Personalized Listening Practice with TED Talks: Students' Perceptions in an EFL Context

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi mahasiswa EFL terhadap penggunaan TED Talks sebagai sumber belajar mandiri dalam praktik mendengarkan personal. Dengan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner skala Likert dan wawancara semi-terstruktur pada sebelas mahasiswa semester enam jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di universitas negeri di Bogor. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memandang TED Talks secara positif sebagai media yang efektif, menarik, dan relevan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan mendengarkan secara mandiri. Ragam konten yang mudah diakses dan penyampaian yang memotivasi meningkatkan minat dan keterlibatan belajar. Tantangan seperti variasi aksen, kosakata yang kompleks, dan kecepatan bicara yang tinggi dilaporkan, dengan strategi penggunaan subtitle, pencatatan kosakata, dan pemutaran ulang video untuk mengatasinya. Secara keseluruhan, TED Talks merupakan sumber belajar yang fleksibel dan bermanfaat untuk pengembangan keterampilan mendengarkan secara otonom dengan penerapan strategi belajar yang efektif.

Kata kunci: TED Talks, Pembelajaran Mandiri, Keterampilan Mendengarkan, Mahasiswa EFL, Praktik Mendengarkan.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates EFL students' perceptions of utilizing TED Talks as an autonomous learning resource for personalized listening practice. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through a Likert-scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with eleven sixth-semester English Education students at a public university in Bogor. Results indicate that students perceive TED Talks positively as an effective, engaging, and relevant medium to improve listening skills independently. The variety of accessible content and motivational delivery enhance learners' interest and engagement. Challenges such as diverse accents, advanced vocabulary, and rapid speech were reported, with strategies like subtitle use, vocabulary note-taking, and repeated viewing employed to address these issues. Overall, TED Talks are a flexible and beneficial tool for autonomous listening development when paired with effective learning strategies.

Keywords: TED Talks, Autonomous Learning, Listening Skills, EFL Students, Personalized Listening Practice.

INTRODUCTION

Listening is a complex cognitive process that enables individuals to effectively comprehend spoken language. According to Alzamil (2021), listening is the first language skill that learners acquire before developing other aspects of a new language. Mastery of listening is crucial in English language learning, as it involves interpreting verbal communication and processing auditory input to construct meaning. Effective listening skills facilitate verbal interaction and enable learners to communicate more proficiently (Fadya et al., 2024). However, many students struggle to improve their listening abilities due to limited engagement and a lack of autonomy in traditional classroom settings (Nenti & Perdhani, 2024).

Autonomous learning, which promotes active participation and learner independence, has been recognized as an effective approach to enhancing listening skills (Holec, 1981; Benson, 2011). Despite its potential, there is still limited understanding of how students utilize digital resources such as TED Talks to develop independent listening strategies. Autonomous listening involves learners taking initiative in selecting appropriate materials, setting personal

learning goals, and monitoring their own progress—thus becoming accountable for their listening development (Andriyanto, Munir, & Sucipto, 2024). The maturity of learners in decision-making and the presence of an internal locus of control significantly influence their engagement in autonomous learning (Gupta & Gupta, 2023).

TED Talks have emerged as an ideal resource for personal and self-directed listening practice due to their diverse topics, engaging delivery, and easy accessibility. TED, which stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design, is a non-profit organization established in 1984 by Richard Saul Wurman with the mission of spreading ideas through short talks lasting 18 minutes or less (Al-Jarf, 2021). These talks expose students to various accents, speech rates, and presentation styles, enabling the development of adaptive listening strategies (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Moreover, features such as subtitles and transcripts support individualized learning pace and reinforce comprehension (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Integrating TED Talks into autonomous listening routines holds the potential to improve students' listening skills in an engaging and meaningful way (Jaelani & Umam (2021).

Previous research has explored listening skills and autonomous learning. Al-Jarf (2021) investigated the integration of TED Talks into EFL listening practice, focusing on selection criteria and instructional strategies. Fadya et al. (2024) examined students' perceptions of TED Talks as a tool for fostering motivation and listening skills in autonomous learning contexts. However, studies that combine the role of TED Talks with autonomous learning remain scarce. This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring students' perceptions of personal listening practice using TED Talks in the EFL context.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach to explore EFL students' perceptions of using TED Talks as an autonomous learning resource in personalized listening practice. As Creswell (2018) explains, qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem through in-depth, context-sensitive inquiry.

The participants of this study consisted of eleven sixth-semester students majoring in English Education at a public university in Bogor, all of whom had prior experience using TED Talks for independent listening practice. Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale, which was distributed online via Google Forms to gain insights into students' perceptions in utilizing TED Talks.

To obtain deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five selected participants. These interviews explored their personal experiences, benefits and challenges in using TED Talks as a listening resource. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, recorded, and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

In line with the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), data analysis was conducted in three main stages: data reduction, which involved simplifying and selecting relevant information; data display, which presented the findings in descriptive form to reveal emerging patterns and themes; and conclusion drawing and verification, aimed at ensuring the validity and trustworthiness of the results

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that students hold highly positive perceptions toward the use of TED Talks as an autonomous learning resource for enhancing listening skills. Students perceive TED Talks as an effective, engaging, and relevant medium that aligns with their academic and personal learning needs. The wide range of topics covered in TED Talks such as education, science, motivation, and personal development was seen as stimulating their interest and motivation to learn.

