

Leveraging Podcasts for Reading Comprehension: Students' Perspectives

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Abstract: Reading comprehension plays a fundamental role in English language learning, yet many university students continue to encounter challenges in understanding academic texts and engaging meaningfully with reading activities. This study aimed to describe students' perspectives on leveraging podcasts for reading comprehension and to identify the challenges and opportunities they experienced during the implementation of the learning activity. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study involved six English Department students at a private university in Malang who had completed the Reading course. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. Prior to the podcast sessions, participants independently read assigned texts and watched supporting videos on selected topics. Data were primarily collected through semi-structured interviews following the podcast sessions and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students perceived podcasts as an engaging learning medium that encouraged preparation, active discussion, and meaningful interaction with reading materials. Participants also reported challenges related to time management, technical issues, and speaking confidence during the learning process. Addressing a gap in prior podcast research, this study highlights students' perspectives on podcasts as an interactive discussion medium following engagement with reading materials. The study suggests that podcasts can serve as an alternative instructional medium to facilitate reading comprehension while encouraging active participation in English language learning.

Keywords: *EFL learners; podcasts; reading comprehension; qualitative description; students' perspectives*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension has long been recognized as one of the core competencies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it enables learners to construct meaning, interpret information, evaluate arguments, and apply knowledge gained from written texts. In higher education, reading extends beyond decoding written language; students are expected to comprehend complex academic texts, integrate information from multiple sources, and critically engage with disciplinary knowledge. Consequently, reading comprehension serves as an essential foundation for academic success while supporting vocabulary development, critical thinking, and overall language proficiency (Alzahrani & Almalki, 2025; Mabrouk Methnani, 2025; Suhaila et al., 2025)

Despite its importance, many EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in reading comprehension due to unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, limited

background knowledge, ineffective reading strategies, and low engagement with reading activities. Successful comprehension requires not only linguistic competence but also learners' active use of appropriate reading strategies (Yapp et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2022). These challenges are often exacerbated by instructional practices that provide limited opportunities for meaningful interaction with reading materials, making reading comprehension an ongoing concern in English language education (Alhabsi et al., 2025; Allehyani, 2025).

To address these challenges, technology-supported learning has increasingly been integrated into language instruction to promote greater learner engagement and autonomy. Digital resources enable students to access learning materials more flexibly while encouraging interactive learning experiences that can improve reading engagement and motivation (Agojo & Cabral, 2024; Liao et al., 2024). Among these resources, podcasts have emerged as a promising instructional medium because they support authentic discussion, collaborative learning, and active learner participation (de la Peña & Cassany, 2024; Engzell et al., 2025; Haneul, 2024).

Although podcasts have traditionally been associated with listening instruction (de la Peña & Cassany, 2024; Engzell et al., 2025; Haneul, 2024), recent studies suggest that their pedagogical value extends to reading comprehension when integrated with reading-based activities. By encouraging learners to discuss, interpret, and reflect on written texts, podcasts provide opportunities to connect textual information with prior knowledge and personal perspectives, thereby fostering deeper engagement with reading (Giefer & Henderson, 2024; Satharatthana, 2024).

Students' perspectives are equally important for evaluating instructional practices because they provide insights into how learners experience and interpret particular learning approaches (Chairunnisa & Kasriyati, 2021). Beyond measuring learning outcomes, investigating students' perspectives helps educators understand factors influencing motivation, engagement, and participation, thereby informing future pedagogical improvements (Masalimova et al., 2024; Ragab et al., 2025; Tamboli et al., 2025).

Previous studies have primarily examined podcasts as instructional resources, (Azizi et al., 2022; Giefer & Henderson, 2024; Satharatthana, 2024) supplementary learning materials, or student-generated products that enhance language proficiency, reading comprehension, learner engagement, and collaborative learning (Gonzalez-Torres & Vargas-Saritama, 2025). Other studies have explored podcasts as complementary learning resources that encourage students to engage more actively with course content (Oslawski-Lopez & Kordsmeier, 2021). However, relatively little qualitative research has examined students' perspectives when podcasts function as an interactive discussion medium following engagement with reading materials, particularly regarding the challenges and opportunities they experience throughout the learning process.

