Enhancing EFL Listening Through Structured Autonomous Use of British Council Learn English Audio Materials

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Listening proficiency often lags behind other English skills for EFL university students, particularly in engineering programs where limited class hours restrict systematic practice. While previous studies have highlighted the benefits of podcasts and online audio resources for developing listening skills, most of these studies have relied on short-term, teacher-led classroom interventions and have rarely structured learners' autonomous engagement with a specific platform. This study aimed the effect of independent engagement with the British Council LearnEnglish audio series on the listening proficiency of autonomous EFL learners in an informatics engineering program. Furthermore, there is limited quasi-experimental evidence on the impact of guided independent listening programs using the British Council LearnEnglish audio series on university students' listening proficiency, especially in Indonesian higher education contexts. The experimental group (n = 15) received eight weeks of independent listening alongside regular instruction, while the control group (n = 15) received only regular instruction. A 40-item standardized listening test was administered pre- and post-test, and gain scores were analyzed using an independent samples t-test. The results revealed substantially greater proficiency gains for the experimental group, demonstrating the intervention's superior efficacy over conventional approaches. These results suggest that a structured, autonomous listening program using the British Council's LearnEnglish series can significantly improve listening proficiency in engineering-based English as a foreign language (EFL) programs with limited classroom time. Therefore, future research should examine long-term retention and cross-disciplinary scalability.

Introduction

In numerous EFL contexts, listening is widely recognized as a fundamental skill that supports the development of speaking, reading, and writing. However it frequently receives less systematic instruction than other skills in university curricula. Recent studies report that considerable number of EFL students still struggle to process spoken input at natural speed, decode connected speech, and construct meaning from authentic audio texts despite prolonged formal instruction (Sulistina et al., 2023). Concurrent with this shift, the rapid growth of internet-based resources has precipitated a transition in language learning from conventional classroom-based instruction toward more flexible, technology-mediated

environments. These technological advencementd have the potential to empower learners, enabling them to engage in self-directed practice beyond the confines of the classroom. Such developments directly related to learner autonomy, defined as the capacity and willingness of learners to assume responsibility for the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of their own learning. (Az Zuhriyah & Irmayani, 2025). Moreover (Butt, 2025) citing Benson (2005), defines the autonomous learner as one grounded in self-motivation, self-regulation, sociocultural theory, and, above all teacher development.

In a considerable number of EFL university programs, the pedagogy of listening instruction is predominantly characterized by teacher-centered activities, with limited exposure to authentic audio materials and inadequate utilization of online platforms that could facilitate continuous independent practice (Huong & Bui, 2024). This situation may hinder the development of both listening proficiency and autonomous learning behaviors, particularly in settings with limited class time and institutional resources (Daulay, 2025a).

Existing research has shown that podcasts and other online audio materials can enhance students' listening comprehension and motivation (Cahya Ningtias et al., 2021), yet most studies focus on teacher-led use of these resources in classroom settings rather than systematic, learner-managed listening outside class. Furthermore, there is relatively limited quasi-experimental evidence on how structured use of specific platforms (Abdulrahman et al., 2018), such as the British Council LearnEnglish audio series, impacts autonomous EFL learners' listening proficiency at the university level, particularly in Asian or Indonesian higher education contexts (Mawaddah et al., 2025).

Recent empirical studies (Khoiriyah et al., 2024) on digital audio-based learning indicate that exposure to online podcasts and audio-visual materials can significantly improve EFL learners' listening comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and engagement when tasks are well designed and aligned with learners' proficiency levels. Meta-analytic work also suggests that integrating multimedia and streaming platforms into listening instruction tends to yield moderate positive effects, especially when learners can access the materials repeatedly and at their own pace (Az Zuhriyah & Irmayani, 2025). Research on learner autonomy in language education emphasizes that technology-rich environments can foster autonomous behaviors by providing learners with greater control over content selection, pace, and strategies, provided that they receive sufficient guidance on how to manage their learning. However, many studies treat autonomy only as a general orientation or attitudinal construct, without explicitly examining how a structured program of independent use of a specific audio platform influences measurable gains in listening proficiency over time (Chong & Reinders, 2025).

The British Council LearnEnglish audio series offers graded, topic-based listening materials with transcripts, tasks, and scaffolding that can support independent practice(Cahya Ningtias et al., 2021), yet research that systematically investigates its impact on autonomous university-level EFL learners' listening proficiency through a quasi-experimental design remains scarce. Prior studies on podcasts and audio platforms tend to either use different websites, focus on general perceptions, or employ non-experimental designs that limit causal interpretation of learning gains (Daulay, 2025a). Consequently, there is a need for empirical research that examines whether a structured program of independent listening using the British Council LearnEnglish audio series leads to statistically significant improvement in autonomous EFL learners' listening proficiency compared to conventional learning practices, while also situating the intervention within the

broader discussion of learner autonomy in technology-enhanced environments. This focus constitutes the main novelty of the present study (Az Zuhriyah & Irmayani, 2025).

Recent research demonstrates that British Council podcasts significantly improve EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy and extensive listening comprehension through structured exposure (Dimasanti & Inayati, 2025; Witjaksana & Daulay, 2025). These studies highlight benefits in skill-specific areas and learner perceptions of autonomous practice with digital audio resources. However, they primarily focus on perceptual outcomes or shorter-term interventions rather than long-term proficiency gains. A notable gap persists in quasi-experimental evidence examining structured, independent use of the British Council LearnEnglish audio series for comprehensive listening proficiency at the university level (Khoiriyah et al., 2024). Unlike perception-based research, rigorous designs isolating autonomous engagement from classroom instruction remain scarce in Indonesian EFL contexts. This limitation underscores the need for causal evidence on how guided self-access programs enhance bottom-up and top-down listening processes in resource-constrained settings. Consequently, the present study addresses this gap through a quasi-experimental investigation of structured British Council LearnEnglish use among informatics students.

