

Students' Perceptions Towards the Use of Podcasts in Listening Class

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ABSTRACT

The development of technology is believed to accommodate teachers in creating new environment in learning English. Podcasts are considered to provide an authentic learning material in teaching English, especially for teaching listening. This study is aimed to investigate students' perception towards the use of podcasts in classroom and reveal students' challenges in listening to podcasts in classroom. Involving 25 students in one public senior high school in Bandung, this study employed qualitative approach with case study design. The data were gathered through questionnaires, interview, and classroom observation. The result of this study indicates that students' perceptions towards the use of podcasts in classroom are generally positive. The implementation of podcasts is believed to be beneficial to students' interest, motivation, and self-perceived performance in listening. Since the content of podcasts are adjusted to the materials learned in classroom, podcasts are believed to generate students' motivation in learning English. Even though podcasts are positively perceived by students, several challenges regarding to listening activity in classroom are also found. The challenges are related to materials, information processing, students' English proficiency, and medium. Due to constraint above, this study suggests that the implementation of podcasts in classroom need support especially from teachers and institutions.

Keywords: *Listening, podcasts, students' perceptions, students' challenges*

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is a process of understanding the spoken language, including recognizing the sound of speech and understanding the meaning of speakers' words (Ahmadi, 2016). It is an active process of constructing meaning from existing knowledge and contextual information. This skill is needed since it is one of the ways for people to receive information from some resources and establish communication with other people. Besides, listening enables students to be more aware of language and its utterance (Asemota, 2015). It enables language learners to encounter and interact with input of language and promote the emergence of other language skills (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). As a result, listening becomes part of curriculum in some educational institutions in EFL country such as Indonesia (Cahyono & Widiati, 2009).

However, even though listening has become part of curriculum in EFL country, this skill is still viewed as 'passive' skills to acknowledge and the materials for teaching listening seem to be neglected in language teaching (Cahyono & Widiati, 2009; Renandya &

Widodo, 2016). In Indonesia, some English teachers still use Bahasa Indonesia as a language instruction in classroom (Abdulrahman, Basalamah, & Widodo, 2018). Besides, the authentic resources are rarely used by English teachers in teaching English. As a result, some students are still confronted with several barriers when they are exposed with the authentic materials in the classroom, especially in listening. For EFL learners, these problems relatively caused by inability to identify different accent and pronunciation, the speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, lack of concentration, anxiety, and the quality of the audio recording (Hamouda, 2013). Moreover, in acquiring listening comprehension, several EFL students are still confronted by several barriers which are classified as affective barriers, habitudinal barriers, information processing barriers, English proficiency barriers, strategic barriers, belief barriers, and material barriers (Chen, 2005).

Thus, to overcome these problems, the students' learning outputs can be developed through the involvements of technology. The involvement of technology in education is believed to raise and facilitate students' engagement through meaningful task and

interaction (Purnawarman, Susilawati, & Sundayana, 2016).

Recently, podcast is recognized as an effective media that accommodate language learning process (Colpley, 2007; Darwis, 2016; Yeh, 2013). Podcast has been used in several countries to broadcast some information through audio or video file which is distributed on the internet and can be downloaded to electronic devices, such as mobile phone, computer, or MP3 player. Podcast becomes an almost authentic source of information which is not only rooted in radio tradition, but also in tradition of audio for teaching learning process (Popova & Edirisingha, 2010). Several potentials of podcast have been illustrated by Popova and Edirisingha (2010) using conversational framework. Podcast can be used as media to deliver an online lecturer, give feedback assignment, provide additional learning and preparatory materials, and create creative activities in teaching learning process. As a result, the implementation of podcasts in classroom can be an alternative not only to provide learning resources in language learning, but also to build students' engagement in the learning process.