The present study was conducted with English Department students at a private university in Malang, Indonesia. Prior to the podcast sessions, students independently read assigned texts and watched supporting videos to build background knowledge. During the podcast sessions, they discussed the assigned topics by responding to guiding questions posed by the authors. Rather than serving as a formal assessment of reading comprehension, the podcasts functioned as an instructional medium that encouraged discussion, idea sharing, and reflection on the reading materials. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted to explore students' perspectives as well as the challenges and opportunities they experienced during the implementation.

By focusing on students' perspectives, this study contributes to the growing literature on technology-supported language learning, particularly the pedagogical use of podcasts in

reading instruction. Previous studies have primarily examined podcasts as reading-while-listening materials to support reading achievement (Satharatthana, 2024), learner-generated supplements to reading activities (Giefer & Henderson, 2024) or student-produced products in foreign language learning (de la Peña & Cassany, 2024). However, these studies have not specifically examined students' qualitative perspectives on podcasts used as an interactive discussion medium following engagement with assigned reading materials, particularly the challenges and opportunities students experience during this process. Rather than evaluating instructional effectiveness through quantitative measures, this study provides a descriptive qualitative account of students' perspectives on using podcasts to facilitate reading comprehension after engaging with assigned texts and supporting videos.

The findings are expected to contribute to the development of interactive reading activities that promote meaningful learner engagement and provide practical implications for English language educators seeking technology-enhanced approaches to reading instruction. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are students' perspectives on leveraging podcasts for reading comprehension?
2. What challenges and opportunities do students experience during the implementation of podcasts for reading comprehension?

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to describe students' perspectives on leveraging podcasts for reading comprehension and to understand the challenges and opportunities they experienced during the implementation of the learning activity. A descriptive qualitative approach is appropriate when the primary objective of a study is to provide a comprehensive description of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of a phenomenon in its natural context rather than to test hypotheses or establish causal relationships (Sandelowski, 2000). Similarly, Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that qualitative research enables the authorss to explore how individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences through rich and detailed descriptions.

A descriptive qualitative design was considered appropriate because the present study did not seek to measure the effectiveness of podcasts or compare learning outcomes between different instructional approaches. Instead, it aimed to understand how students perceived the use of podcasts as a learning medium to facilitate reading comprehension after engaging with assigned learning materials. Through this approach, the the authors were able to obtain detailed accounts of students' experiences, opinions, and reflections regarding the implementation of podcasts in the learning process.

Participants

The participants of this study were six undergraduate students enrolled in the English Department at a private university in Malang, Indonesia. All participants had successfully completed the Reading course before participating in this study. They were selected because they had acquired sufficient experience with academic reading and possessed the background knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully in the podcast discussions and subsequent interviews.

The study employed convenience sampling to recruit participants. Convenience sampling refers to the selection of participants who are readily accessible to the authors and meet the characteristics required to address the research objectives. This sampling technique is widely used in qualitative research when the authors seek participants who possess relevant

experiences and are willing to share detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. Since the purpose of this study was not to generalize findings to a larger population but to obtain in-depth descriptions of students' perspectives, convenience sampling was considered appropriate for identifying participants who had completed the Reading course and were available to participate in all stages of the study.

The sample size of six participants was also considered appropriate for the descriptive qualitative design. Qualitative research prioritizes the richness and depth of information rather than statistical representation. A relatively small number of participants enables the authors to conduct detailed interviews, generate comprehensive descriptions of participants' experiences, and perform in-depth thematic analysis. Because each participant contributed extensive qualitative data through individual interviews, six participants provided sufficient information to address the research questions while allowing careful interpretation of each participant's perspectives.

