The Use of spotify as a Self-Learning Medium to Improve Listening Skills
A Case Study of Third-Semester TBI 2 Students

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Abstract Listening skills are fundamental in English language learning because they are the main gateway to language proficiency. However, students often face obstacles such as differences in accents, the speed of native speakers, and limited vocabulary. This study aims to describe the use of the Spotify application as a learning medium to improve students' listening skills. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The research subjects were third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at UIN Sumatera Utara (UINSU) in class TBI 2. Data were collected through questionnaires covering content usage patterns, duration, and application feature utilization. The results showed that: Students actively use Spotify (music and podcasts) as a source of authentic language input independently. Using Spotify has a positive impact on vocabulary comprehension, pronunciation, intonation, and conversation comprehension skills. The playback speed feature helps students control the audio speed according to their ability level, making the learning process more flexible and personalized. Consistent listening duration (15–30 minutes) is effective in supporting the development of listening skills without causing cognitive fatigue.

Keywords: English Language Learning; Listening Skill; Podcast; Spotify; Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) requires mastery of four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills are interrelated and cannot be separated from one another. However, among these four skills, listening skills play a very fundamental role because they are the main gateway in the language acquisition process. Through listening activities, learners obtain language input that forms the basis for developing speaking, reading, and writing skills. Without adequate listening skills, learners will have difficulty understanding spoken messages, participating in communication, and optimally developing other language skills (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Rost, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

The importance of listening skills in English language learning has been widely discussed by experts. Rost (2011) states that listening is a core skill in language learning because most communication processes depend on the ability to understand spoken language. Furthermore, Brown (2007) explains that listening is not merely a passive activity of receiving sounds, but an active process that involves identifying sounds, understanding vocabulary, interpreting language structures, and making sense of the context of communication. Thus, listening skills require complex cognitive abilities and need to be trained continuously.

In addition, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) emphasize that listening skills play an important role in improving learners' linguistic and strategic competence. Through listening

activities, learners can enrich their vocabulary, improve their understanding of grammar, and familiarize themselves with the pronunciation and intonation of native speakers. This shows that listening not only functions as a means of understanding, but also as a medium for comprehensive language learning. Therefore, listening instruction needs special attention in English language learning curricula, especially at the university level.

In practice, many English language learners still experience difficulties in listening skills. These difficulties include the speed of native speakers, differences in accents, limited vocabulary, and lack of exposure to authentic English. Field (2008) mentions that the lack of contextual and realistic listening practice is one of the causes of low listening skills in EFL learners. This is often exacerbated by conventional learning methods that only rely on audio material from textbooks and do not provide a variety of learning resources that suit the needs of students.

Along with the development of information and communication technology, English language learning has undergone significant changes. The use of digital technology and mobile-based applications has opened up new opportunities to improve the quality of language learning, including listening skills. According to Kukulska-Hulme (2020), mobile technology allows learners to access learning materials flexibly, independently, and continuously. Digital applications also provide authentic materials that can help learners become accustomed to using English in real-life contexts.

The use of applications as a medium for listening comprehension is considered effective because it can increase student motivation and engagement. Several studies show that technology-based learning can provide a more engaging learning experience than traditional methods. Audio and podcast applications, for example, allow learners to listen to various topics with different accents, speeds, and speaking styles. This is very important in training comprehensive spoken language comprehension skills.

One application that has great potential for improving listening skills is Spotify. Spotify is an audio streaming application that provides a variety of content such as songs, podcasts, and other audio programs in various languages, including English. Although Spotify is not an application specifically designed for language learning, the content available on it is authentic and relevant to the use of English in everyday life. This is in line with Gilmore's (2007) opinion that authentic material can help learners understand the actual use of language and improve communication skills.

Spotify provides various features that can support the development of students' listening skills. The podcast feature, for example, allows students to listen to discussions, interviews, and stories on a variety of topics, ranging from education and culture to global issues. In addition, the audio speed setting feature allows listeners to adjust the speaking speed according to their ability level. The playlist feature also makes it easy for students to group audio materials according to learning objectives, such as vocabulary practice, pronunciation, or content comprehension.

