

Podcast-Based Learning: A Case Study of Malaysian Architecture Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the student perceptions and receptivity toward podcast-based learning in language classrooms for their future careers. Communication skills are extremely important in today's business world where graduates need to communicate effectively and fluently. Podcasts can be valuable teaching tools to help students practice these skills, as they present students with authentic, spontaneous speech, natural intonation patterns, and business terminology. The qualitative descriptive case study design was used to analyse the feedback received from 50 students of the 5th semester of the Architecture course after participating in a targeted, podcast-based classroom instructional trial. The data were gathered using an open-ended survey underpinned by Technology Acceptance Model. The thematic analysis revealed that the podcasts have the potential to produce many anticipated language benefits. Podcasts enable students to develop the ability to listen to fast native speech, to learn authentic vocabulary in authentic contexts, and to practice pronunciation by imitating natural word stress patterns. Moreover, the opportunity to listen in an independent and private room reduces students' anxiety, consequently improving their oral fluency and confidence in their future presentations. The findings of this study show the significant potential of using podcasts as a part of the language curriculum to make mobile technology a crucial instrument for developing a student's communicative fluency and career readiness.

Keywords: Mobile assisted language learning, Podcasts, Receptive language skills, Productive language skills, Technology Acceptance Model.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional model for the language classroom in the university has been highly structured and teacher-led with an audio model. In higher education, listening practice has been traditionally conducted in a formal setting such as computer labs, or as regular audio tracks dedicated for classroom assessments (Oraif & Alrashed, 2025). These materials are useful for new learners but tend to not be suitable for more advanced university students who are trying to prepare for the more dynamic environment of native speakers. Fortunately, this old paradigm has been transformed by modern digital technology by moving the classroom from teacher-centred instruction to Mobile Assisted Language Learning (Hafour, 2022).

Among these new digital tools, podcasts have become very popular as an educational tool. Podcasts are short audio or video recordings that students can listen or watch directly on their own smartphones or tablets. This media is very good for students at university who are learning English because it provides them a good combination of convenience and direct contact with real language (Indahsari, 2020). While rigid classroom listening test is a learning practice that can only be carried out in the classroom, podcasts can be listened to at any time and any place, helping students to cultivate a habit of flexible learning. Student interactions with this technology are critical to the success of the technology as emotional and mental aspects also determine the student's real language competence in language learning (Yang, 2020).

The Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1982) states that language acquisition is best facilitated by frequent exposure to language that is comprehensible, but slightly beyond the learner's level, in a comfortable, low-anxiety environment. Podcasts perfectly match this theory because there are many real topics, difficulties, and conversations that are used naturally in the podcasts, which directly target the listening and speaking confidence of learners. The use of podcasts in university courses, however, still shows a rather uneven distribution across institutions (Anderson & Dau, 2021).

Some students can easily use them for their own study, while others struggle to learn without a clear guide from their lecturers and become frustrated or experience technology fatigue. This demonstrates the fact that university lecturers cannot simply provide students with an audio link and expect them to learn more without effort (Bond et al., 2020). To achieve optimal outcomes, students' actual experiences need to be determined to check how they could facilitate and hinder students' language development. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the students' perception on the use of podcast-based learning to enhance their English language skills. This paper can demonstrate the importance of podcasts to be effectively integrated into contemporary language courses to develop real world fluency for students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model, which was first proposed by Davis (1989), is the main model used for this research. This model is applied to systematically investigate the reason why students accept or reject digital educational tools for skill acquisition. According to the model, the behavioural intention of a person to use the technology in question depends on two main cognitive beliefs namely; Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use. Perceived Usefulness in language learning classrooms can be defined as the learners' personal perception of how using podcasts can positively affect their language learning, language enrichment, or communication. Perceived Ease of Use, on the other hand, is the student's perception of the ease of use of the podcast technology (David, 1989).

Modern adaptations of this model in digital learning settings demonstrate that these two constructs do not operate in isolation. Perceived Ease of Use has a direct causal effect on Perceived Usefulness (Chen et al., 2025). If a student can easily access podcast platforms, search for content that is relevant to their studies, and download podcasts to their mobile devices without any technical hassle, then they will be much more likely to see the value of using it to improve their practical language skills. The subsequent positive cognitive evaluations have a lasting impact on the student's intention to use the media regularly, making the media a requirement that becomes a long-term habit and self-directed study (Pan & Shao, 2020).