Podcast Implementation

The podcast was implemented as a learning medium designed to encourage students to engage in discussion after completing individual learning activities. Prior to each podcast session, participants were provided with an assigned reading text and a supporting video related to the same topic. They were asked to study both learning materials independently before attending the scheduled podcast session. The purpose of this preparatory stage was to familiarize participants with the topic and provide sufficient background knowledge to support meaningful discussion.

During the podcast session, the authors facilitated the discussion by asking a series of guiding questions related to the assigned topic. Rather than functioning as a formal assessment, the podcast provided opportunities for participants to express ideas, share opinions, respond to questions, and discuss information obtained from the reading text and supporting video. The discussion encouraged participants to connect information from multiple learning resources while actively participating in conversations about the topic.

The podcast therefore functioned as an instructional medium that supported learning through discussion and interaction. The experiences gained during these podcast sessions subsequently became the basis for the semi-structured interviews, which explored students' perspectives regarding the learning activity as well as the challenges and opportunities they encountered.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument used to collect data was a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews allow the authors to obtain detailed descriptions of participants' experiences while maintaining sufficient flexibility to explore emerging issues during the interview process (Creswell, J.W., Poth, 2018). This format was considered appropriate because it enabled participants to explain their opinions freely while allowing the authors to ask follow-up questions when further clarification was needed.

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions developed to address the research objectives. The questions explored participants' perspectives on using podcasts for reading comprehension, their experiences during the learning process, and the challenges and opportunities they encountered throughout the implementation. The interview guide was reviewed prior to data collection to ensure that each question was relevant to the research objectives and sufficiently clear for participants.

Each interview was conducted individually after participants completed the podcast session. Interviews were carried out in Indonesian to allow participants to express their

thoughts comfortably and minimize potential misunderstandings that might arise if English were used. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. For reporting purposes, selected interview excerpts were translated from Indonesian into English by the authors. The translated excerpts were carefully compared with the original Indonesian transcripts to ensure that the participants' intended meanings were accurately preserved.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in several stages. Initially, participants were invited to participate voluntarily after they had completed the Reading course. Those who agreed to participate received information regarding the purpose of the study, research procedures, and ethical considerations before providing informed consent.

The authors subsequently distributed the assigned reading texts and supporting videos. Participants independently studied these materials prior to the scheduled podcast session. During the podcast, participants discussed the assigned topics by responding to guiding questions facilitated by the authors. The podcast sessions provided participants with opportunities to exchange ideas and reflect on the content they had previously studied.

Following the completion of the podcast session, each participant participated in an individual semi-structured interview. The interviews focused on participants' perspectives regarding the use of podcasts for reading comprehension, including their perceived benefits, challenges, and overall learning experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach was selected because it provides a systematic yet flexible framework for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. Thematic analysis was considered appropriate for the present study because it enabled the authors to examine students' perspectives regarding the use of podcasts for reading comprehension while identifying recurring themes related to their learning experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and opportunities.

The analysis began with data familiarization. After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed repeatedly to ensure transcription accuracy and to allow the authors to become familiar with the participants' responses. During this stage, initial notes were recorded to capture emerging ideas and meaningful expressions related to the research questions.

The second stage involved generating initial codes. Each transcript was examined line by line to identify meaningful segments of data relevant to students' perspectives on leveraging podcasts for reading comprehension. Similar responses across participants were assigned comparable codes to facilitate subsequent categorization.

Following the coding process, related codes were grouped into broader categories that reflected similar meanings and patterns across participants' responses. These categories were then examined and refined to develop themes that represented the central ideas emerging from the data. The authors continuously compared the themes with the original interview transcripts to ensure that they accurately represented participants' experiences and remained consistent with the research questions.

