a means of language acquisition, particularly for enhancing listening skills. This approach has gained significant popularity due to the various advantages it offers. However, there is a considerable lack of related research in the context of Vietnam, particularly in university-level academic listening classes. This study addresses this gap by investigating the perceptions of 118 intermediate English linguistics students at International University, Vietnam National University HCMC, regarding the use of Podcasts to enhance their listening skills beyond the classrooms. Data collection was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, which involved the use of an online survey questionnaire as well as interviews conducted through the Zoom application. A total of 118 intermediate English linguistics students were involved in the survey questionnaire, whereas the interviews were conducted with a smaller sample size of eight students. Results showed positive perceptions regarding the usefulness of Podcasts in post-classroom listening practice. The participants reported that Podcasts were valuable for improving their ability to understand spoken language, providing an enjoyable and entertaining experience, and offering flexibility beyond traditional classroom settings. This study indicates the potential of Podcasts as effective tools for improving English listening skills and, therefore, highlights the need for teachers to consider integrating Podcasts as a resource for teaching and learning listening skills beyond the classroom.

Keywords: English linguistics students' perceptions; listening skills; mixed methods; Podcasts

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INTRODUCTION

Until the present, language has been considered a universal medium of communication that everyone uses in their daily lives. In other words, people establish clear communication in which they express their thoughts through language as a crucial tool (Nishanthi, 2018). Therefore, to achieve the purpose of either effective use of language or language development, four macro skills (reading, listening,

writing, and speaking) were suggested to be targeted and mastered (Khamkhien, 2010). Among these skills, listening is often considered one of the most challenging to acquire (Alzamil, 2021). This challenge is particularly pronounced in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where listening skills are frequently overshadowed by the emphasis placed on grammar, reading, and vocabulary (Hamouda, 2013). Consequently, EFL students often grapple with listening comprehension, as it has historically received insufficient consideration from teachers and textbook authors (Hamouda, 2013).

This discrepancy is particularly evident in the Vietnamese education system, where students at high schools are primarily focused on exam preparation and tend to prioritize reading, vocabulary, and grammar over communicative skills like listening and speaking (Bui & Duong, 2018). This imbalance is compounded by textbooks, integral to the curriculum, which frequently neglect the development of listening skills, thereby contributing to a notable educational gap (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Nguyen, 2020). Consequently, students encounter limited opportunities for meaningful and authentic listening practice, potentially fostering listening anxiety in the classroom (Le & Le, 2022). To address these issues, various strategies have been proposed to enhance students' listening skills beyond traditional classroom settings. Holmes (2019) suggested that exposure to authentic educational materials or standard ESL coursebooks could be an appropriate way to broaden the learners' range of vocabulary and hone their listening skills. Authentic media, including Podcasts, have been acknowledged as authentic, influential, and dynamic tools that significantly assist the process of learning listening skills (Hasan & Hoon, 2013). Building on this, Yoestara and Putri (2019) highlighted the flexibility of Podcasts, aiding information retention despite technical challenges and time constraints. Furthermore, Podcasts have been recognized for its ability to address educational discrepancies by fostering increased student motivation and engagement in the learning process (Siregar & Manurung, 2020). This effectiveness was confirmed by Rachmaniputri et al. (2021), who found that Podcasts improved students' interest, motivation, and self-perceived efficacy in listening class. Hoan and Nguyen (2021) studied the impact of using Podcasts for English listening comprehension among English-major students at FPT university. Their quasi-experimental design, including pre-tests, post-tests, score analysis, and a questionnaire, indicated a considerable increase in interest and a strong desire to use Podcasts among the experimental group.