Pedagogical Benefits of Podcasts in Language Acquisition

Podcasts have clear benefits over traditional classroom audio tools as revealed by a rising number of contemporary literatures. The greatest advantage is that podcasts provide students with authentic language. The main drawback of typical university listening audios for exams is their forced and artificial nature, while podcasts are native speakers speaking naturally, using authentic idioms, accents, and professional cultural contexts (Gönülal, 2020).

Recent studies show that regular exposure to this type of authentic media leads to great progress in core language skills. Students gain rapid listening comprehension due to their ability to detect natural word boundaries, blended speech, and different intonation patterns (Şendağ et al., 2018). Besides, podcasts can play a positive role in the enhancement of students' speech. Students at the university level benefit significantly from frequent exposure to podcasts in terms of their pronunciation, word knowledge, and confidence in speaking English (Peng et al., 2025).

Podcasts also are a wonderful tool for teaching multimedia instruction cognitively. The human brain has various memory mechanisms for visual and auditory information (Chang et al., 2011). If lecturers provide audio podcasts along with a synchronized transcript, key vocabulary handouts, or visual summaries, they engage both learning

channels simultaneously. The blended approach enables students to process the language more efficiently, facilitating the link between the unfamiliar sound and the correct text meaning, and accelerating their overall receptive competence (Feng & Webb, 2020).

Motivation, Autonomy and Emotional Factors

Podcasts can change the emotional and psychological learning experiences of students, as well as enhancing language learning. Among the more recent findings in research is the significant improvement in students' motivation after the podcast integration (Hernandez & Mendoza, 2025). Since podcasts cover a wide range of topics, including career advice, world news, and so much more, this allows students to choose material that resonates with their personal and professional interests. This freedom transfers the control from lecturer to learner so that language practice is more personal and interesting (Yang, 2020). This shift is a key step towards learner autonomy and overall, increases students' motivation in language learning.

Podcast is portable, enabling university students to study while they are commuting, working in the studio or relaxing at home, turning a busy, everyday part of life into productive learning time. The convenience of this setting makes the language learning process more feasible for students to make it their own not only in the physical classroom (Bozorgian & Shamsi, 2022), but also outside of it.

Apart from that, podcasts are more independent-structured, providing a much-needed emotional safety net. Usually it could be stressful to have group listening activities in university lecture halls because when one student misses any words, the tape will still play, and they will feel left out or left behind. Podcasts remove this pressure entirely, because students can pause, rewind and adjust the speed of the podcast in private. This control reduces what Krashen (1982) calls the affective filter, thereby allowing students to work at their own speed in a low stress situation when dealing with challenging native speech.

Structural Barriers to Independent Technology Integration

However, podcasts can be quite difficult to implement in higher education, even in the face of its many advantages. The lack of instructional scaffolding in the design of university courses is one major obstacle. Podcasts are often presented as simple listening activities that do not provide learners with any strategies to approach them, and therefore learners can feel overwhelmed with rapid native speech (Gönülal, 2020).

The unscripted podcasts can also be a problem for low and intermediate learners. In the absence of a vocabulary guide or text subtitles, less advanced learners may fall behind in fast conversational pace and difficult accents (Dania & Adha, 2021). Students can soon become overwhelmed with this difficulty and become mentally fatigued, leaving them with no interest in the tool completely. These challenges show that technology alone cannot change a classroom. To accept and use podcasts and for them to be effective, they need to be supported by careful instructional design, by matching the difficulty of the podcasts to the level of the learner, and by consistent support from the lecturer (Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative descriptive case study design to assess the role of podcast in improving students' language skills. This study focused on students' immediate experiences and feedback right after a targeted lesson. A qualitative case study design was chosen as it enables a deep understanding of the interaction between a group of students and podcasts in the context of an active classroom lesson, providing rich narrative data about user acceptance. The participants were 50 undergraduate Architecture students (5th semester) from a university in Malaysia. The students came from three classes of a compulsory professional English communication course. These classes were selected through purposive sampling as it was an important transitional period of study for the fifth semester Architecture students, and they are actively preparing for the transition into the professional world.

This study employed an open-ended evaluation questionnaire as the primary research instrument, which was delivered digitally at the end of each lesson. The survey instrument was based on qualitative applications of

TAM by Kampookaew (2020) and Koç et al. (2021). The survey questions were divided into two main areas: the ease of use of podcast features for processing spoken English (Perceived Ease of Use) and usefulness of podcasts for vocabulary gain, pronunciation and oral presentation confidence (Perceived Usefulness). Data was collected in the targeted class in a two-hour regular professional English class. This classroom intervention was exploratory in nature, so a targeted two-hour instructional trial was conducted to investigate immediate user experience, cognitive engagement and technology acceptance prior to the full-scale curriculum integration.

