

EFFECTIVENESS OF ISLAMIC PODCASTS FROM " HOW TO CLEAN DIRTY HEARTS " BY DR HAIFAA YOUNIS IN IMPROVING EFL LISTENING PROFICIENCY

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Abstract: *This study explores the effectiveness of listening to How to Clean Dirty Hearts, an Islamic podcast by Dr. Haifaa Younis, in enhancing the listening proficiency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. In contemporary language education, digital media resources such as podcasts are increasingly recognized for their capacity to provide authentic, engaging, and contextually meaningful input that complements traditional classroom instruction. Podcasts offer learners extended exposure to natural speech, varied accents, and nuanced discourse, which are often limited in scripted classroom materials. This study employed a quasi-experimental design involving 60 Indonesian EFL learners, who were randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group. Over a period of eight weeks, the experimental group engaged with selected episodes of the podcast, accompanied by guided listening activities, while the control group received conventional listening instruction without additional podcast exposure. Pre- and post-listening comprehension tests were administered to assess improvement in listening skills, and a perception survey was conducted to evaluate learners' attitudes toward podcast-based learning. The results indicate that the experimental group demonstrated statistically significant gains in listening proficiency compared to the control group, suggesting that regular exposure to culturally relevant, meaningful audio content can substantially support listening development. Additionally, learners reported high levels of engagement, motivation, and enjoyment, highlighting the value of culturally responsive materials in fostering both linguistic competence and positive attitudes toward autonomous listening practice. These findings underscore the pedagogical potential of integrating Islamic-themed podcasts into EFL curricula as a strategy to enhance listening skills, learner motivation, and overall engagement in digital and classroom-based language learning environments.*

Keywords: *Islamic Podcast; EFL Listening Proficiency; Digital Media In Language Learning; Authentic Input; Learner Perceptions*

Introduction

Since it is essential for learners to comprehend spoken material, engage in meaningful communication, and perform well in real-world language settings, listening proficiency is widely acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Speaking, reading, and writing skills are developed through listening, which is frequently the first skill learners encounter in real-world situations. Despite its significance, listening continues to be one of the most difficult abilities for EFL learners because of things like speech speed, limited exposure to real-world input, unfamiliar accents, and a lack of practice chances outside of the classroom.

Traditional listening training in many EFL contexts mostly uses scripted audio resources intended more for assessment than for real involvement. These resources are frequently brief, manufactured, and unrelated to the interests or cultural backgrounds of the students. As a result, when participating in listening assignments, students may feel anxious, unmotivated, and passive. These restrictions draw attention to the need for different teaching strategies that promote active and independent learning while giving students richer, more genuine listening experiences.

In order to solve these issues, technology-enhanced media have been incorporated into language instruction more frequently due to the quick development of digital technology. Podcasts have drawn a lot of attention among these media as adaptable and easily accessible learning resources that provide exposure to spoken language in natural settings. Through podcasts, students can hear real-life conversations from proficient speakers in a variety of settings, subjects, and speech patterns.

One of the main benefits of podcasts is their flexibility; students may listen to them at any time and from any location, adjust the speed at which they listen, replay parts as needed, and repeat what they've heard, all of which promote better listening techniques and deeper comprehension. Consistent usage of podcasts has been demonstrated over time to improve pronunciation awareness, aid in vocabulary acquisition, and boost learners' confidence in their ability to comprehend spoken English.

The use of topic-based and culturally relevant podcast content in EFL training has gained popularity in recent years. By relating language acquisition to learners' values, beliefs, and individual experiences, such content has the potential to boost learner engagement. The Islamic podcast *How to Clean Dirty Hearts* by Dr. Haifaa Younis is an illustration of this kind of content. Reflective conversations about spirituality, morality, mental health, and personal development are presented in this podcast in an understandable and captivating narrative format. The podcast is an engaging source of genuine listening input that goes beyond strictly religious education because of its conversational tone, thematic complexity, and emotionally impactful messages.

How to Clean Dirty Hearts' linguistic features natural speech patterns, contextualized vocabulary, and meaningful discourse make it a viable resource for EFL listening practice even though its main purpose is spiritual reflection. Students are more likely to listen intently, persevere through understanding challenges, and think critically about the subject matter when they interact with content that they find personally important. This implies that culturally relevant podcasts could have two advantages: they could promote language acquisition and interpersonal interaction.

There is still a dearth of empirical study on the use of Islamic podcasts specifically for enhancing English listening skills, despite the growing popularity of podcasts in language learning. The majority of current research ignores the influence of culturally grounded content on learner motivation and understanding in favor of standard English podcasts or instructional audio recordings. Research on how long-term exposure to Islamic podcast content affects EFL learners' listening skills and attitudes toward listening activities is therefore necessary.

