

The Effect of Podcast Use on EFL Students' Listening Skills and Contextual Vocabulary Mastery

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Abstrak

Listening comprehension and contextual vocabulary mastery remain persistent challenges for EFL learners exposed mainly to simplified classroom materials rather than authentic spoken English, as reflected in a diagnostic test at SMAS Islam Diponegoro (mean = 61.4), below the school's minimum criterion of 75. This study examined the effect of BBC Learning English - Real Easy English podcast-based instruction on Grade XI EFL students' listening skills and contextual vocabulary mastery using a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design. Seventy-two students were purposively assigned to an experimental group ($n = 36$, podcast-based instruction) and a control group ($n = 36$, researcher-made audio-based instruction) across five sessions. Data were collected using validated listening and vocabulary tests (Cronbach's Alpha = .79 and .84) and analyzed with the Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Signed-Rank tests. The experimental group showed significantly greater improvement in listening skills ($Z = -3.499$, $p < .001$) and contextual vocabulary mastery ($Z = -4.257$, $p < .001$), with medium-to-large effect sizes ($r = .41-.50$), and significantly outperformed the control group on both posttests ($p = .006$; $p = .011$). These findings indicate that podcast-based instruction is more effective than conventional instruction, supporting its integration into senior high school EFL teaching.

Keywords: podcast; listening skills; contextual vocabulary

Introduction

Listening is widely recognized as one of the most fundamental skills in language learning, functioning as the primary channel through which learners receive oral input that supports the development of speaking, vocabulary, and grammatical competence. Without adequate listening skills, learners cannot engage effectively in real-life communication, since they are unable to comprehend spoken messages, respond appropriately, or participate meaningfully in conversation. Because listening is the language skill which most frequently used in everyday communication, yet it receives comparatively little systematic instructional attention in many EFL classrooms, this imbalance leaves learners underprepared to process authentic spoken English and to meet real-

world communicative demands, particularly in contexts where English is not used outside the classroom.

In Indonesia, listening remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL students because natural spoken English involves rapid, continuous speech containing reduced forms, connected speech, and spontaneous expressions that leave little time for learners to process meaning (Hardiyanto et al., 2021). Unlike scripted classroom recordings, authentic spoken English demands immediate comprehension without the opportunity to pause or re-read, placing considerable cognitive demands on learners who have limited exposure to real-world English input. These difficulties are compounded by limited contextual vocabulary knowledge: students who rely on isolated word memorization often fail to recognize the same items when they appear embedded in continuous speech, since successful vocabulary use depends on understanding words within meaningful context rather than in isolation (Sani et al., 2024). Classroom listening materials, moreover, tend to be simplified and artificially constructed, which further limits students' readiness for the authentic spoken English encountered outside formal instruction (Gilmore, 2007).

These challenges were empirically confirmed at SMAS Islam Diponegoro through a diagnostic listening test administered to prospective participants in Class XI B-2 during the researcher's teaching practice observation in the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, which produced an average score of 61.4, below the school's Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) of 75. Classroom observation and an informal interview with the English teacher further indicated that vocabulary instruction was predominantly decontextualized, relying on word lists and translation exercises that did not prepare students to process vocabulary within real oral communication. These empirical findings provided the direct motivation for the present study.

Podcasts offer a potential response to this problem because they provide authentic spoken English produced for real audiences, are freely accessible, and can be replayed to support repeated engagement with target vocabulary in context. The BBC Learning English - Real Easy English series was selected because it combines authentic conversational English with a pace and vocabulary load appropriate for elementary to pre-intermediate learners: the series is classified as Easy level, corresponding to A1-A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and each five-minute episode features natural conversation between native speakers together with a complete transcript, making it both authentic and manageable for senior high school learners. Prior studies have shown that podcast-based instruction can improve EFL learners' listening comprehension and vocabulary mastery (Yazmin & Clara, 2024; Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2025), and that podcasts are positively perceived as a medium for practicing listening and supporting autonomous learning (Dimasanti & Inayati, 2025). However, most existing studies have examined listening and vocabulary as separate outcomes rather than as mutually reinforcing competencies developed through a single instructional intervention, and few have tested this integrated effect within an Indonesian senior high school context using a controlled quasi-experimental design (Suseno, 2024).