Finally, the themes were defined, interpreted, and presented descriptively in the findings section. Representative excerpts from the interviews were incorporated to support each theme and provide evidence for the interpretations. Throughout the analysis, emphasis was

placed on preserving participants' meanings while providing a coherent interpretation of their perspectives.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, the semi-structured interview guide was reviewed by an expert in English language education to ensure that the interview questions were relevant to the research objectives, clearly worded, and capable of eliciting comprehensive responses from the participants. The expert's feedback was incorporated into the final version of the interview guide before it was administered.

To strengthen the credibility and dependability of the findings, the coding process involved both the authors and a second coder with experience in qualitative research. After the interview transcripts had been coded independently, the authors and the second coder compared the coding results to identify similarities and discrepancies. Any differences in interpretation were discussed until agreement was reached regarding the most appropriate coding decisions. This collaborative coding process reduced the possibility of individual the authors bias and contributed to the consistency of the thematic analysis.

Additionally, throughout the analytical process, the authors continuously compared the emerging themes with the original interview transcripts to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected participants' responses. These procedures helped enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings by ensuring that the reported themes were grounded in the participants' own experiences and perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study to protect the rights and confidentiality of all participants. Before data collection commenced, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the research procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

Participants provided informed consent before participating in the podcast sessions and interviews. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms or participant codes were used during transcription, analysis, and reporting. All interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely and were accessible only to the authors for research purposes. The data were used solely for academic purposes, and participants' personal identities were not disclosed in any publications or presentations resulting from the study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with six English Department students who participated in the podcast-based learning activity. The findings are organized according to the two research questions. The first section describes students' perspectives on leveraging podcasts for reading comprehension, while the second section presents the challenges and opportunities they experienced throughout the implementation of the learning activity. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) podcasts encouraged better preparation for reading discussions, (2) podcasts increased students' motivation to engage with reading materials, (3) podcasts promoted more strategic engagement with reading, and (4) students experienced both challenges and opportunities during the implementation of podcasts.

Theme 1. Podcasts Encouraged Better Preparation for Reading Discussions

One of the most consistent findings across the interviews was that participants perceived the podcast as encouraging them to prepare more seriously before participating in the discussion. Knowing that they would be expected to share ideas and respond to guiding questions motivated them to read the assigned texts more carefully and watch the supporting videos attentively. Rather than completing the reading merely to fulfill a course requirement, participants reported engaging with the learning materials more purposefully because they anticipated discussing the topic during the podcast session.

Most participants explained that the combination of reading texts and supporting videos helped them understand the topic more comprehensively. While the reading materials provided detailed information, the videos offered visual explanations and contextual examples that clarified unfamiliar concepts. This combination enabled participants to connect information from different sources before expressing their understanding during the discussion.

For example, one participant explained that watching the video before reading helped create a clearer understanding of the topic because the visual explanation made the reading materials easier to comprehend.

“...it really helped me understand the context of the reading material because it became more visual and interactive.” (P1)

Similarly, another participant described the video as an important source of background knowledge that complemented the reading material.

“...the video helped me understand the topic more deeply before I read the text in detail.” (P2)

Several participants further explained that preparing for the podcast encouraged them to pay closer attention while reading. Instead of reading quickly, they attempted to identify the main ideas, supporting information, and important points that could later be discussed during the podcast.

One participant stated:

“...because I knew I would join the podcast, I became more careful when reading the material and tried to understand it before the discussion.” (P3)

Another participant similarly noted that the preparation process motivated them to read more thoroughly than they normally would.

“...the preparation really helped because it encouraged me to read the material more carefully.” (P1)

Across the interviews, participants consistently viewed preparation as an essential part of the learning process rather than a separate activity preceding the podcast. Reading the assigned texts and watching the supporting videos enabled them to enter the discussion with greater confidence and a clearer understanding of the topic. These findings suggest that students perceived the podcast as encouraging meaningful preparation that fostered more active engagement with the reading materials before discussion.