These perceptions suggest that students view TED Talks not merely as a tool for improving English comprehension, but also as a source of inspiration and critical reflection that supports independent learning. This aligns with the findings of Upa and Muljiani (2023), who argue that TED Talks enrich students' knowledge while enhancing listening skills through the presentation of authentic and engaging content.

In terms of benefits, students reported several advantages of using TED Talks for independent learning.

1. **TED Talks offer flexible and easily accessible learning materials**, particularly

through platforms such as YouTube, which allows students to engage in listening practice anytime and anywhere, according to their own convenience and pace (Tilwani et al., 2022). Students can access these talks anytime and anywhere, allowing them to integrate listening practice into their daily routines without being confined to a specific time or place. This ease of access supports autonomous learning by enabling learners to manage their study schedules independently and adapt their listening practice to fit personal preferences and goals. Additionally, features such as the ability to pause, rewind, or adjust playback speed provide further opportunities for personalized learning, as students can engage with content at a pace that suits their proficiency. The convenience of using various digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, or laptops also enhances learning mobility and fosters consistent engagement, making TED Talks a practical tool for sustainable and self-directed language development.

2. **The content presented in TED Talks is highly relevant and contextually**, which enhances the development of listening skills in a more meaningful and engaging way. The talks often address real-world issues, contemporary topics, and diverse perspectives, allowing learners to engage with language that reflects authentic use in various social and professional settings. This contextual exposure helps students not only understand vocabulary and sentence structures, but also grasp the speaker's intent, tone, and communicative purpose. By listening to content that resonates with their academic interests or personal experiences, learners are more likely to stay motivated and emotionally connected to the material. Furthermore, the relevance of TED Talks encourages critical thinking and deeper reflection, making listening practice not just a mechanical process but an intellectually enriching experience. Such meaningful engagement is essential in promoting long-term retention and helping learners internalize the language more effectively.

3. **TED Talks speakers often deliver inspirational messages using engaging and dynamic speaking styles**. The way ideas are presented through storytelling, humor, emotion, and strong delivery can capture students' attention and increase their willingness to listen and learn. Many speakers in TED Talks share personal experiences, challenges, and successes, which can resonate with learners and make the content feel more authentic and impactful. This emotional and motivational element not only makes listening more enjoyable, but also encourages students to reflect on their own goals and learning journeys. According to Al-Jarf (2021), TED Talks provide motivational input that stimulates learners' interest and promotes autonomous language learning by making the listening experience more meaningful. Similarly, Fadya et al. (2024) found that the inspiring nature of TED speakers can spark greater engagement and a positive attitude toward practicing listening independently.

4. **Vocabulary enrichment** is a key benefit of using TED Talks, as students encounter specialized academic and professional terms—such as "sustainable development" or "disruptive innovation"—that are rarely covered in traditional textbooks (Ludovikus et al., 2023). Unlike scripted learning materials, TED Talks expose learners to authentic language use, including natural speech patterns, current idioms, and real-world rhetorical techniques. This immersion in unscripted English helps students move beyond textbook examples, developing communicative competence by observing how speakers structure arguments, emphasize points, and adapt their tone for different audiences.

However, despite generally positive perceptions of TED Talks, students also encounter several significant challenges.

1. **The challenges students face is difficulty understanding the speakers' accents**, as TED Talks feature presenters from diverse cultural and national backgrounds. This means students often encounter various English accents such as British, Indian, or African English, which can be challenging to comprehend, especially for learners who are more familiar with American accents (Al-Jarf, 2021; Sabrina & Sadikin, 2024). Because TED Talks include speakers from around the world, the variation in pronunciation, intonation, and

speech rhythm requires students to develop greater listening flexibility. For many learners, exposure to unfamiliar accents can initially cause confusion and reduce comprehension. This challenge highlights the need for learners to gradually build their ability to understand different English accents, which is an important skill in real-world communication but can be a significant challenge in autonomous listening practice.

2. **The presence of complex and unfamiliar vocabulary.** Students reported that they often need to pause the videos, turn on subtitles, or take notes of new words to study after watching. The use of advanced or specialized vocabulary in TED Talks can make difficult to comprehend, especially for students at intermediate levels. This often interrupts the flow of listening practice, requiring students to engage in additional effort to understand and retain new terms. While this can slow down the learning process, it also presents an opportunity for vocabulary expansion and deeper engagement with the material when learners actively review and learn the new words**.**

3. **The fast-speaking pace and natural speaking style of TED Talks** presenters require students to concentrate more intensely in order to fully grasp the meaning (Gilmore, 2007). Unlike scripted or classroom listening materials, TED Talks often reflect spontaneous, authentic speech, which can be challenging for learners who are still developing their listening fluency. These difficulties highlight that, although TED Talks offer rich context and authenticity, students still need to apply effective self-directed learning strategies to overcome such obstacles. Developing skills like selective listening, note-taking, and repeated viewing becomes essential for managing the improving overall comprehension.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results reveal that students view TED Talks very positively as a tool for independent listening practice. They find the content interesting, relevant, and easy to access, which makes learning more personal and enjoyable through a wide range of topics and motivating speakers. TED Talks also help students improve their vocabulary and understand how English is used in real-life situations. While students face some challenges such us, dealing with unfamiliar accents, complex words, and fast speech. They can manage these problems using strategies such as turning on subtitles, writing down new words, and watching the videos again. Overall, TED Talks are seen as a useful and adaptable resource for building listening skills independently, especially when students apply effective learning strategies.

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