Based on this background, this study addressed two research questions: (1) is there a significant difference in listening skills between EFL students who receive podcast-based instruction using BBC Learning English - Real Easy English and those who receive researcher-made audio-based instruction; and (2) is there a significant difference in contextual vocabulary mastery between the two groups? Accordingly, this study aimed to examine the effect of podcast-based instruction on EFL students' listening skills and contextual vocabulary mastery at SMAS Islam Diponegoro, using a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design.

By treating listening and vocabulary as jointly developed outcomes of a single intervention, this study departs from the single-focus approach of most prior podcast research, which has generally investigated either general listening or discrete vocabulary learning in isolation, and instead reflects current thinking in communicative language teaching that favors instructional designs mirroring the integrated complexity of real language use. Theoretically, the study is expected to contribute to the growing body of research on technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) in Indonesian secondary education, where quasi-experimental evidence on digital audio media remains comparatively limited, and to extend prior single-outcome podcast research by demonstrating whether the same intervention can produce measurable gains in two related but distinct competencies simultaneously. Practically, the findings are intended to provide senior high school EFL teachers with evidence-based guidance on organizing podcast-based instruction to simultaneously strengthen holistic listening comprehension and contextual vocabulary mastery within the constraints of fixed curricula and limited class time, offering a low-cost, readily accessible alternative to commercially produced or textbook-bound listening materials that many Indonesian schools cannot easily afford. Understanding how such instruction can be organized to address both outcomes at once equips teachers with concrete pedagogical strategies that are grounded in classroom research rather than anecdotal practice, which is particularly valuable in contexts where teachers must balance authentic input with the practical realities of limited instructional time and uneven access to diverse learning materials. In sum, the novelty of this study lies in its methodological and contextual contribution: it is, to the researchers' knowledge, among the first quasi-experimental studies to test listening and contextual vocabulary as jointly developed outcomes of a single podcast-based intervention within an Indonesian senior high school setting, rather than treating them as separate research strands as most prior podcast studies have done.

Literature Review

This section reviews the theoretical and empirical literature underlying the three constructs examined in the present study: podcasts as authentic instructional media, the development of listening skills in EFL contexts, and the development of contextual vocabulary mastery, before situating the study within the existing body of podcast-based EFL research.

The term podcast, a portmanteau of iPod and broadcast, refers to a digital audio file distributed online for flexible, on-demand listening, typically produced as part of a series that allows learners to receive regular episodes of authentic spoken content (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). Unlike materials specifically designed for language learners, podcasts are produced for genuine communicative purposes and real audiences, so they expose learners to language as it is actually used rather than to an artificially simplified approximation of it (Gilmore, 2007). Their accessibility through mobile devices further allows students to engage with English informally outside the classroom, which is particularly relevant for Indonesian secondary students who have limited everyday exposure to spoken English but increasingly widespread access to smartphones and the internet (Stanley, 2025). Because podcast episodes can be replayed at will, learners are also able to control the pace of their own listening, pause at difficult sections, and revisit target vocabulary multiple times, features that are difficult to reproduce with single-exposure classroom audio (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). Podcasts used in EFL learning can be broadly divided into authentic podcasts, produced for general audiences and characterized by natural pace, connected speech, and informal vocabulary, and pedagogical podcasts, purpose-built for learners with slower speech rates and explicit vocabulary support. While pedagogical podcasts can scaffold lower-proficiency learners, authentic podcasts more closely prepare students for real-world listening encounters

because they present the unmodified oral language learners will actually meet outside the classroom (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007).

Podcasts relate directly to listening skill development because listening comprehension involves rapid, interconnected cognitive operations, including sound discrimination, word recognition, grammatical parsing, and inferencing of speaker intent, that must occur close to simultaneously as speech unfolds (Rost, 2015). Because natural speech does not present words as clearly separated units the way written text does, and podcast content typically retains reduced and connected speech forms, podcasts function as suitable training material for the kind of rapid word-recognition ability that scripted classroom audio does not provide (Buck, 2001). Podcast-based lessons can further be structured to move between extensive listening, which builds general comprehension through continuous exposure, and intensive listening, which directs focused attention to specific features such as target vocabulary (Rost, 2015), reflecting the flexible, simultaneous use of top-down and bottom-up processing that effective real-world listening requires (Vandergrift, 2007). Because engaging content also promotes more active listening strategies (Vandergrift, 2007), topically interesting authentic podcasts provide a stronger basis for listening instruction than artificially constructed classroom recordings.