The instructor had a set of podcasts about workplace communication skills and the participants worked through the first half of the session using their own personal headphones, allowing them to work through the material at their own speed. Next, the students were then directed to a link to the open-ended evaluation questionnaire. The participants spent approximately half an hour typing their reflective comments and were directly targeted at their own language development. The qualitative responses that were gathered were then aggregated and analysed by inductive thematic analysis where the specific development of language skills were explicitly and directly captured from the students' own voice. Selected student responses that were highly representative of the final themes were selected to illustrate the reality of each theme to maintain conciseness and clarity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research will provide qualitative feedback that highlight the immediate pedagogical benefits and perceived usefulness of podcasts on the students' language skills. The thematic analysis of the open-ended responses revealed three core themes. In alignment with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), these themes demonstrate how specific digital features (reflecting Perceived Ease of Use) directly influenced the students' evaluations of the tool's practical value for language enhancement (reflecting Perceived Usefulness).

Enhancement of Receptive Skills

The first major language skill area highlighted by the students was the improvement of their receptive skills, which serves as primary qualitative evidence of both Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU). Standard audio tracks in a typical language classroom are too fast and unnatural because students find it hard to hear natural word boundaries and native speaker accents (Rahimi & Chalak, 2017). The qualitative feedback showed that podcasts helped students train their ears to decode difficult English sounds, get familiar with natural usage of the language in real life contexts and they could control the pacing of the input.

Table 1 Podcast Enhance Receptive Skills

Respondent	Responses
A	"When the native speakers talked too fast, I can just change the speed to 0.5 and I can listen better"
B	"I like that I can skip back the audio whenever I want. And I like to learn the cool accent"
C	"I sometimes cannot catch everything lecturer said, but podcast can help if I miss anything"
D	"It sounds natural, like im having conversation with friends"

In terms of language acquisition, listening comprehension involves a decoding process in the brain that performs a task known as auditory decoding, breaking down a stream of native language sounds into words that are recognizable (Hamada, 2025). As Respondent A and Respondent B noted, a native speaker's normal speech, all spoken at one time, may be completely overwhelming for the language learner. The students could make use of the rewind and speed reduction functions in podcasts to produce what Krashen (1982) refers to as comprehensible input. Rather than get frustrated, and tune out of the class, students can change the audio velocity to suit their individual brain processing speed. This physical control enabled them to note the linguistic aspects, including connected speech, blended vowels, and the natural intonation patterns of the language.

From a Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) perspective, the mechanical functionalities highlighted by Respondents A and B directly determine the medium's Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). When students can seamlessly manipulate the audio playback without encountering technical friction, it drastically lowers their

cognitive burden. This fluid ease of use directly triggers a high evaluation of Perceived Usefulness (PU), as demonstrated by Respondents C and D, who recognized the digital tool as an effective academic supplement.

Moreover, the data shows that podcasts fill a huge comprehension gap in the lecture context. Respondent C made it clear that the podcast was useful as a learning tool as not everyone could hear what the lecturer said in class. This indicates that podcasts can be a useful supplementary tool to university lectures for students to listen to academic input at their own pace and satisfy their curiosity level.

Respondents A, B, and C all discussed the mechanical aspects of the audio, while Respondent D emphasized the other equally significant aspect of receptive learning; comfort of natural input. Respondent D commented that the tone of the podcasters was friendly, and the input sounded like a friendly conversation with friends. According to the theory of language acquisition, a speaker's voice that is sincere, natural, spontaneous and relaxed in the use of language calms the student and reduces anxiety (Krashen, 1982). This positive change of mood can help to eliminate the mental obstacles that hinder language learning, allowing students to become more receptive to natural vocabulary and native pronunciation.

Students who learned through mechanical control of asynchronous audio had a lot stronger receptive language foundation than those who learned through the classical playback system used in the classroom (Bozorgian & Shamsi, 2022). The podcast format works well because it makes complex native speech understandable and stress-free to learn, whether through changes in the features of the apps or because of the relaxed conversational style (Şendağ et al., 2018; Gönülal, 2020).

Enhancement of Contextual Vocabulary

The second theme focuses on contextual vocabulary development, illustrating a clear dimension of Perceived Usefulness where learners recognize the direct utility of the podcast for career-specific language improvement. The data shows how the students learned to move from basic classroom English to natural and industry-relevant expressions through listening to authentic communication content. These fifth semester students were working on being professional, so they can listen carefully to the professional vocabulary, idioms, and phrases used by the podcasters.