Although the application of Podcasts in learning listening has been proposed and discussed in various studies worldwide with positive results and conclusions, there is a notable lack of research in the context of Vietnam. The concern arises from the uncertainty surrounding Vietnamese perceptions of applying Podcasts beyond the traditional classroom setting. Hence, to fill this gap, this study examined the English linguistics students' perceptions towards the use of Podcasts in learning English listening skills. This gap is especially significant given the rising popularity and rapid development of Podcasts in the country, coupled with a noteworthy percentage of university students expressing interest in this medium, as indicated by Ward (2019). The research was expected to make a valuable contribution to the domain of students' awareness of the acceptance of using Podcasts in practicing listening and raise a concern for teachers to consider choosing this tool to integrate Podcasts as a resource for teaching and learning listening skills beyond the classroom. The research question is stated as follows:

How do the students perceive the use of Podcasts as authentic learning materials for practicing listening beyond the classroom?

METHOD

Research design

In this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed. As stated by Creswell and Clark (2018), mixed-methods design involves the collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data within a single research study. The first stage of the study employed quantitative techniques to achieve the aim of capturing the numerical data of students' preferences on the implementation of Podcasts in practicing listening. Specifically, an online-based survey was conducted

delivering through Google Forms. This quantitative approach, as emphasized by [Nardi \(2018\)](#), is particularly suited for quantifying the extent of engagement in specific behaviors and systematically evaluating social phenomena. It allows for a structured and numerical assessment of students' attitudes and preferences. However, as quantitative research concerned variables as numbers, which was considered not enough to publish justified understanding ([Aspers & Corte, 2019](#)), the second stage of the study addressed research issues qualitatively using a semi-structured interview to enable an in-depth exploration of the students' perceptions regarding the use of Podcasts in learning listening after class. As highlighted by [Gray et al. \(2020\)](#), in-person interviews provide a unique opportunity to simulate real-world interactions, fostering a positive rapport between interviewers and participants while allowing for the observation of nonverbal cues and contextual settings. This qualitative stage was crucial for gaining insights into phenomena that could not be directly observed, such as perceptions and thoughts.

Participants

The study participants included 118 students at International University - Vietnam National University HCM City who agreed to participate in the research, having experience using Podcasts to study listening and completing Intensive English (IE) courses with the final test score equivalent to at least 5.5 or achieving IELTS 5.5 or more. This helped the researcher(s) ensure that participants had a satisfactory level of English proficiency, particularly in the context of listening beyond the classroom, allowing them to navigate the intricate materials commonly found in Podcasts. Such materials typically present fewer vocabulary challenges than materials designed for learners at lower proficiency levels. Additionally, English linguistics students were targeted due to their heightened motivation to engage with English regularly compared to students in other disciplines. Following the survey phase, eight volunteer students were invited to participate in interviews using purposive sampling to provide deeper insights into the research questions ([Campbell et al., 2020](#)). This method allowed the researchers to intentionally choose participants who actively engaged in listening beyond the classroom, ensuring they could provide deeper insights into the research questions. In consideration of the study's context, participants were invited based on their expressed willingness to partake in interviews. To ensure a diverse range of perspectives, respondents presenting dissimilar viewpoints compared to the majority in the survey were also contacted. This approach aimed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse viewpoints within the participant pool, enriching the qualitative data obtained during the interview phase of the study.

Data collection techniques

The questionnaire

The data collection instrument used in this study was a Likert-scale questionnaire to evaluate the students' perceptions toward the use of Podcasts for practicing listening, as it was considered to be uncomplicated to construct and prone to generate a scale of high reliability ([Taherdoost, 2019](#)). Additionally, as stated by [Taherdoost \(2019\)](#), it was straightforward to comprehend and complete from the participants' standpoint.

In terms of questionnaire content, the statements were adopted and categorized from the revised framework of the Technology Acceptance Model ([Davis, 1989](#)) and modified based on a study by [Maziriri et al. \(2020\)](#) with the aim to investigate the students' perceptions towards Podcasts as a learning aid outside of the classrooms. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: Perceived Usefulness (PU), Perceived Ease Of Use (PEOU), and Behavioral Intention To Use (BITU) Podcasts in learning listening. The consent form, the type of classes, and the experience of using Podcasts to listen to English passages were also embedded in the first part of the questionnaire to filter the relevant participants for the study. Regarding the medium, this survey was administered using Google Forms, a user-friendly and cost-effective option for researchers due to its ease of setup and customization ([Colney, 2023; Haddad & Kalaani, 2014](#)).