Contextual vocabulary, as understood in this study, refers to receptive vocabulary knowledge demonstrated through learners' ability to recognize and interpret words as they are encountered in oral input rather than as isolated dictionary items. Because word meaning can shift depending on the surrounding linguistic and situational context, successful vocabulary use requires learners to draw on co-occurring words, intonation, and discourse cues to derive an item's intended meaning (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2007). Effective vocabulary learning is therefore understood to depend not only on knowledge of a word's form and meaning in isolation but on repeated, meaningful encounters with the word in use (Nation, 2013), a condition that authentic podcast listening creates by embedding target vocabulary within natural discourse together with the intonational and contextual cues that support inference. Corpus-based evidence indicates that everyday vocabulary occurs with particularly high frequency in informal conversational registers (Darwin & Gray, 1999), underscoring that learners who lack familiarity with such vocabulary in natural contexts are likely to face substantial comprehension difficulty in authentic spoken interaction, and reinforcing the pedagogical value of instruction that embeds vocabulary in continuous, contextualized speech rather than decontextualized word lists.

A growing body of empirical research links podcast exposure to gains in both listening and vocabulary outcomes, although most studies have treated these outcomes separately. University-level EFL learners exposed to podcasts have shown improved listening comprehension, particularly among lower-proficiency students (Yazmin & Clara, 2024), while BBC Learning English podcasts specifically have been found to attract learner attention, increase motivation, and improve listening comprehension when accompanied by purposefully designed activities (Davydenko, 2021). Descriptive studies of EFL learners' podcast use and perceptions report that vocabulary enrichment is consistently identified as the primary perceived benefit of podcast listening, alongside gains in pronunciation and autonomous learning (Dimasanti & Inayati, 2025), and experimental work with EFL learners exposed to multiple podcast series over an extended period has demonstrated significantly better vocabulary and speaking outcomes relative to a control group (Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2025). At the same time, qualitative work on listening difficulties has identified vocabulary deficiency as the most frequently reported obstacle to comprehension across proficiency levels (Hardiyanto et al., 2021), while studies of incidental vocabulary learning through other digital media, such as English-language mobile games, confirm that meaningful contextual exposure can support vocabulary gains even outside structured instruction (Sani et al., 2024).

Teachers themselves also report favorable beliefs about podcasts as a tool for developing listening and speaking skills in EFL classrooms (Harahap & Rizal, 2023).

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest structure, appropriate for measuring the effect of an instructional treatment by comparing an experimental group with a control group within intact classroom settings rather than through random assignment (Cohen et al., 2017). The study was conducted at SMAS Islam Diponegoro among Grade XI students; using purposive sampling, two intact classes with comparable below-KKM performance were selected as the data source, namely Class XI B-2 ($n = 36$) as the experimental group, which received podcast-based instruction using BBC Learning English - Real Easy English episodes, and Class XI B-1 ($n = 36$) as the control group, which received researcher-made audio-based instruction covering the same topics and target vocabulary, resulting in a total sample of 72 students taught by the same researcher-teacher across five instructional sessions of equivalent duration. Data were collected using two researcher-developed instruments validated through expert judgment and item analysis following a pilot test with 36 students from a non-participating class: a 15-item multiple-choice listening test and a 10-item multiple-choice contextual vocabulary test, yielding Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients of .79 and .84, respectively; parallel forms of both instruments were administered as a pretest at the beginning of Session 1 and as a posttest at the end of Session 5 for both groups, with raw scores converted to a 0-100 scale. Data were analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics through descriptive statistics, assumption testing (the Shapiro-Wilk normality test and Levene's homogeneity test), and hypothesis testing at $\alpha = .05$: because the normality assumption was violated for most score distributions, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used for within-group pretest-posttest comparisons and the Mann-Whitney U Test for between-group posttest comparisons, except for the control group's listening scores, whose difference scores were normally distributed and were therefore analyzed with a Paired Samples T-Test, with effect sizes computed using Cohen's d for the parametric comparison and $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$ for the non-parametric comparisons, interpreted following standard benchmarks for small, medium, and large effects (Cohen, 2013).