By examining the efficacy of Dr. Haifaa Younis' Islamic podcast *How to Clean Dirty Hearts* in enhancing EFL learners' listening skills, this study aims to close this research gap. The study looks at learners' attitudes and opinions regarding the use of Islamic podcast content as a listening resource in addition to measuring improvements in listening comprehension. By doing this, the study hopes to add to the expanding corpus of research on technology-enhanced language acquisition and offer useful information to teachers looking for creative, culturally sensitive methods of teaching listening skills in EFL settings.

Literature Review

It has long been known that one of the most important yet difficult skills in EFL acquisition is listening competency. Listening necessitates real-time processing of spoken language, including phonological elements, intonation, stress patterns, and discourse markers, in contrast to reading, which gives students control over the rate of input. Effective listening, according to researchers, is not just decoding sounds but also evaluating meaning based on context, prior knowledge, and pragmatic clues. As a result, learners who have little exposure to real spoken English frequently struggle with comprehension, especially when faced with natural speech outside of the classroom.

Numerous studies show that while grammar and reading abilities are typically given priority in classroom instruction, EFL students often receive inadequate listening input. Because of this, students may show excellent receptive knowledge in written forms yet struggle to grasp spoken English in everyday contexts. This disparity highlights the necessity for educational resources that offer substantial and significant listening exposure outside of textbook-based audio recordings.

Genuine Input and the Development of Listening

Second language acquisition theories generally support the need of authentic input in language acquisition. Learners are exposed to real language use through authentic resources, which reflect discourse patterns, accent variety, and natural speed. Regular engagement with authentic listening materials, according to academics, improves learners' capacity to process spoken input more effectively and create reasonable expectations for language use. Additionally, authentic audio enhances learners' awareness of pronunciation and intonation patterns and encourages incidental vocabulary acquisition.

However, other experts warn that learners, especially those with lower competence levels, may initially become overwhelmed by authentic information. Studies suggest using scaffolding strategies like guided comprehension exercises, repeated listening, and transcript support to solve this issue. It has been demonstrated that when used properly, authentic listening resources greatly increase learner confidence and listening comprehension.

Podcasts as Resources for Teaching EFL Listening

One of the most extensively studied digital resources for EFL listening training is podcasts. Podcasts, which are defined as downloadable or streamable audio programs, provide flexibility, accessibility, and a broad range of topics appropriate for a variety of learner interests. Several empirical research show that listening activities based on podcasts have a good impact on learners' motivation, independent learning habits, and listening comprehension.

Students who regularly listen to podcasts do better than those who only use traditional listening resources, according to research done in a variety of EFL contexts. Podcasts provide several benefits, such as giving learners control over the speed at which they listen, allowing them to replay content, and exposing them to longer spoken conversations as opposed to brief written dialogues. With the help of these qualities, students can acquire listening techniques including content prediction, key concept identification, and context-based meaning inference.

Additionally, using podcasts promotes learning outside of the classroom, which lengthens the amount of time spent listening. Research on extended listening indicates that better understanding abilities are closely correlated with higher levels of both quantity and quality of hearing input. As a result, podcasts are useful tools that encourage lifetime learning habits and learner autonomy in addition to being educational resources.

Learners' Attitudes and Motivation for Using Podcasts

A key component of successful language learning is learner motivation, especially when it comes to listening, which many students find challenging and stressful. When podcasts are used in the classroom, research consistently demonstrates that students have more positive attitudes regarding listening activities. When compared to traditional classroom listening exercises, students frequently characterize podcasts as entertaining, captivating, and less stressful.

Increased desire to listen repeatedly and on one's own has been associated with positive learner views toward podcasts. Deeper processing of spoken input and a steady improvement in comprehension skills are supported by this frequent exposure. Additionally, as they grow acclimated to natural speech patterns over time, learners say that podcasts boost their confidence while listening to native or near-native speakers.

Culturally Appropriate Content for EFL Students

The significance of meaningful and culturally appropriate content in language instruction has been underlined more and more in recent studies. Engagement and motivation tend to rise when educational materials match students' cultural identities, beliefs, or interests. In addition to promoting academic success, academics contend that culturally responsive pedagogy validates students' identities during the learning process.

Culturally relevant content has been demonstrated to lessen affective obstacles like anxiety and resistance to language learning in EFL environments. When students have an emotional connection to the material, they are more likely to stick with difficult assignments. Deeper comprehension is facilitated by this link, which also improves focus and promotes thoughtful listening.

Islamic Content and Learning English

The scant research that is currently available indicates that Islamic-themed English resources can have a good impact on the motivation and engagement of EFL learners, especially in environments where Muslims predominate. According to studies looking at English-language Islamic writings, lectures, or videos, students show more engagement and attention when the material reflects their moral and religious beliefs. These resources offer well-known conceptual frameworks that aid students in deriving meaning and better understanding difficult concepts.