Prior to conducting the final questionnaire, a pilot survey was conducted to evaluate the validity and reliability of the instrument (Wadood et al., 2021). The prototype questionnaire was distributed to a group of 35 students who met the requirement to be the participants but agreed to participate in the pilot study one week prior to the final version to allow for necessary adjustments. To ensure validity and reliability, Cronbach's alpha was employed, with a calculated value of 0.98 considered both acceptable and reliable for the pilot survey based on Taber's criteria (2018). However, according to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018), individuals may refrain from endorsing the extreme options of 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Strongly Agree', opting instead for intermediate responses such as 'Agree' and 'Disagree'. This tendency has the potential to obscure the genuine intensity of participants' perceptions and behaviors (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Hence, follow-up interviews were chosen as an additional data collection method. This approach allows participants to offer more detailed explanations of their responses and address any potential areas of ambiguity.

The interview

In addition to the questionnaire, interviews were employed to gather insights into participants' perceptions of using Podcasts and to assess the effectiveness of Podcasts in post-class listening practice. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, employed to choose respondents who were most likely to provide pertinent and valuable information (Campbell et al., 2020). Specifically, individuals willing to participate in the interviews were invited, and those with differing viewpoints from the majority of survey participants were also contacted to gain deeper insights into minority perspectives.

The interviews consisted of 5 items adopted from McNamara and Haegele (2021) who conducted a study to examine the use of Podcasts in the classroom and Yeh (2013) who examined the use of Podcasts as a tool for extensive listening in an English-language learning context. The interviews were conducted via Zoom application due to its user-friendly interface, economical nature, data management features, and secure policies (Archibald et al., 2019). Furthermore, this application also provided automated transcript features facilitating the data analysis process (Gray et al., 2020).

Data analysis

The information gathered from the Likert-scale questions was transformed into numerical data and tables using Google Forms. After the online survey was completed, the results were automatically documented in a Google Spreadsheet using the direct link provided by Google Forms through the 'responses' tab (Wiemken et al., 2018). Following data collection, the data were subjected to statistical analysis. However, compared to Google Sheets, Microsoft Excel was mentioned to be more robust by being able to handle more cells and data (Rebman et al., 2022). Therefore, Microsoft Excel was used to convert the raw counts obtained from the Likert scale questionnaire into proportions to determine the proportion of English linguistics students at IU who indicated varying levels of agreement or disagreement with the survey items.

Regarding the interview, the Zoom recordings were transcribed by one of Zoom's features that generated automated transcripts from the audio (Gray et al., 2020). The transcripts were saved as separate video text track files in the recorded meetings list and remained editable using the text editor application. These transcripts were double-checked by the researchers and imported into Microsoft Excel to facilitate labeling and categorization with different colors (Bree & Gallagher, 2016). In particular, each interviewee was assigned a unique identity, ranging from S1 to S8 (Smith, 2015), and a corresponding color code was assigned to their responses within the appropriate columns for analysis in themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results aimed at addressing the predetermined research question concerning students' perceptions of using Podcasts to improve their listening skills outside the classroom. The analysis is based on the questionnaire and follow-up interview data. Furthermore, given that the survey

items and interview questions were developed on the theoretical foundations of three core categories—Perceived Usefulness (PU), Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), and Behavioral Intention to Use (BITU)—this section is also divided into three parts, each dedicated to discussing the results from one of these categories.