Results and Discussion

Before hypothesis testing, preliminary analyses confirmed that the experimental and control groups were statistically equivalent at pretest and that the assumptions required for the subsequent tests were properly evaluated. The Independent Samples T-Test on pretest listening scores showed no significant difference between the control and experimental groups ($t = -.142$, $p = .887$), and Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance ($F = 3.917$, $p = .052$). Because the vocabulary pretest was not normally distributed, the Mann-Whitney U test was used instead and likewise showed no significant baseline difference ($U = 598.000$, $Z = -.581$, $p = .561$; median = 60.00 for both groups). The Shapiro-Wilk test further indicated that most score distributions departed from normality, particularly in the experimental group's posttest scores, justifying the predominant use of non-parametric procedures for hypothesis testing, while Levene's test on posttest scores confirmed homogeneity of variance for both listening ($F = .155$, $p = .695$) and vocabulary ($F = 2.250$, $p = .138$). Taken together, these preliminary results establish that the two groups began the treatment from a comparable baseline, so that any subsequent between-group differences can reasonably be attributed to the instructional treatment rather than pre-existing group differences.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Listening and Vocabulary Scores by Group

Group	Variable	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)
Control	Listening	63.00 (14.45)	64.17 (18.00)
Control	Contextual Vocabulary	61.11 (14.10)	71.67 (17.65)
Experimental	Listening	63.53 (18.45)	78.31 (18.32)
Experimental	Contextual Vocabulary	63.89 (13.37)	82.22 (13.76)

Table 1 summarizes the raw pretest and posttest performance of both groups. The control group's mean listening score rose only marginally, from 63.00 (SD = 14.45) to 64.17 (SD = 18.00), while its mean vocabulary score rose more noticeably, from 61.11 (SD = 14.10) to 71.67 (SD = 17.65). The experimental group, by contrast, showed a substantially larger increase on both measures, with mean listening scores rising from 63.53 (SD = 18.45) to 78.31 (SD = 18.32) and mean vocabulary scores rising from 63.89 (SD = 13.37) to 82.22 (SD = 13.76). These descriptive patterns anticipate the inferential results reported below and indicate that, although the two groups began at a comparable level on both measures, the experimental group's posttest gains clearly exceeded those of the control group. Notably, the standard deviations for both groups remained relatively wide at posttest, suggesting that individual students responded to instruction to differing degrees regardless of group assignment, a pattern that is examined further in the item-level improvement counts reported below.

Table 2. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results and Effect Sizes

Comparison		Test	Statistic		p	Effect Size
Experimental group – Listening	within-group	Wilcoxon Signed-Rank	Z = -3.499		.001	r = .41
Control Listening	within-group –	Paired Samples t-test	t = -.763		.451	d = .18
Experimental group – Contextual Vocabulary	within-group	Wilcoxon Signed-Rank	Z = -4.257		.001	r = .50
Control Contextual Vocabulary	within-group –	Wilcoxon Signed-Rank	Z = -2.519		.012	r = .30
Between-group Listening	–	Mann-Whitney U	U = 390.500		.006	r = .32
Between-group Contextual Vocabulary	–	Mann-Whitney U	U = 425.000		.011	r = .30

Table 2 consolidates the within-group and between-group test statistics for both dependent variables. Across all four comparisons involving the experimental group, results were statistically significant at $p < .05$, with effect sizes ranging from medium ($r = .30$ -.41) to large ($r = .50$). By contrast, only one of the two control-group within-group comparisons reached significance, and its effect size ($r = .30$, vocabulary) was consistently smaller than the corresponding experimental-group effect. This consolidated pattern reinforces, at a glance, the conclusion supported by the individual test results reported below: podcast-based instruction produced more consistent and

practically larger gains across both outcome variables than researcher-made audio-based instruction. Because all between-group posttest comparisons in Table 2 relied on the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test rather than an independent-samples t-test, the reported effect sizes (r) are interpreted using the small (.10), medium (.30), and large (.50) benchmarks conventionally applied to rank-based statistics, which are not directly numerically equivalent to Cohen's d but are interpreted on a comparable ordinal scale of practical significance.