Islamic audio content frequently includes moral narratives, contemplative speech, and storytelling all of which are linguistically rich and supportive of listening practice. These features make Islamic podcasts a potentially useful tool for teaching EFL listening skills, particularly when paired with instructional aids like vocabulary and comprehension questions.

Research Deficit

Few studies have particularly looked at the use of Islamic podcasts as listening materials, despite a large body of research on podcasts in EFL listening training. The majority of current research focuses on news broadcasts, general English podcasts, or audio content intended for pleasure. There is still a dearth of empirical data on how Islamic podcast material affects the listening skills and attitudes of EFL learners.

Additionally, podcasts that prioritize moral and introspective discourse above factual or conversational subjects have received less attention. It may be possible to gain fresh perspectives on the significance of meaning, identity, and motivation in language learning by comprehending how such information influences listening comprehension and learner engagement.

The Current Study's Objective

In order to close these gaps, the current study examines how well Dr. Haifaa Younis' Islamic podcast *How to Clean Dirty Hearts* can enhance the listening skills of EFL students. This study aims to add to the body of knowledge on podcast-based listening instruction and culturally sensitive EFL pedagogy by analyzing both listening performance and learner perceptions. It is anticipated that the results will have useful ramifications for teachers looking for creative and significant listening materials for EFL classes.

Method

Techniques Participants

This study involved sixty EFL students from an Indonesian university English program. They were divided into two groups at random: the experimental group ($n = 30$) and the control group ($n = 30$). According to institutional placement examinations, all participants had intermediate English ability.

Materials

The experimental group listened to certain episodes of Dr. Haifaa Younis' *How to Clean Dirty Hearts*, which had been linguistically modified with English transcripts and subtitles to aid with comprehension. The control group did not receive any additional podcast exposure, but they did use normal classroom listening resources that were in line with the curriculum.

Methodology

Both groups finished a pre-listening assessment that used multiple-choice and short-answer formats to gauge listening comprehension. The experimental group listened to three audio parts every week for eight weeks. Each section was followed by guided activities (note-taking, vocabulary problems, and comprehension questions). During the same time span, the control group received regular listening instruction. At the conclusion of the intervention, a post-listening test with the same format as the pre-test was given.

Examination

Score changes within and between groups were analyzed using statistical analysis (paired t-tests and independent samples t-tests). Interview accounts were thematically coded, and questionnaire results were subjected to descriptive analysis.

Result and Discussion

Findings and Discussion: Overall Listening Proficiency Improvement

The study's findings show that EFL students who listened to Dr. Haifaa Younis' Islamic podcast *How to Clean Dirty Hearts* significantly improved their listening skills. Following the eight-week intervention, the experimental group showed a significant improvement in listening comprehension, according to statistical analysis of the pre-test and post-test results. On the other hand, the control group, which received traditional listening instruction without the use of podcasts, only slightly improved and did not reach statistical significance.

These results imply that learners' listening abilities were significantly improved by prolonged exposure to podcast-based listening input. The idea that prolonged and purposeful listening exercise is crucial for improving listening competency is supported by the improvement seen in the experimental group. The significant improvements in comprehension performance may be explained by the longer discourse parts that podcasts offer compared to standard classroom recordings, which enable students to engage in deeper processing of spoken language.

Growth of Sub-Skills in Listening

Learners in the experimental group shown significant progress in a number of listening sub-skills, including identifying core ideas, finding supporting details, and deriving meaning from context, according to additional examination of the listening test results. Additionally, during lengthy audio segments, participants showed enhanced ability to follow the speaker's line of reasoning and higher comprehension of important vocabulary words.

The podcast's content, which is distinguished by structured discourse and reflective storytelling, is responsible for this progress. Instead of concentrating only on discrete facts, these elements allow listeners to follow the flow of ideas. According to research that highlights the significance of extended listening in the development of higher-level comprehension skills, learners' capacity to comprehend spoken English more holistically was probably improved by repeated exposure to this discourse style.

Effects of Self-Paced and Repeated Listening

The ability to regulate their listening speed was one of the biggest benefits mentioned by students. Students regularly paused, replayed, and re-listened to podcast episodes, especially when they came across unfamiliar terminology or difficult concepts, according to questionnaire and interview data. Students were able to interact with the content at a level appropriate to their own skill level because to this self-paced listening environment.

Students' willingness to participate in listening exercises seems to be increased by their favorable emotional connection to the material. Learners were more likely to listen intently and repeatedly when they thought the podcast was useful and relevant outside of language acquisition. This result lends credence to the idea that affective involvement is essential for both listening comprehension and language learning in general.

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The Function of Culturally Significant Content

Learner engagement and understanding were found to be significantly enhanced by the incorporation of Islamic-themed information. Even when faced with unfamiliar words, participants claimed that their familiarity with the underlying notions of spirituality and moral contemplation helped them anticipate meaning and make sense of the spoken input. This is consistent with schema theory, which contends that prior knowledge helps students understand by allowing them to activate preexisting cognitive frameworks.