In addition to podcasts, listening to English songs on Spotify can also contribute to improving listening skills. Songs can help students understand vocabulary in a more relaxed context, improve pronunciation, and recognize English intonation and rhythm patterns. According to Murphey (1992), songs have great potential in language learning because they are repetitive, easy to remember, and can increase learning motivation. Thus, Spotify can be an interesting and effective alternative medium for training students' listening skills.

Despite its many advantages, the use of Spotify in listening learning also has several limitations. One of the main drawbacks is that Spotify does not provide structured exercises, evaluations, or direct feedback on the listener's comprehension. This is in contrast to language learning applications that are specifically designed for educational purposes. Additionally, not all content on Spotify is suitable for students' skill levels, so careful selection of materials is necessary. Limitations on free accounts, such as ads and restricted features, can also disrupt students' concentration while learning.

Therefore, the use of Spotify as a listening learning medium needs to be combined with appropriate learning strategies and guidance from lecturers. Spotify should be used as a supplementary tool that complements classroom learning, not as the sole source of learning. With the right approach, Spotify can make a positive contribution to improving students' listening skills.

This research is important to discuss because the research subjects are third-semester English language students. At this stage, students are in a phase of more complex language development, where they begin to encounter longer, more academic, and more varied spoken texts. Third-semester students are also required to have adequate listening skills to support other courses that use English as the medium of instruction. Therefore, improving listening skills at this stage is crucial.

By examining the use of the Spotify application in improving the listening skills of third-semester English language students, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study can enrich the study of the use of digital media in

listening learning. Practically, the results of this study can be a reference for lecturers and students in choosing innovative, effective, and appropriate learning media in the digital era. Thus, this study is feasible and important to be conducted and discussed in depth.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it aims to describe and understand in depth the use of the Spotify application as a learning medium in improving students' English listening skills, without any specific treatment or experiment. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore participants' experiences and perceptions naturally (Creswell, 2014). The subjects of this study were third-semester students in the English Education Study Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU) in class TBI 2. The object of the study was the use of the Spotify application in English listening learning, specifically through English-language music and podcast content.

Data collection was conducted using questionnaires filled out by students. The questionnaires were used to obtain data on students' habits in using the Spotify application, including the types of content they often listen to, duration of use, and utilization of the playback speed feature to aid in understanding English listening comprehension. In addition, the questionnaires also explored students' perceptions of the benefits of using Spotify in improving their English vocabulary and conversation skills.

The data obtained was analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Relevant data were selected and systematically organized in descriptive form to facilitate the drawing of meaning and conclusions. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, namely by comparing responses between respondents to obtain data consistency and increase the validity of the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to comprehensively describe respondents' perceptions and experiences regarding the influence of listening to Spotify-based content on improving their listening skills. The data obtained through the research instruments was then analyzed descriptively to illustrate listening habits and the significant impact felt by respondents. To provide a clear picture of these findings, the following table presents the data analysis grouped according to key indicators.

Table 1. Analysis of Spotify's influence on listening skills.

Main theme	Indicator/question	Description of data findings
Patterns of media usage	Types of content and duration	Most respondents chose English-language music with a dominant duration of < 15 minutes and 15-30 minutes.
Cognitive involvement	Paying attention to lyrics/content.	The majority of respondents fell into the categories of always and sometimes.
Linguistic improvement	Vocabulary comprehension	Respondents consistently answered "agree"
Phonological awareness	Intonation and pronunciation	The majority of respondents agreed
Receptive competition	Understanding conversations	The majority of respondents agree that Spotify makes it easier to understand.
Psychological aspects	Self-confidence	Respondents answered between agree and neutral.

The results of the study indicate that third-semester students in the English Education Study Program at UINSU, class TBI 2, actively use Spotify as a supporting medium to improve their English listening skills. This finding is in line with Brown's (2001) opinion that listening is a receptive skill that requires learners to understand the meaning of the spoken language input they receive continuously. Exposure to English through music and podcasts on Spotify provides authentic input that helps students in the comprehension process. The active use of Spotify shows that students do not only rely on classroom learning but also seek language input sources independently. This is important because the more often learners are exposed to English in diverse contexts, the greater their chances of improving their ability to understand spoken messages. Continuous exposure through Spotify also helps students build consistent listening habits, which are essential for mastering listening skills.