Theme 2. Podcasts Increased Students' Motivation to Engage with Reading Materials

Beyond encouraging better preparation, participants consistently described podcasts as a learning medium that increased their motivation to engage with the assigned reading materials. Rather than perceiving reading as an isolated academic requirement, they viewed it as an essential preparation for participating in a meaningful discussion. Knowing that they would be expected to explain ideas, respond to guiding questions, and communicate their understanding motivated them to approach the reading activities more seriously.

Several participants explained that preparing for the podcast created a sense of responsibility because they wanted to contribute actively to the discussion. This expectation encouraged them not only to complete the assigned readings but also to understand the content sufficiently to express their opinions during the podcast session.

As P5 explained:

"Preparing for the podcast motivated me to understand the material well because I did not want to have nothing to say during the discussion. I wanted to contribute meaningfully to the conversation." (P5)

Similarly, P2 emphasized that participating as a podcast speaker encouraged greater responsibility for mastering the assigned material.

"As a speaker, I felt personally responsible for answering the questions well. That responsibility encouraged me to master the material before participating in the podcast discussion." (P2)

Likewise, P6 reported that preparing to become a podcast speaker significantly increased motivation to study the material more carefully.

"Preparing to become a podcast speaker strongly motivated me to study the material more carefully because I wanted to be well prepared for the discussion." (P6)

Participants also highlighted that the conversational nature of the podcast distinguished it from more conventional reading assignments. Rather than simply completing a written task, the opportunity to discuss the topic encouraged them to become more actively involved in the learning process. For several participants, this interactive format made reading more enjoyable and meaningful.

P5 described this experience by explaining:

"Watching videos or listening to podcasts feels more enjoyable, almost like entertainment, so the information stays in my mind more easily." (P5)

Similarly, P3 explained that the expectation of participating in the discussion motivated greater engagement with the assigned reading.

"I knew that if I did not read the material, I would not know what to say when answering the podcast questions. Therefore, I had no choice but to read and understand the material beforehand." (P3)

These responses indicate that participants perceived podcasts as creating a learning environment that encouraged active participation and purposeful preparation. Instead of reading solely to complete an academic task, they became motivated to understand the material so they could contribute meaningfully to the discussion. The participants' responses further suggest that motivation emerged from a combination of personal responsibility, interactive discussion, and the opportunity to communicate their understanding rather than simply completing the assigned reading. Consequently, podcasts were perceived not merely

as a technological medium but as an instructional activity that encouraged greater engagement with reading materials.

Theme 3. Podcasts Promoted More Strategic Engagement with Reading

Another prominent theme emerging from the interviews was that podcasts encouraged students to engage with reading materials more strategically. Rather than reading passively to complete an assignment, participants reported adopting more deliberate reading approaches because they anticipated discussing the topic during the podcast session. The expectation of responding to questions and expressing their understanding encouraged them to identify important information, revisit unfamiliar concepts, and organize their ideas before participating in the discussion.

Several participants explained that they became more selective in identifying the main ideas and supporting information while reading. Instead of attempting to remember every detail, they focused on concepts that would help them explain the topic during the podcast discussion.

For example, P4 explained:

"I mainly focused on the key points and the main ideas presented in the reading." (P4)

Similarly, P6 reported that preparation for the podcast encouraged greater attention to the central themes of the reading.

"I mainly focused on the themes and the key ideas that would become the main topics of discussion during the podcast." (P6)

The interviews also suggest that students became more aware of their own understanding while preparing for the discussion. Several participants described rereading the assigned materials, connecting information from the supporting videos with the reading texts, and organizing their thoughts before expressing their ideas. Rather than relying solely on memory, they actively monitored their comprehension to ensure they could participate confidently in the podcast.

P2 described this preparation process by stating:

"Reading the material beforehand helped me understand the flow of the discussion. I did not have to think of new answers during the podcast because I had already organized my ideas while preparing." (P2)

Likewise, P1 explained that careful preparation enabled more focused participation during the discussion.