The educational benefits of podcast have been investigated by many researchers, but the implementation podcast needs to be investigated more since the application is considered as a new thing in Indonesia (Darwis, 2016). The benefits of podcasts have been revealed in the study conducted in Malaysia where the improvement of academic performance was found (Hasan & Hoon, 2013). This potential benefit was also found in study which involved 46 EFL students in Saudi (Qasim & Fadda, 2013). The finding showed that podcasts were not only improving students' listening comprehension, but also increasing students' motivation, providing an enjoyable learning environment, and improving students' automaticity. As a result, the integration of podcasts into curriculum is also suggested since the percentage of teachers who associate this technology in classroom, especially in EFL country, is relatively low (Hasan & Hoon, 2012; Schmid, 2010). Besides, the implementation of podcasts, especially in foreign language learning, is considered undeveloped and further investigation on pilot studies and investigations of students' perceptions need to be examined since this media has potential to provide students with opportunity to actively engage with language learning in EFL classroom (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009; Jiang; 2017).

Therefore, this study investigates students' perception towards the use of podcast as additional material in learning English and the challenges students face while they are listening to podcast in the classroom.

2. METHOD

This study was conducted using a case study design by involving 25 students in senior high school level.

Observation, audio-recorded interview, and questionnaires were served as research instruments. Those instruments were used to get the insight into how students perceive podcast as additional material in classroom and find out their challenges in listening to podcast in classroom.

The classroom observation was conducted four times along with the regular schedule of school. Observation is aimed to collect the 'live' data from natural situation in the classroom (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The data from classroom observation was gathered through videotaping and observation sheet. Moreover, close-ended questionnaire was given to strengthen the data collected from classroom observation. This instrument was used to identify attitudes, behaviour, opinion, or characteristics of a group of people (Creswell, 2012). At the same time, open-ended questionnaire was administered to provide different types of information and to reveal the finding that has not been covered in the close-ended questionnaire. Then, the interview was conducted at the end of study to sample respondents' opinion and to evaluate respondents in some respect (Cohen, et al, 2007).

In conducting the study, several procedures were followed including determining the topic of podcasts, preparing the materials and lesson plans, implementing podcasts in classroom, and administering the questionnaire and the interview.

The topic of podcast was chosen in line with the materials which were taught in the school. Since the school implements the National Curriculum of Indonesia 2013, the materials taught by teachers were explanation text and exposition text. As a result, the topics were about natural disaster and common issues related to students, such as bullying and the use of school uniforms from *But Why: Podcast for the Curious Kids* and *Short and Curly* channel.

Students were exposed with podcasts in the beginning of learning activity to activate their knowledge about one particular topic. The activity was recorded through video tapping and described in observation sheet. In conducting the lesson, the scientific approach was used since it is addressed in syllabus of senior high school. However, the process of listening only covers three stages, which were observing, questioning, and associating activity.

After conducting the lesson in four meetings, questionnaires and interview were administered to find out students' perception towards the use of podcast as additional learning material in the classroom and the challenges students faced while they were listening to podcasts.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysed data, it has shown that students gained positive perception toward the use of podcast in classroom. Most students agreed that podcasts are interesting and motivating learning media to learn English in classroom. Podcasts are believed to provide authentic listening materials which help students to listen to English materials and help them in learning pronunciation and English vocabulary. Even though some students gained negative perception towards the use of podcast in classroom and faced several challenges while listening to the podcasts, they claimed that integrating Podcast in listening activity in classroom is essential to help them to learn English. The findings were explained below:

3.1. Students' perceptions towards the use of podcast in listening class

The interpretation of the data regarding to students' perception towards the use of podcasts in the classroom were categorized into four main aspects, which are (1) personal feeling, attitudes, goals, and drives; (2) sensory nature of stimulus; (3) personal experiences; and (4) background or setting of the stimulus (Sperling, 1957)

3.1.1. Students' personal feeling, attitudes, goals, and drives

Personal goals, drives, attitudes, and feelings are any mental factor, emotional state, and desire in responding the stimulus (Sperling, 1957). In this case, students' feeling, attitudes, personal goals and drives refers to what students feel after being exposed with podcasts in classroom associated with their learning process.