Table 2 Podcast Enhance Contextual Vocabulary

Respondent	Responses
E	"podcast can show me how people pitch their ideas in real life"
F	"I can learn many words and phrases for workplace setting purposes"
G	"I can learn the natural intonation when speaking, not just for presentation"

From these comments, it is evident that podcasts have a significant part in the process of learning vocabulary in context. Traditional vocabulary lessons tend to focus on memorizing word lists and definitions, without helping students understand how words are used in authentic conversations. As Student G stated, the natural and spontaneous language used during the communication podcasts introduced them to natural professional expressions, transitions between structures and conversational fillers.

This exposure enabled them to view words within the contexts of professional settings. This is exactly in line with contemporary theories about the acquisition of vocabulary, which hold that it is much easier to remember words in natural, high interest contexts than through forced drill (Gönülal, 2020). The podcast helped connect real-world situations with classroom English, and it was an excellent vocabulary resource, in line with the findings of Indahsari (2020) and Hernandez-Lopez & Mendoza-Jimenez (2025) on the importance of authentic digital media.

Enhancement of Pronunciation, Word Stress, and Accent Mimicry

The third theme was related to the students' pronunciation development, word stress and accent mimicry, representing the point where Perceived Ease of Use actively facilitates long-term Perceived Usefulness. One of the most frequent problems encountered by intermediate level students is breaking out of monotonous reading

and developing the ability to use natural word stress. From the qualitative data, it was found that students' listening to native speakers in podcasts helped them to observe, imitate and absorb the professional speech rhythm.

Table 3 Podcast Enhance Pronunciation, Word Stress and Accent Mimicry

Respondent	Responses
H	"I can learn to speak english naturally and help me pronounce many words properly"
I	"I found myself interested and I keep repeating some phrases to learn the accent and flow"
J	"...make my own reading less robotic"

The feedback indicates that podcasts are very effective phonological modelling tools. These subtle pronunciation cues (word stress, sentence intonation, vowel reduction, etc.) can be lost in a traditional classroom setting because of limitations in auditory input and lack of focused phonological training (Rahimi & Chalak, 2017). University students could listen to high quality podcast one at a time and practice auditory shadowing skills, which involve immediate repetition of heard speech, help strengthen auditory processing and fluency development through repeated exposure and metacognitive listening strategies (Bozorgian & Shamsi, 2022).

As Respondent H and Respondent I testified, they could hear the speech clearly and pay close attention. Respondent I explicitly noted that they kept repeating phrases to copy the native speaker's accent and flow. This repetition is crucial in developing spoken fluency as it allows the muscle memory to get used to new sounds.

In addition, this active imitation process directly addressed the issues raised by Respondent J, who had reported that this practice made their own reading sound much less robotic. When language learners are shown a natural way to speak, rather than reading word for word, they no longer read word by word, but rather group words together in natural phrases and pauses. This active noticing process taps into the subconscious learning of pronunciation, thereby assisting students to get away from unnatural, flat speech delivery.

This is a direct confirmation of previous findings which suggest that personal digital audio exposure is an effective phonological and pronunciation learning tool, where controlled listening and repetition using podcasts enhance learners' oral production, fluency, and speech naturalness (Şendağ et al., 2018; Bozorgian & Shamsi, 2022; Peng et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates that podcast-based learning plays a valuable role in enhancing the English language skills of university students preparing for their professional careers. This research shows that there are obvious benefits of podcasts over traditional classroom listening exercises. Through the lens of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the data shows that the podcasts' features directly increase Perceived Ease of Use, allowing students to listen to a podcast at any speed to improve their listening comprehension. This ease-of-use results in a high evaluation of Perceived Usefulness, because students can hear authentic vocabulary from the business world and practice pronunciation rhythms in private with their headphones. By being able to progress at their own pace with natural, native speech without being immediately judged by peers, students can successfully develop both their receptive skills and their productive speaking confidence.

Finally, podcasts are an effective and convenient means of bridging the gap between academic language learning and the ability to speak and understand English in the workplace. The positive outcome of this classroom intervention suggests that private listening time should be introduced in the university language courses for university lecturers and curriculum designers to enable students to repeat phrases and mimic the natural flow of speech. Language lecturers can also create distinct activities around these features. They can assist students in learning the more difficult business phrases, and include audio tracks to pause, mimic, and practice. This active method will directly improve the common habit of speaking robotically and effectively develop oral fluency.

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