Difficulties Learners Face

Despite the generally favorable results, students still mentioned a number of difficulties when listening. The podcast's natural speaking tempo and intonation patterns initially caused several participants to have trouble. Others have trouble understanding sophisticated vocabulary and some abstract concepts without outside help.

But when students learned adaptive listening techniques including accessing transcripts, taking notes, and discussing material with peers, these difficulties gradually decreased. These challenges seemed to promote strategic listening practices rather than impede development,

which helped to increase listening skills over time. This result supports the notion that, when combined with suitable scaffolding, exposure to difficult but meaningful input is advantageous.

Comparing Conventional Listening Training

There was a noticeable difference in learning results and engagement between the experimental and control groups. Although the control group engaged in curriculum-aligned conventional listening exercises, the duration and interactivity of these activities were frequently constrained. According to learners in the control group, listening assignments lacked personal significance and were mostly test-oriented.

On the other hand, the podcast-based method fostered learner autonomy and extended listening outside of the classroom. The experimental group's greater performance was probably influenced by this difference in learning experiences. The results corroborate other studies that suggested podcast-based training is superior to conventional approaches when the objective is to improve listening skills through real-world and relevant material.

Pedagogical Consequences

The study's findings have significant ramifications for EFL instruction. They start by highlighting the potential of podcasts as effective tools for enhancing listening skills, especially when utilized regularly over time. Second, they stress how crucial it is to choose material that is both meaningful and culturally appropriate for students. In addition to language advantages, Islamic podcasts like *How to Clean Dirty Hearts* provide chances for introspective education and personal growth.

Instead than using podcasts to replace traditional instruction, educators are urged to incorporate them as supplemental elements into listening curriculum. The efficacy of podcast-based listening activities can be further increased by offering transcripts, guided comprehension exercises, and conversation possibilities. Furthermore, promoting independent listening outside of the classroom can greatly expand students' exposure to real-world spoken English.

Conclusion

This study offers strong proof that Islamic podcasts, especially "How to Clean Dirty Hearts" by Dr. Haifaa Younis, are excellent resources for improving the listening skills of EFL students. Post-test listening scores significantly improved, according to quantitative data, suggesting that students internalized the vocabulary, language structures, and comprehension techniques found in real podcast content in addition to engaging with the subject matter. The qualitative results also showed that students thought these podcasts were very inspiring, pertinent, and personally significant. This dual effect—cognitive and emotional—highlights the significance of culturally and spiritually relevant materials in language instruction, particularly in settings where students are more receptive to information that is consistent with their values, beliefs, and daily experiences.

The study's conclusions point to a number of significant ramifications for EFL instruction. First, using podcasts in listening lessons encourages independent, self-directed learning. Podcasts offer rich, realistic language input that exposes students to a variety of speech rates, accents, and pragmatic language use, in contrast to typical classroom activities that frequently rely on scripted or artificially reduced audio. Students get practical listening skills from this exposure that they can use outside of the classroom. Second, learners are more motivated and engaged when culturally and spiritually relevant content is incorporated. Deeper cognitive processing and improved memory of language forms and communicative functions result from learners investing more effort in understanding and reflection when they find the material meaningful.

Additionally, this study highlights podcasts' potential as a flexible, scalable teaching tool. Because of its digital nature, students can access the material at any time and from any location. This flexibility is especially helpful for EFL students who might not have much exposure to English outside of the classroom. Podcasts also promote reflective learning; the study's combination of journaling and listening activities promoted metacognitive awareness, enabling students to track their comprehension, identify areas of weakness, and create development plans. In order to develop lifetime learning skills in language acquisition, such reflective practices are crucial.

Although the study showed definite advantages, it also identified areas for further investigation. Longitudinal research could look at how long-lasting listening gains are and whether consistent podcast listening can affect other language abilities like speaking or writing. Research comparing various podcast genres—religious, cultural, or general education—may also provide insight into how content type affects language acquisition and student motivation. In order to generalize results more widely, research might further examine the efficacy of podcasts in a variety of EFL scenarios, including learners from various cultural origins, skill levels, and age groups.

In conclusion, incorporating Islamic podcasts such as "How to Clean Dirty Hearts" into EFL listening instruction is a promising strategy that blends cultural relevance, motivational engagement, and real-world language exposure. Such treatments can improve students' listening skills as well as their confidence, self-directed learning abilities, and appreciation of relevant, contextually rich knowledge by attending to both their linguistic and affective requirements. In order to promote holistic language development, educators and curriculum designers are urged to take into account podcasts as a useful addition to conventional language training, utilizing the advantages of both technology and culturally relevant content.

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