1. Effect of Podcast-Based Instruction on Listening Skills

The within-group Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test showed a significant improvement in listening skills for the experimental group ($Z = -3.499$, $p < .001$; 26 students improved, 9 declined, 1 unchanged; N-Gain = 36.82%, Medium category), whereas the control group's paired-samples comparison was not significant ($t = -.763$, $p = .451$; N-Gain = -2.78%). The between-group Mann-Whitney U test confirmed that the experimental group's posttest performance (Mean Rank = 42.84) was significantly higher than the control group's (Mean Rank = 29.35; $U = 390.500$, $Z = -2.773$, $p = .006$). Effect sizes were medium both within the experimental group ($r = .41$) and between groups ($r = .32$), while the control group's within-group effect size for listening was very small (Cohen's $d = .18$).

This pattern, a significant gain in the treatment group alongside a non-significant change in the untreated comparison group, constitutes strong evidence within a non-equivalent control group design that the improvement is attributable to the instructional treatment rather than to maturation or test familiarity. The finding is consistent with Vandergrift's metacognitive model of listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 2007), which holds that listening ability develops through sustained exposure to authentic input combined with purposeful processing tasks; the BBC podcast supplied natural, unscripted speech that required students to actively process oral information rather than respond to simplified recordings. Because natural speech does not present words as clearly separated units the way written text does, learners must rely on the kind of rapid word-recognition ability that develops specifically through exposure to connected, reduced speech forms (Buck, 2001), which conventional, carefully articulated classroom recordings rarely provide. The BBC episodes' combination of extensive listening for overall comprehension and intensive attention to target vocabulary within each session likewise mirrors the integrated use of top-down and bottom-up processing that effective real-world listening requires (Rost, 2015), which may explain why even a brief five-session treatment produced a medium effect size. It also aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which predicts that comprehensible input pitched slightly above learners' current competence promotes acquisition (Krashen, 1982), since the podcast content, while authentic, remained within a manageable range for Grade XI learners, consistent with the series' A1-A2 CEFR classification and accompanying transcripts. The result additionally corroborates Hardiyanto et al.'s account of speech rate and unfamiliar vocabulary as primary listening obstacles for low-proficiency EFL students (Hardiyanto et al., 2021), suggesting that repeated exposure to authentic spoken English through podcasts helps address exactly these obstacles, and extends earlier evidence of podcast-based listening gains, such as improvements following BBC Learning English podcast use among university students (Davydenko, 2021) and following Spotify podcast-based instruction at a teacher training college (Ananta, 2021), to a senior high school context.

One factor warranting caution in this interpretation is that the experimental group's podcast episodes featured dialogue between two speakers, while the control group's researcher-made recordings were monologues. Because dialogue includes interactional features such as turn-taking and varied intonation that may themselves aid comprehension, the observed listening advantage may reflect both the authenticity of the material and its conversational format; future studies should

isolate discourse type from source authenticity by holding one of these factors constant across conditions.

At the individual level, the fact that 26 of 36 experimental-group students improved while only 9 declined, compared with a far more mixed pattern in the control group, suggests that the treatment benefited the majority of learners rather than producing gains concentrated in a small subset of already higher-performing students. This distribution is consistent with the view that authentic podcast input functions as a broadly accessible source of comprehensible input rather than a resource that only benefits learners who are already relatively proficient listeners, though the presence of nine experimental-group students who did not improve indicates that podcast-based instruction alone may not be sufficient for every learner and may need to be supplemented with additional scaffolding, such as guided pre-listening vocabulary previews, for students who continue to struggle with natural speech rate.

2. Effect of Podcast-Based Instruction on Contextual Vocabulary Mastery

For contextual vocabulary mastery, the experimental group again showed a significant within-group improvement (Wilcoxon $Z = -4.257$, $p < .001$; 29 students improved, 4 declined, 3 unchanged), and this time the control group also improved significantly, though far less (Wilcoxon $Z = -2.519$, $p = .012$; 20 improved, 10 declined, 6 unchanged). The magnitude of change differed considerably: the experimental group's N-Gain of 47.78% (Medium category; large within-group effect, $r = .50$) was substantially greater than the control group's N-Gain of 18.54% (Low category; medium effect, $r = .30$). The between-group Mann-Whitney U test confirmed that the experimental group's posttest vocabulary performance (Mean Rank = 42.69) significantly exceeded the control group's (Mean Rank = 30.31; $U = 425.000$, $Z = -2.556$, $p = .011$), with a medium between-group effect ($r = .30$).