Perceived Usefulness (PU)

Table 1

The percentage of students' perception toward the PU of Podcasts

Statements	Likert Scales (n (%))				
	(1: Strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Using Podcasts outside the classroom helped me to improve my listening skills.	0	0	13 (11%)	53 (44.9%)	52 (44.1%)
2. Using Podcasts outside the classroom enriched my vocabulary.	0	1 (0.8%)	16 (13.6%)	53 (44.9%)	48 (40.7%)
3. Podcasts offered many accents of people in the world to practice listening.	0	0	7 (5.9%)	46 (39%)	65 (55.1%)
4. Podcasts offered a variety of topics to listen to.	0	0	16 (13.6%)	42 (35.6%)	60 (50.8%)
5. Podcasts offered authentic materials for English listening.	0	3 (2.5%)	22 (18.6%)	55 (46.6%)	38 (32.2%)
6. Podcasts made learning listening skills become interesting.	0	5 (4.2%)	25 (21.2%)	45 (38.1%)	43 (36.4%)

Regarding PU of Podcasts as sources for practicing listening in more depth, results from [Table 1](#) highlighted positive perceptions of the participants, with 89% acknowledging the potential positive impact of Podcasts on their listening skills. As can be seen from [Table 1](#), 85.6% of the respondents believed that exposure to Podcasts outside the classroom expanded their vocabulary range. This belief stemmed from the exposure to “*new words and phrases that you may not have heard before*” (S5, S8), “*new discussions*” (S4), and “*information in a contextualized and conversational manner*” (S6). The perceived efficiency in enhancing vocabulary correlated with the study by [Saragih et al. \(2022\)](#), which showed significant improvements in students' listening comprehension in terms of vocabulary and critical thinking skills.

Additionally, 94.1% of students found Podcasts beneficial in providing exposure to various accents. This result was supported by S6, who stated that as Podcasts were produced by native or fluent speakers, they can help learners develop their comprehension of natural speech patterns, intonation, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage. Similarly, S8 highlighted that Podcasts introduce learners to a wide range of accents and dialects, enhancing their ability to comprehend various speakers and diverse content types. Besides the exposure to different vocabulary, different accents, or different genres of speech, the variety of topics elicited a remarkable level of agreement of 86.4% of students, according to the questionnaire results (see [Table 1](#)). S6's explanation for this finding was that “*Podcasts cover a broad range of topics*” and “*there are many different Podcasts available on a variety of topics*” (S1, S3, S7 and S8). As a result, it is quite “convenient” for students to choose the relevant content for the listening

practice (S1, S3 & S4) or to widen their knowledge about the fields they like (S6, S7 & S8). In particular, 78.8% of students agreed that Podcasts offered authentic materials to assist them during the listening process (see Table 1). S6 explained that learners using Podcasts were provided with “real-life examples”, “scenarios”, “real-life stories, interviews with professionals, or discussions on current events”, and “exposure to authentic language use”. S6 clarified that “this authenticity can provide learners with practical insights and perspectives from experts in their respective fields”. According to S1, S3, S6 and S7, diverse perspectives provided by Podcasts could also practically enhance an individual’s logical and critical thinking skills.

Additionally, S7 mentioned, “This is because you are often presented with different perspectives on a topic, which can help you to form your own opinions”. S1 also believed that the diverse range of perspectives and ideas could broaden students’ knowledge and understanding of different topics and issues. This finding was in line with the study by Ahmed (2016), which revealed that Podcasts demonstrated the potential to provide students with access to a wide range of knowledge and perspectives, involve them in active learning, and facilitate their critical thinking skills. In addition, Podcasts were also believed to create an interesting atmosphere for learning by 75.6% of students (see Table 1). S1 stated the reason for this finding was that it was “fun and engaging” to process information using Podcasts. Therefore, S1 claimed that students could stay “engaged and motivated, which can help enhance retention and recall”. S2, S4 and S5 also supported that as they could access different kinds of content, choose the listening that attracted them, and feel satisfied with the knowledge they achieved. However, from the questionnaire results, a small minority of participants (4.2%) disagreed with the idea that interesting content was applicable (see Table 1). When asked about their dissatisfaction, S7 mentioned that the Podcasts they had listened to lacked a sense of humor. Overall, Podcasts were viewed favorably as a valuable resource for enhancing listening skills, given their diverse content, exposure to various dialects, multiple perspectives, and authentic materials. These results were consistent with those of Ahmed (2016) and Saragih et al. (2022), which corroborated the practicality of Podcasts in assisting users’ listening skills.