"Reading the material beforehand made the discussion more focused and meaningful because I already had a basic understanding of the topic before participating in the podcast." (P1)

Another strategy repeatedly mentioned by participants involved using the supporting videos to establish background knowledge before reading the assigned texts. Rather than replacing the reading activity, the videos functioned as complementary learning resources that enabled participants to identify essential information more efficiently.

As P3 explained:

"The video highlighted the main ideas, making it easier for me to identify the important information while reading." (P3)

Similarly, P5 reported:

“Watching the video first helped me focus better on the important ideas before reading the text.” (P5)

These findings indicate that participants did not simply increase the amount of time spent reading. Instead, they described meaningful changes in how they approached the reading process. Preparing for the podcast encouraged them to establish background knowledge, identify important ideas, organize information, and continuously monitor their understanding before participating in the discussion. Consequently, students perceived podcasts as encouraging a more strategic approach to reading, in which comprehension was supported through purposeful preparation rather than passive completion of the assigned texts.

Theme 4. Students Experienced Both Challenges and Opportunities During the Implementation of Podcasts

Although participants generally expressed positive perspectives toward leveraging podcasts for reading comprehension, they also identified several challenges throughout the implementation of the podcast activities. These challenges primarily related to maintaining concentration while preparing for the discussion, managing preparation time, and developing the confidence to communicate their understanding during the podcast. Nevertheless, participants consistently emphasized that these challenges were outweighed by the opportunities provided through the learning experience.

One challenge reported by several participants was the need for careful preparation before participating in the discussion. Because students were expected to explain ideas and respond to questions, they felt responsible for thoroughly understanding the assigned materials beforehand. Although this expectation increased their motivation to prepare, it also required greater effort than completing conventional reading assignments.

As P2 explained:

“The podcast made me feel responsible for studying both the reading material and the supporting video beforehand because I wanted to be well prepared for the discussion.” (P2)

Similarly, P3 described the expectation of participating in the discussion as a motivating challenge.

“Traditional assignments often made me postpone reading because there was no immediate need to understand the material. In contrast, the podcast required me to understand the topic beforehand because I would be expected to discuss it during the session.” (P3)

Some participants also acknowledged personal challenges associated with maintaining concentration while studying independently. Rather than viewing this as a weakness of the podcast activity itself, they explained that they developed personal strategies to overcome these difficulties.

For example, P5 stated:

“I sometimes find it difficult to concentrate, so I usually study the material on my own in a quiet place. Watching the video first helped me focus better on the important ideas before reading the text.” (P5)

Similarly, P6 emphasized that thorough preparation was necessary because active participation required a solid understanding of the topic.

“Preparing to become a podcast speaker strongly motivated me to study the material more carefully because I wanted to be well prepared for the discussion.” (P6)

Despite these challenges, participants consistently described the podcast as providing valuable learning opportunities. One of the most frequently mentioned opportunities was the chance to participate actively in academic discussions. Rather than completing reading tasks individually, students were encouraged to communicate their understanding, exchange ideas, and respond to questions based on the assigned materials.

P1 explained:

“The discussion allowed me to exchange ideas and hear explanations from others that I might not have discovered on my own. This helped deepen my understanding of the reading material.” (P1)

Likewise, P4 described the podcast as providing a new and effective learning experience. *“It gave me a new learning experience because it was my first time participating in a podcast. I found it to be a very effective way to discuss the topic.” (P4)*

Another opportunity repeatedly identified by participants was the development of greater confidence when expressing their understanding of academic texts. Because students prepared by reading the assigned materials and watching the supporting videos before the discussion, they felt more capable of contributing their ideas during the podcast.