Relating students' perception toward the exposure of podcast with their personal feeling, it was found that most students agreed that the implementation of podcasts in classroom was interesting. Students found podcasts as an interesting media because this media has never been introduced and used by their schoolteachers. Moreover, they also believed that podcasts are essential for language learning, especially English. Students' responses regarding to their personal feeling was also revealed through interview and open-ended questionnaire as stated below:

"Sometimes, I felt bored and did not pay attention to the subject. However, podcasts motivated me to gain more focus. Besides, it was fun to listen to the topic on podcasts." (S1)

"In my opinion, the use of podcasts in learning process was interesting because teachers rarely used this media in teaching. Besides, the use of podcasts can improve students' skills." (S21)

Figure 1 Students' responses regarding to their personal feeling towards podcast

From the students' answers, there were three main reasons that can be highlighted regarding to students' personal feeling towards podcasts. First, podcasts were found to be motivating since they sued students to gain more focus on the content of the podcasts. Second, podcasts were also found to be interesting learning media because students were never exposed with them in the classroom. Third, podcasts were considered to create enjoyable learning environment because the activity in the classroom was not only reading, but also listening.

Then, relating students' perception with personal goals and drives, most students agreed that podcasts helped them to learn English since they addressed their needs in learning English. Podcasts were not only promoting students' learning for English in general but also promoting several aspects like vocabulary, pronunciation, and accent recognition in particular. Students' responses were described below:

"From the podcasts, we can know the accent used by speakers. Besides, we also know how to pronounce the words correctly." (S17)

"Podcasts helped me to learn vocabulary. Since the podcasts were repeated, I gradually remember the words." (S18)

Figure 2 Students' responses regarding to their personal goals and drives towards their listening activity

From the answers above, students acknowledged podcasts as media which helped them to develop some particular aspects in English learning such as listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Since listening in EFL/ESL context was viewed as 'passive' skills to acknowledging and the materials for teaching listening skills seemed to be neglected in language teaching (Cahyono & Widiati, 2009; Renandya & Widodo, 2016). This technology can be an alternative media to develop students' fluency in listening, introduce how to pronounce words, and enrich students' vocabularies.

Apart from personal feeling, drives and goals, attitude becomes another factor that influences students in perceiving podcast as learning media in classroom. It was found that most students enjoyed listening to podcasts. Students also agreed that they would listen to podcasts in the future. The enjoyment perceived by students was possibly caused by the nature of podcasts that stimulated students' interest in learning language. The attitudes were also caused by the usefulness and the relevance with learning objective, students' learning styles, and the content learned by students (Chan, Chi, & Chin, 2011; Nataatmadja & Dyson, 2008; Rahimi & Katal, 2012).

3.1.2. Sensory nature of stimulus

Sensory nature of stimulus is one of factors that influence human perception. In terms of the difficulty in comprehending the stimulus, most students stated that podcasts are easy to listen. However, the findings revealed that students still faced several difficulties when they were listening to podcasts even though they stated that podcasts were easy to listen. Besides, the content of podcasts became another factor that influenced their perception. Most students agreed that the topic of podcasts was suitable for them because it was related to their lives and to what they learned in classroom. The response towards the topic was described as follow:

"I like podcasts, it depends on the topic. If the topic is interesting, I like to listen to it, and the topic was interesting" (S17)

Figure 3 Student's response regarding to the nature of stimulus

The implementation of podcasts in classroom needs to consider the topic and level of difficulties since it is intended to different types of students (Li, 2012). The topic of podcasts could help educators excite students' curiosity and interest, and elaborate connection between new and previous materials or difficult concepts (Istanto & Indrianti, 2011; Ogott & Odera, 2012).

3.1.3. Students' personal experience

Perception is a process of inference associated with past experiences (Sperling, 1957). Past experiences influenced students' perception towards podcasts which were implemented in the classroom. It was found that most students have experience in listening to podcasts but rarely listening to them both inside and outside the classroom.