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)

Table 2
The percentage of students’ perception toward the PEOU

Statements	Likert Scales (n (%)) (1: Strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree)				
	1	2	3	4	5
7. It is easy to access Podcasts.	0	1 (0.8%)	10 (8.5%)	31 (26.3%)	76 (64.4%)
8. It is difficult to access Podcasts on different devices.	29 (24.6%)	50 (42.4%)	20 (16.9%)	16 (13.6%)	3 (2.5%)
9. It is easy to find materials to learn listening in Podcasts.	1 (0.8%)	7 (5.9%)	26 (22%)	51 (43.2%)	33 (28%)
10. It is difficult to study what I want from Podcasts.	21 (17.8%)	47 (39.8%)	36 (30.5%)	13 (11%)	1 (0.8%)
11. It is easy to listen to Podcasts as many times as I want.	0	0	11 (9.3%)	40 (33.9%)	67 (56.8%)

In terms of the PEOU, the data in Table 2 revealed a strong approval rate of 90.7% among students regarding the ease of accessing Podcasts. Specifically, over 67% of survey respondents agreed that they could access Podcasts on various devices. When asked about the ease of use, S1, S2, S4, S5, S6, and S8 shared that Podcasts are accessible. S1 pointed out that Podcasts could be listened to by

students at “*their own time and pace*”, “*from anywhere.*”, “*with both smartphones or iPads*” and “*at any time of the day*”. Others also shared the same ideas as using similar phrases to describe Podcasts, namely “*movable*” (S2), “*downloadable*”, “*at any point they have a spare moment*” (S4), “*at any time and in any place*” (S5), and “*anytime, anywhere*” (S6 and S8). S5 uttered that “*Podcasts can be accessed on a variety of devices, including smartphones, tablets, and computers*”, and “*I can listen to Podcasts on my phone, computer, or tablet*” (S8).

Nevertheless, a relatively small percentage of participants (16.1%) encountered difficulties accessing Podcasts on multiple devices. This was explained by S4 that there were different platforms to access Podcasts, and each platform, such as “*Apple Podcasts, YouTube, Spotify, and Google Podcasts*”, has “*its own way of organizing and displaying Podcasts*” as well as its own requirements for the operating system. As an example, “*Apple Podcasts app was only available for Apple devices*”, which made it challenging to use on other devices (S3). S7 also shared that in case learners who owned old-model smartphones might experience lagging when listening. In terms of ease in content searching, a high rate of respondents (71.2%) agreed that it was easy to find materials to learn listening using Podcasts (see Table 2). S4 illustrated this ease with the term “*endless sources*”.

Regarding the ease of studying what learners want from Podcasts, there appeared to be contrasting ideas; while 57.8% of respondents approved of this kind of ease, 11.8% of respondents indicated some challenges in studying what they wanted from Podcasts (see Table 2). S1, S2, and S3 shared a similar viewpoint, suggesting that with patience and knowledge of search techniques, learners could quickly find relevant content. S6 mentioned that it took time during initial searches, but with familiarity, the process became straightforward. In contrast, S4 noted that despite users' ability to choose Podcasts relevant to their interests, the sheer volume of topics could be “*overwhelming and difficult to follow.*” He provided an example of current events as there were so many different news outlets. S5 also mentioned that studying what they wanted from Podcasts was challenging due to the lengthy and complex nature of some Podcasts.

Similarly, S7 explained that even though there is a variety of listening, not all of them fit lessons they want to practice both for the particular content and the required time for the listening practice. Lastly, a significant 90.7% of students mentioned that it is easy to replay Podcasts as many times as they want. This allowed less-advanced students to gain exposure to new vocabulary, pronunciation, and accents, enhancing their listening skills (S3 & S5). In summary, the ease of use of Podcasts in practising listening received significant support from most respondents, aligning with findings in studies by Abdulrahman et al. (2018), Harahap (2020), and Rachmaniputri et al. (2021), which also reported positive attitudes toward the accessibility of Podcasts for learning listening skills. The difficulties reported when using Podcasts were also in line with the study by Hamouda (2013) as he revealed the difficulties in following the conversations and lack of concentration were challenging for students.