That both groups improved, but to different degrees, suggests that any structured audio-based instruction supports some vocabulary gain, while authentic podcast exposure produces a considerably larger one. A plausible explanation lies in incidental vocabulary learning through contextual exposure: effective vocabulary learning requires not only knowledge of a word's form and meaning in isolation but also repeated encounters with the word in meaningful use, precisely the condition that authentic podcast listening creates by embedding target vocabulary in natural discourse together with cues from surrounding words, intonation, and speaker intent (Nation, 2013). Because word meaning can shift depending on context, learners must additionally draw on situational and co-textual cues rather than fixed definitions to interpret vocabulary correctly (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2007), a skill that decontextualized word-list memorization, the dominant vocabulary practice observed at SMAS Islam Diponegoro prior to the study, does little to develop. The finding aligns with Dimasanti and Inayati, who reported that vocabulary mastery was the primary benefit students perceived from podcast listening (Dimasanti & Inayati, 2025), with Yazmin and Clara, who found notable vocabulary gains following podcast-based instruction (Yazmin & Clara, 2024), and with experimental evidence from Iranian EFL learners exposed to multiple podcast series, whose vocabulary and speaking outcomes significantly exceeded those of a non-podcast control group (Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2025). The finding is further consistent with evidence that incidental vocabulary learning can occur through meaningful digital exposure more generally, as demonstrated in a study of vocabulary gains among students who engaged extensively with English-language mobile game content (Sani et al., 2024), and with evidence that structured podcast listening can strengthen multiple language skills simultaneously, including vocabulary, when accompanied by comprehension-focused tasks (Luma Adnan 'Taha, 2025). Because the study relied on intact, non-randomly assigned classes, however, the association

between podcast exposure and greater vocabulary gain should be interpreted as strong supporting evidence rather than definitive proof of causation.

The item-level improvement pattern for vocabulary further supports this interpretation: 29 of 36 experimental-group students improved their scores, compared with 20 of 36 in the control group, and the proportion of students who declined was also smaller in the experimental group (4 versus 10). Because the vocabulary test required students to infer word meaning from spoken context under time pressure, rather than to recall isolated definitions, this pattern suggests that repeated authentic exposure specifically strengthened students' ability to process vocabulary in real time, a skill that is arguably more difficult to develop through decontextualized instruction regardless of how much practice time is available. It is also worth noting that the control group's vocabulary N-Gain of 18.54%, while modest, was nonetheless statistically significant, whereas its listening N-Gain was slightly negative and non-significant; this asymmetry within the control group itself suggests that vocabulary knowledge may be somewhat more responsive to any form of structured audio exposure than global listening comprehension is, which depends on the successful coordination of several sub-skills at once rather than on lexical recognition alone.

Taken together, the listening and vocabulary results support both alternative hypotheses of the study and indicate that authentic spoken English podcasts can serve as a single instructional resource capable of advancing two interrelated EFL competencies at once. This integrated outcome is the study's principal academic contribution: whereas most prior podcast research has evaluated listening or vocabulary in isolation, treating the two as jointly developed within one structured, five-session intervention offers empirical support for instructional designs that mirror the way listening and lexical processing operate together in real communication, rather than as separate curricular strands. This integrated framing also helps explain why the vocabulary effect ($r = .50$) was somewhat larger than the listening effect ($r = .41$) within the experimental group: because the instructional sequence in each session moved from extensive listening for global comprehension to intensive listening focused specifically on target vocabulary, students received two distinct, mutually reinforcing exposures to the same lexical items within a single episode, whereas listening comprehension as a broader construct depended on the successful integration of many simultaneous sub-skills, including grammatical parsing and inferencing of speaker intent, that are less directly targeted by a single instructional cycle (Rost, 2015).

3. Pedagogical Implications

These findings carry direct implications for EFL teaching practice at the senior high school level. Because BBC Learning English - Real Easy English is freely accessible, accompanied by transcripts, and requires no subscription, teachers facing the constraints of fixed curricula and limited class time can adopt it as a supplementary resource without additional cost or extensive preparation. Teachers themselves have reported favorable beliefs about the usefulness of podcasts for developing listening and speaking skills in EFL classrooms (Harahap & Rizal, 2023), suggesting that the instructional design tested here is likely to be perceived as feasible and acceptable by practitioners beyond the present sample. More broadly, the results support instructional approaches that mirror the complexity of real communicative language use rather than fragmenting listening and vocabulary into separate curricular strands (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), reinforcing a shift toward authentic, integrated skill development in Indonesian secondary EFL classrooms.