For this reason, some students in this study faced difficulties in listening to Podcasts in classroom. Students with experiences in listening to podcasts have accustomed to jump to conclusion where familiarity of stimuli and general sensory perception are concerned. On the other hand, students who were rarely exposed by podcasts

might possibly find difficulties when they were listening to it. They might have problem in developing their automaticity to comprehend the listening materials (Renandya & Widodo, 2016). As result, foreign language teachers play a great role in helping students to build their procedural knowledge on how to process spoken language with automaticity and ease (Renandya & Farrell, 2010).

3.1.4. Background or setting of stimuli

Another factor that affects students' perception towards podcasts was related to context or background where certain stimuli occur (Sperling, 1957). Some students claimed that the implementation of Podcasts in classroom was fascinating and helpful to learn English better, while other students also claimed that the implementation in classroom caused several problems in comprehending the content of the podcasts.

Most students agreed that listening to podcasts at the beginning of the class helped them to associate what they learned in the classroom. Besides, the implementation of podcasts in classroom was believed to provide an enjoyable learning environment. It is supported by the students' response below:

"(Podcasts) were fun and interesting because the activity in classroom was not only reading, but also listening. This activity is very important for me to learn the language." (S14)

Figure 4 Student's opinion about learning environment after podcast

Nevertheless, the background or setting of stimuli also led students to face several problems. The main reason of the problems was related to external distraction and environment such as friends' voices and rain. It is supported by students' answer below:

"The problem is the situation in classroom must be as quiet as possible. We have to focus on comprehending all the contents of the podcasts and it was difficult." (S16)

Figure 5 Student's response related to the environment where stimuli occur

The classroom situation influenced how students perceive podcasts in learning activity. Some technical factors such as seating arrangement, the distance between speaker and listeners, the equipment for listening, and students' preparedness also needed to be considered because the exposure was assigned to all students in classroom. However, since listening is a subjective process, students might differently perceive podcasts because of their own attitudes towards themselves, others,

and environment (Hullbert, 1989). Students' attitudes towards those factors can either enhance or dismiss the stimuli and thereby misrepresent the meaning of the message.

3.2. Students' challenges in listening to podcast in classroom

The data gained from questionnaire, classroom observation, and interview showed that students faced several main challenges. Most of challenges were related to information processing, English proficiency, materials, and medium (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Involving 25 participants in the study, the percentage of each challenge from questionnaire was illustrated as follow:

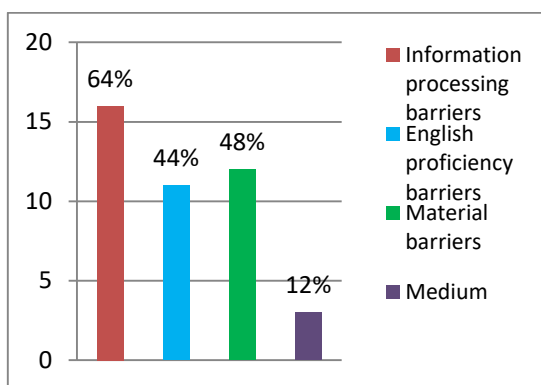


Figure 6 Students' challenges in listening to podcast

3.2.1. Information processing barriers

Information processing barriers refer to the obstacles related to how the aural input was processed in human brain. This obstacle was identified through several aspect related to spoken-word recognition, processing speed and input retention, interpretation, and processing distraction (Chen, 2005).