Behavioural Intention to Use (BITU)

Table 3
The percentage of students' perception toward the BITU

Statements	Likert Scales (n (%))				
	(1: Strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree)				
	1	2	3	4	5
12. I will use Podcasts as a source to practice listening outside classrooms.	0	0	5 (4.2%)	61 (51.7%)	52 (44.1%)
13. I will recommend my friends use Podcasts to practice listening outside the classroom.	0	1 (0.8%)	15 (12.7%)	50 (42.4%)	52 (44.1%)

Concerning BITU, the data presented in [Table 3](#) clearly demonstrates the widespread belief among respondents (95.8%) in the utility of Podcasts as a valuable resource for students to enhance their listening skills outside the classroom. To illustrate this, S1 expressed the opinion that Podcasts could be *“a great complement to traditional educational methods”* as it is easy to assess, cost-effective and convenient. Similarly, S5, S7 and S8 described Podcasts as a *“great tool to support their study”* if they are used correctly for educational purposes, not just for entertainment. This was further reinforced by the fact that 86.4% of respondents expressed their willingness to recommend Podcasts to others looking to improve their listening skills (see [Table 3](#)). S1, S4, S5, S6, and S8 completely supported this idea when affirming that they would recommend Podcasts to people who want to improve their listening skills for both daily life English and academic English.

Similarly, S2 also stated that *“it may be worth recommending to others who are looking to improve their listening as it includes not only authentic English but also English in formal context”*. S3 also explained that with the development of technology and better living conditions, almost all of her friends have smartphones, iPads and laptops, so *“why don’t we introduce this comfort to them to help them have more authentic listening practice beyond the classroom environment?”* Despite the high percentage of respondents who expressed their approval, the questionnaire still reported a significant number of individuals who felt uncertain about making recommendations, as they would need to consider other factors (12.7%). For instance, S2 explained that their choices would depend on the individual's *“level of proficiency,”* and S3 shared a similar viewpoint, stating, *“I would only introduce it to high school students who have a strong English foundation or university students”* as they have more motivation to practice listening skills outside the classroom. There appeared a particular case mentioning that students might not want to persuade others to listen to Podcasts unless there was a clear interest: *“I want them to make their own decision about whether or not it is a good fit for them. I believe that everyone learns differently, and what works for one person may not work for another”* (S7). In general, the findings indicated that the majority of respondents are inclined to utilize Podcasts for listening practice purposes, aligning with the results of [Gonulal \(2020\)](#), which also revealed a significant majority of students expressing their intention to utilize Podcasts after experiencing this medium.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study effectively addresses the research question: “How do the students perceive the use of Podcasts as authentic learning materials for practicing listening beyond the classroom?” The findings reveal a distinctly positive perception among intermediate-level English linguistics majors at IU regarding the application of Podcasts for extracurricular listening practice. Participants consistently expressed favorable views, citing the diverse and authentic content of Podcasts as a valuable resource for enhancing listening skills. The accessibility, convenience, and engaging nature of Podcasts emerged as key factors contributing to their positive perceptions. Moreover, participants recognized the practical utility of Podcasts, emphasizing their effectiveness in improving real-world listening abilities. The research not only answers the central research question but also provides a detailed understanding of the specific elements that contribute to the perceived effectiveness of Podcasts in language learning. This insight offers valuable considerations for educators looking to integrate Podcasts as authentic learning materials, emphasizing content diversity, accessibility, and engagement to optimize language instruction beyond the classroom. The positive perceptions uncovered in this study underscore the potential of Podcasts as an impactful tool for students seeking to enhance their listening skills in authentic, real-world contexts. Acknowledging limitations, the study's small sample size of 118 English linguistics students at IU calls for caution in generalizing findings. Variability in opinions among students from different majors necessitates broader participant representation. Further research should involve a more extensive and more diverse population, extending beyond a single institution to enhance the study's applicability. Future experimental studies can scrutinize the effectiveness of podcast applications in post-class listening practice, offering a comprehensive understanding of its impact.

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