As P6 noted:

“Reading the material beforehand made me feel more confident because I already understood the topic before the discussion began.” (P6)

Similarly, P5 explained:

“Preparing for the podcast motivated me to understand the material well because I did not want to have nothing to say during the discussion. I wanted to contribute meaningfully to the conversation.” (P5)

Participants also reported that the podcast encouraged greater interest in reading beyond the assigned materials. Several explained that discussing the topic motivated them to seek additional information and reflect more deeply on what they had learned. Consequently, reading became more purposeful because it was directly connected to an authentic communicative activity rather than functioning as an isolated academic task.

Overall, the findings suggest that students perceived the implementation of podcasts as presenting both challenges and opportunities. While the activities required greater preparation, sustained concentration, and active participation, these demands were viewed positively because they encouraged students to engage more seriously with the assigned reading materials. At the same time, the podcast created opportunities for meaningful discussion, increased confidence, and deeper engagement with reading through collaborative interaction.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored students' perspectives on leveraging podcasts for reading comprehension and examined the challenges and opportunities they experienced throughout the implementation of podcast-based learning activities. Overall, the findings indicate that students perceived podcasts as more than a technological tool for communication. Instead, they viewed podcasts as an instructional medium that encouraged purposeful preparation,

promoted active engagement with reading materials, and created opportunities to discuss and reflect on their understanding of the assigned texts. Although participants encountered several practical challenges, such as time management, technical issues, and speaking confidence, these challenges did not diminish the perceived educational value of the activity. Rather, students consistently emphasized that participating in the podcast discussions encouraged them to prepare more carefully, engage more actively with the reading materials, and communicate their understanding in a meaningful way. These findings suggest that the educational value of podcasts lies not solely in the technology itself but in how podcasts are integrated into a structured learning process that combines independent preparation, discussion, and reflection.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that students perceived podcasts as encouraging more meaningful preparation before participating in discussion. Rather than reading the assigned texts merely to complete a course requirement, participants reported becoming more attentive to the content because they anticipated discussing the topic and responding to guiding questions during the podcast session. This expectation appeared to transform reading from a passive activity into a purposeful learning process in which students actively sought to understand, organize, and communicate information obtained from the assigned materials.

This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that podcast-supported learning can promote active learner engagement by creating opportunities for students to participate in knowledge construction rather than simply receiving information. de la Peña & Cassany (2024) argue that podcast-based learning encourages students to become active contributors to classroom discourse by discussing, explaining, and negotiating ideas with others. Likewise, Engzell et al. (2025) emphasize that podcasts foster collaborative learning environments in higher education by facilitating interaction and reflective dialogue among learners. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that the perceived value of podcasts emerged before the discussion itself. Students consistently described the anticipation of participating in the podcast as motivating them to prepare more thoroughly, suggesting that the instructional process surrounding the podcast was equally important as the discussion itself.

The participants' responses also indicate that preparation involved more than completing assigned readings. Before joining the podcast sessions, students independently read the assigned texts and watched supporting videos related to the same topic. They explained that the videos helped clarify unfamiliar concepts, provided contextual information, and enabled them to establish background knowledge before engaging with the written texts. Rather than replacing reading activities, the videos complemented the reading process by making abstract ideas easier to understand. Consequently, students entered the podcast discussions with greater confidence because they had already developed a broader understanding of the topic through multiple learning resources.

These findings resonate with studies on technology-supported reading, which suggest that digital learning resources can enhance students' engagement with academic texts when they encourage active interaction rather than passive information consumption. Agojo and Cabral (2024) reported that technology-assisted reading instruction improved learners' willingness to interact with reading materials by providing more engaging learning experiences, while Liao et al. (2024) argue that digital learning environments encourage learners to process information through multiple modes of representation, thereby supporting deeper cognitive engagement with texts. Similarly, Yu et al. (2022) demonstrated that students' reading comprehension is influenced not only by the reading medium itself but also by the instructional activities that accompany the reading process. The present study supports these

arguments by showing that students perceived the combination of reading texts, supporting videos, and podcast discussions as an integrated learning sequence that encouraged more purposeful engagement with reading materials.