The first factor that affected students' comprehension was related to spoken-word recognition. Students stated that they did not know several words presented in the audio. Some students actually know the words, but when it presented in oral form, they hardly recognize them. It was supported by students' answers from the interview:

"Personally, it is hard for me to listen to the podcast because there are only few words that I often hear. Thus, I only recognize those words." (S24)

Figure 7 Student's response related to spoken words recognition

The second information processing factor that affected students' comprehension was related to processing speed and input retention. The students' answers were described as follow:

"The sound (of podcasts) was unclear, it's hard for me to concentrate because it's also too fast." (S11)

Figure 8 Student's response regarding to processing speed and input retention

Other information processing challenge that students faced when they listened to Podcasts was processing distraction. Students in this study said that they were distracted by other students' voices when they were listening to podcasts. Their responses were described as follow:

"My friends were noisy, so the podcasts cannot be heard." (S9)
 "The classroom situation was not quite, so the audio Podcasts were unclear." (S21)

Figure 9 Students' responses regarding to processing speed and input retention

The possible reason for the challenges related to information processing is that listeners' processing capacity and perceptual attention become dominant with language processing (Chen, 2005). Since listening requires straightaway processing to spoken input, it makes the skill more complex than reading (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Students' cultural background, prior knowledge, and strategy need to be elaborated in comprehending the listening materials. The possible cause of this problem was also because of the limited capacity of students' short-term memory (Goh, 1999). Short-term memory deals with new input even though some form of the input associated with the information that has been stored in long-term memory. While students failed activating and elaborating what has been stored in both memories, students appeared to have problems in processing the information.

3.2.2. English proficiency barriers

Other crucial factor that influences students' listening comprehension was English proficiency. There were two major challenges found in this study, which were vocabulary mastery and overall English proficiency. Most students in this study claimed that they found unfamiliar words when they listened to podcasts in classroom. Moreover, most students agreed to say that their vocabularies obstruct them in comprehending the content of the Podcasts. From students' responses towards these statements, it could be inferred that vocabulary mastery play a great impact on how students listen and understand the content of the podcasts. Most of students agreed that their English vocabularies were limited. Consequently, they could not understand the

words on the spoken language and hardly understand the content of the podcasts. This finding was also supported by students' response below:

"There are some words that I cannot understand, it's hard to interpret the words. (S5)
"I was confused. The vocabularies make me confused." (S15)

Figure 10 Students' responses related to vocabulary mastery in listening to podcasts

Apart from vocabulary, overall English proficiency level also influenced students in comprehending the information in the podcasts. Students agreed that their English proficiency level influence their ability in comprehending the content of the Podcasts. However, since the participants have different proficiency levels, it was found that this proficiency becomes an obstacle for some of students. This finding was supported by students' answer below:

"even though listening to audio podcasts is important, I find it hard to listen to what was said by speakers. Even though I've tried to guess the spoken words, it's still hard for me." (S24)

Figure 11 Students' responses related to their English proficiency

The level of proficiency was influenced by the strategy acquisition to listeners' listening skills and their overall language skills (Chen, 2005). The failure of listening strategies was believed to cause poor listening ability. Moreover, this problem was possibly caused by multiple factors such as language competence, emotional or physical issue, and listeners' background knowledge regarding to the topic (Renandya & Widodo, 2016). The familiarity of the topic, in this case, can also contribute in comprehending the materials in the podcasts.

3.2.3. Material barrier

Other challenges students faced when they listened to podcast was related to materials barrier, which refers to the audio podcasts. Students claimed that they faced problems regarding to spoken features, including rate of speech, accents, and clarity of voice in the audio.

Students claimed that they could not understand the content of podcasts because the speakers spoke too fast. Even though some proficient students considered the speech rate in the podcasts were normal, students with middle to lower proficiency level considered the audio podcasts were too fast. This finding was revealed through students' answer below:

"The dialogue in the podcast is too fast, so I cannot understand it." (S22)

Figure 12 Student's response related to the rate of speech in the podcasts.

This problem was emerged because listeners cannot control the speed of speech (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). As a result, they could not repeat the audio and listened to the particular words they could not catch since the audio was played for all students in the classroom. This situation caused critical difficulties in comprehending the content in the podcasts.

Apart from rate of speech, accents became another factor that challenged students in listening to podcasts. It is supported by students' response below:

"I hardly get the words if the accents were different." (S1)

Figure 13 Student's response related to the accents of speakers in the podcasts.