Three concrete recommendations follow from the instructional design tested in this study. First, teachers can structure each lesson around the same extensive-then-intensive listening sequence used here, beginning with a full, uninterrupted play of a short authentic episode for global comprehension before returning to specific segments to focus explicitly on target vocabulary in context, rather than treating listening and vocabulary as separate lesson components. Second,

because contextual vocabulary mastery depends on learners' ability to draw on situational and contextual cues rather than fixed definitions (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2007), teachers should design comprehension questions that require students to infer word meaning from the surrounding dialogue rather than simply matching vocabulary to translations, preserving the contextual processing demand that appears central to the observed gains. Third, given that nine experimental-group students did not show listening improvement, teachers working with lower-proficiency classes may wish to supplement authentic podcast listening with brief pre-listening vocabulary previews or optional access to transcripts for struggling learners, without removing the authentic, connected-speech input that appears to drive the overall effect. These recommendations are consistent with communicative language teaching's broader emphasis on exposing learners to genuine language use while still providing sufficient scaffolding for successful comprehension (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), and they position podcast-based instruction not as a replacement for existing listening pedagogy but as an accessible way of bringing authentic spoken English into classrooms that would otherwise rely primarily on textbook audio (Saifulloh, 2026; Saifulloh et al., 2023, 2025b, 2025a; Saifulloh & Anam, 2022). At the same time, the smaller but still significant vocabulary gain observed in the control group suggests that any structured, repeated listening practice, even with researcher-made monologue recordings, can support some vocabulary development; podcasts appear to accelerate and amplify this process rather than being the only pathway to it.

4. Limitations of the Study

The study is nonetheless limited by its reliance on two intact classes at a single school, a short five-session treatment period, the researcher's dual role as instructor and investigator, and a discourse-format difference (dialogue versus monologue) between the experimental and control materials, all of which constrain causal certainty and generalizability. The researcher-developed nature of both instruments, while supported by expert validation and acceptable reliability coefficients ($\alpha = .79$ and $.84$, respectively), also limits direct comparability with studies using standardized listening or vocabulary measures, and the ten-item vocabulary test, while adequate for the scope of this study, may not fully capture the breadth of students' contextual vocabulary knowledge. Because the wide standard deviations observed in Table 1 indicate considerable individual variation in how students responded to both treatments, aggregate group-level findings should not be assumed to generalize uniformly to every learner. Future research should replicate the design across larger and more varied samples, extend the treatment period with delayed posttests to assess retention, and consider mixed-methods or discourse-controlled designs, for example holding discourse format constant across conditions, to isolate the specific mechanisms underlying podcast-based learning gains.

Conclusion

This study examined whether podcast-based instruction using BBC Learning English - Real Easy English produces greater gains in listening skills and contextual vocabulary mastery than researcher-made audio-based instruction among Grade XI EFL students. In response to the first research question, the experimental group's posttest listening scores were significantly higher than the control group's ($U = 390.500$, $p = .006$), with a medium between-group effect ($r = .32$), while the control group showed no significant within-group gain. In response to the second research question, the experimental group's posttest vocabulary scores were likewise significantly higher ($U = 425.000$, $p = .011$), with the experimental group's improvement (N-Gain = 47.78%) considerably exceeding the control group's modest gain (N-Gain = 18.54%). Both alternative hypotheses are therefore accepted: podcast-based instruction produced statistically significant and practically

meaningful improvements in both outcomes, with the advantage being particularly pronounced for contextual vocabulary mastery.

These findings support integrating authentic spoken English podcasts into senior high school EFL instruction as a resource that can simultaneously build listening comprehension and contextual vocabulary knowledge, and they contribute empirically to technology-enhanced language learning research by demonstrating the value of treating these two competencies as jointly developed outcomes rather than isolated instructional targets. As detailed in the Limitations subsection above, the design's reliance on intact classes, a short treatment period, and a discourse-format difference between materials constrain causal certainty and generalizability, pointing to clear directions for future replication and refinement.

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