An important contribution of the present study lies in how participants described the relationship between preparation and discussion. Previous podcast research has primarily focused on podcasts as instructional resources, learning materials, or student-generated products that contribute to learning outcomes (Gonzalez-Torres & Vargas-Saritama, 2025). In contrast, participants in this study perceived the podcast primarily as an interactive discussion medium that encouraged them to prepare more carefully before participating in conversation. This finding suggests that the educational value of podcasts may not depend exclusively on listening to podcast content or producing podcasts themselves, but also on the expectation of communicating ideas developed through prior engagement with reading materials.

Furthermore, participants explained that preparing for the podcast encouraged them to become more conscious readers. Several described rereading difficult sections, identifying important ideas, and connecting information across the reading texts and supporting videos before participating in the discussion. Such behaviours reflect active engagement with reading rather than superficial completion of assigned tasks. Yapp et al. (2023) similarly argue that effective reading comprehension requires learners to employ purposeful reading strategies that enable them to monitor understanding, identify essential information, and integrate ideas throughout the reading process. The participants' experiences therefore suggest that podcasts can encourage strategic engagement with reading by providing students with an authentic communicative purpose for reading rather than treating reading as an isolated academic exercise.

Taken together, these findings indicate that students perceived podcasts as facilitating meaningful preparation rather than simply supporting classroom discussion. The instructional sequence implemented in this study, consisting of independent reading, supporting videos, podcast discussion, and subsequent reflection, created opportunities for students to interact with the assigned materials from multiple perspectives before articulating their understanding. This pattern may be explained by the communicative purpose created by the podcast activity. Because students anticipated that they would need to explain, justify, and discuss ideas from the assigned materials, reading became preparation for meaningful interaction rather than merely the completion of an academic task. This expectation appeared to encourage students to monitor their understanding, identify relevant information, and organize their ideas before participating in the discussion. Consequently, the positive perspectives reported by participants appear to result not only from the podcast itself but also from the pedagogical design that positioned discussion as the culmination of a structured reading process.

In the Indonesian EFL higher-education context represented by this study, particularly among English Department students at a private university in Malang, this instructional sequence illustrates how reading activities can be connected with opportunities to use English for purposeful academic communication. Thus, lecturers may consider integrating structured podcast discussions after reading activities to provide students with opportunities to interpret texts, articulate their understanding, and engage collaboratively with academic content. This finding contributes to the growing literature on technology-enhanced language learning by illustrating how podcasts can function as an instructional medium that promotes purposeful engagement with reading comprehension through preparation, interaction, and reflection rather than through technology alone.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored students' perspectives on leveraging podcasts for reading comprehension and examined the challenges and opportunities they experienced during the implementation of podcast-based learning activities. The findings indicate that students perceived podcasts as a meaningful instructional medium that encouraged them to prepare more thoroughly, engage actively with reading materials, and participate confidently in academic discussions. Although participants encountered challenges related to time management, speaking confidence, and occasional technical issues, these difficulties did not diminish the overall value of the learning experience. Instead, students considered the opportunities for discussion, collaboration, and reflection to outweigh the challenges they experienced.

This study advances the current understanding of technology-supported language learning by demonstrating that podcasts can serve not only as instructional resources but also as interactive discussion media that facilitate students' engagement with reading. Rather than emphasizing learning outcomes alone, the study provides qualitative evidence of how students experience podcast-supported reading activities, thereby extending existing literature that has primarily focused on instructional effectiveness. These findings highlight the importance of designing podcast-based learning activities that encourage preparation, interaction, and reflection to support meaningful reading experiences in higher education.

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. Since the study involved only six participants from a single English Department at one private university, the results are context-specific and are not intended to be generalized to broader educational settings. Future research may include participants from different institutions, employ larger samples or mixed-methods and longitudinal designs, and investigate how podcast-supported learning influences reading comprehension over time. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical potential of podcasts in English language education.

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