The use of podcasts and songs in English produced by native speakers also supports the theory of authentic materials. According to Gilmore (2007), authentic materials can improve language comprehension skills because they present natural and contextual language use. In this study, students showed attention to the vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation used by native speakers, indicating that Spotify serves as a means of presenting real language contexts outside the classroom. The existence of authentic materials allows students to become familiar with the variations of English that are actually used in everyday life, not just the simplified language found in textbooks. Thus, students become more accustomed to natural speech

patterns, including the use of idiomatic expressions and variations in intonation, which ultimately improves their readiness to face real-life communication situations.

Listening for 15–30 minutes consistently can be linked to the input hypothesis theory proposed by Krashen (1985). Sufficient and repeated exposure to language input for a reasonable amount of time allows students to understand the language gradually without experiencing cognitive fatigue. Thus, using Spotify for a relatively short but regular amount of time is still effective in supporting the development of students' listening skills. This moderate listening duration shows that the quality and consistency of language exposure are more important than excessive but irregular duration. By listening regularly, students can process language information gradually and build a more stable understanding. This approach also helps maintain high learning motivation without feeling burdened.

In addition, Spotify's playback speed feature plays an important role in adjusting the difficulty level of the material to students' listening abilities. This is in line with Rost's (2011) opinion, which emphasizes that listening comprehension will be more optimal when learners can control the speed and complexity of verbal input. The ability to slow down or speed up the audio allows students to learn according to their individual needs, making the learning process more flexible and personalized. Control over audio speed helps students reduce difficulties in understanding speech that is too fast, especially for EFL learners. By adjusting the speed, students can focus on recognizing sounds, vocabulary, and sentence structure more clearly before moving on to normal speed, thereby gradually increasing their confidence in listening.

From the perspective of independent learning, the results of this study also support the concept of learner autonomy. Holec (1981) states that independent learning occurs when learners have control over their own learning goals, materials, and strategies. Students who choose podcast or song content according to their interests and adjust the audio playback speed demonstrate learning independence in improving their listening skills. Furthermore, the use of Spotify as a digital learning medium is in line with the multimedia learning theory proposed by Mayer (2009), which states that learning will be more effective when information is delivered through media that is interesting and easily accessible. Spotify provides a practical and familiar audio platform for students, thereby increasing their motivation and engagement in the English learning process. Control over audio speed helps students reduce difficulties in understanding speech that is too fast, especially for EFL learners. By adjusting the speed, students can focus on recognizing sounds, vocabulary, and sentence structure more clearly before switching to normal speed, thereby gradually increasing their confidence in listening.

Easy access to Spotify via mobile devices allows students to learn anytime, anywhere. This supports more flexible learning that suits the lifestyles of today's students, so that the learning process is not limited to the classroom.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Spotify is not only used as a medium of entertainment, but also as an effective learning medium in improving the listening skills of third-semester English Education students in class TBI 2 at UINSU. The integration of Spotify in English language learning, both formally and independently, can be an alternative learning strategy that is relevant to technological developments and the needs of today's students.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of the Spotify application has a significant positive contribution to improving the listening skills of third-semester students in the English Education Study Program at UINSU. The Spotify application not only functions as a medium of entertainment but also as an effective medium for independent learning through the provision of authentic material in the form of English songs and podcasts. However, the results of the study show that in terms of confidence, some respondents were in the neutral category. This indicates that even though language input exposure through listening activities has been optimal, respondents still need practice in the output aspect, particularly speaking skills, to achieve a higher level of confidence. Therefore, the integration of Spotify in English language learning, both as a supporting medium for classroom learning and as a means of independent learning, needs to be combined with activities that encourage continuous speaking practice. This learning strategy is considered relevant and contextual in responding to the needs of language learners in the information technology era.

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