The familiarity of speakers' accents, in this case, becomes one of crucial factors that affecting students' comprehension towards the materials in the podcasts. This problem was discovered in both English native speaker and non-native speaker because the main causes of the unfamiliarity lie within the level of experience with the accents (Bloomfield, A., Wayland, S., E. Rhoades, Blodgett, A., Linck, J., & Ross, S., 2010).

The last material barrier that influenced students in comprehending the listening materials in the podcasts is clarity of voice. Students said that the audio podcasts exposed in the classroom was not clear enough. The quality of podcasts was considered to be low, so they could not get the message and comprehend the materials clearly. It is supported by students' response below:

"Sometimes the audio podcast was unclear and the dialogue was too fast, so I hardly understand it." (S22)

Figure 14 Student's response related to the quality of audio podcasts

Listeners, speaker, medium, and environmental factors became the primary aspects that impact listening comprehension (Bloomfield, et al., 2010; Boyle, 1984; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Thus, relating students answer with this problem, listeners are more strongly

affected by their attitudes towards the speaker than the message presented in the audio (Hullbert, 1989).

3.2.4 Medium

Another challenge that students faced in listening to podcast in classroom was related to medium, where the message was transmitted. Some students claimed that they hardly processed the information from the podcasts because of the distance to the source of audio.

Moreover, the problem related to the equipment used in listening to podcasts in classroom was also found in this study. These findings are supported by students' responses below:

"Maybe speaker was too far from me and the voice is unclear. So, I hardly heard the speaker." (S15)
 "Periodically, audio system becomes a problem and the room was filled with noises. It makes me hard to listen to podcasts." (S18)

Figure 15 Students' responses related to the distance of the source of audio.

Any factor that interferes with the process of transmission and reception of a message is classified as distraction (Hullbert, 1989). Since environmental distraction, including medium, cannot be eliminated and the attempt that listeners need to do was increasing their concentration (Adler & Lucas, 2013; Hullbert, 1989). This environmental aspect, covering atmospheric condition as well as distance between communicator and listeners, affects to the listening performance and how the stimuli were perceived (Zaman & Sidhu, 2013).

4. CONCLUSION

There are several points highlighted in this study. First, students' perception towards the use of podcasts in classroom was generally positive. Podcasts were believed to provide authentic materials for listening practice and create fun learning environment in the classroom. Since the topics were adjusted with the materials in school, students claimed that it helped them to engage and integrate the lesson they learn in the classroom. Besides, the implementation of podcasts in classroom was also believed to motivate students to learn English because podcasts do not only help students with listening, but also help them with vocabularies, pronunciation, and English accents recognition. Second, several challenges were faced by students when they were listening to podcasts in classroom. The challenges found in this study were related to materials, information processing, English proficiency, and medium. The spoken features in podcasts, such as accents, speech rate, and clarity of voice, affected students in recognizing words and

interpreting the message delivered in the podcasts. In addition, students' proficiency level also contributed in processing the information delivered from the podcasts, including their vocabularies and overall English proficiency. Since the implementation of podcasts was in classroom, other technical factors such as medium and environmental distraction also influence students' perception in listening to podcasts in classroom.

For these reasons, the implementation of podcasts in classroom requires preparation from both teachers and students. The implementation of podcasts can be optimized by teachers to support the learning process. Teachers can create various tasks, other than listening task, and choose various topics related to the materials learned by students so that other language skills can rehearsed through the use of this media in the classroom. Moreover, to minimize the problems occurred in the implementation, teachers can anticipate it by providing online medium where students can access the podcasts independently with teachers' supervision. Moreover, the involvement of schools in the implementation of podcasts is needed, for instance providing adequate equipment, providing Wi-Fi access for learning activities, etc. Besides, study related to the use of podcasts in classroom need to be examined further. The implementation of podcasts can be also associated with other language skills. Researchers can examine how students perceived podcasts in writing, speaking, or reading and find out the effect of this media on students' learning.

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