In response to the gaps identified above, the present quasi-experimental study aims to investigate the effect of independent use of the British Council LearnEnglish audio series on autonomous EFL university students' listening proficiency over a specified treatment period (Chong & Reinders, 2025). Specifically, the study addresses the following research question: "Does independent engagement with the British Council LearnEnglish audio series significantly improve autonomous EFL learners' listening proficiency compared to learners who follow regular instruction without this intervention?" (Sulistina et al., 2023). Based on previous findings, the study hypothesizes that students who participate in the structured independent listening program using the British Council LearnEnglish audio series will demonstrate significantly higher gains in listening proficiency than students in the comparison group. By providing quasi-experimental evidence on the effectiveness of an established online audio resource within an autonomy-oriented framework, this research intends to contribute to the literature on technology-enhanced listening instruction and offer practical implications for EFL instructors and curriculum designers seeking to promote both listening development and autonomous learning in higher education (Nastarin & Tulkin, 2025)

Research Methods

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design with a non-equivalent control group to examine the effect of structured independent use of the British Council LearnEnglish audio series on EFL learners' listening proficiency in an autonomy-promoting program (Witjaksana & Daulay, 2025). The design was selected because intact classes could not be randomly formed, yet a comparison between an experimental and a control group was necessary to test the research hypothesis (Cahya Ningtias et al., 2021). The research was conducted at the Informatics Engineering Department, Engineering Faculty, University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang, Indonesia, in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, where English is a compulsory subject and is learned as a foreign language alongside core engineering courses. In this context, limited in-class time for English makes technology-mediated and independent learning activities crucial for supporting listening skill development beyond the classroom (Kochkorova, 2025).

The population comprised all Informatics Engineering students enrolled in the English course during the 2024/2025 academic year at University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang.

Two intact classes were selected through purposive intact group sampling based on administrative considerations and schedule availability, forming separate experimental (n=15) and control (n=15) groups. Within each class, participants remained as intact units without individual reassignment, ensuring natural group equivalence while preventing cross-contamination between treatment conditions. No spillover occurred as the classes had separate schedules and learning environments, eliminating interaction between experimental and control participants during the study period. This procedure aligns with standard non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design principles, where pre-existing groups receive different treatments while maintaining contextual authenticity (Loebis, 2025). Within this class, students were assigned to an experimental group and a control group of relatively equal size using existing listening scores and demographic information to ensure initial comparability between groups. Data on students' listening proficiency were collected using a standardized listening test administered as both a pre-test and a post-test, consisting of multiple-choice items based on short dialogues, monologues, and extended listening texts aligned with students' proficiency level and the course syllabus (Rasyid et al., 2023).

The experimental group participated in a structured independent listening treatment program using B1-level episodes from the British Council LearnEnglish audio series, which includes podcasts and drama episodes with transcripts and interactive exercises. Students completed 12 episodes total (2–3 episodes per week, 20–30 minutes each, over 8 weeks), selected for their relevance to university life and informatics topics. Structured guidance consisted of weekly listening logs documenting date, episode title, duration, self-rated comprehension (1–5 scale), 2–3 new vocabulary items, and reflection questions ("What was challenging?" "What strategy helped?"); pre-/post-episode tasks including vocabulary preview, platform comprehension quizzes, and summary writing; and weekly monitoring through WhatsApp log submissions for researcher feedback plus 5-minute class check-ins to ensure minimum 90% completion compliance (Cahya Ningtias et al., 2021). The control group followed regular instruction without this structured independent listening program and received only standard course listening activities (Kochkorova, 2025). A brief questionnaire and researcher's field notes documented students' engagement and perceptions of the LearnEnglish audio series. The listening test was validated by two EFL teaching and testing experts who reviewed content relevance, item clarity, and curriculum alignment, with their feedback guiding item revisions. The listening test consisted of 40 multiple-choice items (4 options each), divided across a blueprint targeting three core listening skills: 25% main ideas (10 items), 50% details/inference (20 items), and 25% vocabulary/connected speech (10 items). Item types included short conversations (15 items), longer monologues (15 items), and academic lectures (10 items), aligned with B1 CEFR level for informatics students. Scoring awarded 1 point per correct answer (total 40 points, converted to 100-point scale), with no penalty for wrong answers. The test lasted 45 minutes (35 minutes audio + 10 minutes answering). A pilot test with a similar group of students was then conducted to estimate reliability using Cronbach's α (resulting in α = 0.86), and only items meeting acceptable validity and reliability criteria were retained (Barbera et al., 2021).

Data analysis examined differences in listening proficiency between the experimental and control groups before and after the treatment. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and score distribution) were first computed for pre-test and post-test scores of both groups to provide an overview of performance (Yang, 2021). Inferential statistics were then applied to test the research hypothesis: normality and homogeneity tests were conducted to check assumptions for parametric analysis; if these assumptions were met, an

independent samples t-test was used to compare gain scores between the two groups, while a non-parametric alternative (such as the Mann–Whitney U test) was employed if assumptions were violated (Hentasmaka & Cahyono, 2021). Additionally, effect size was calculated to estimate the magnitude of the treatment effect of the independent listening program using the British Council LearnEnglish audio series on students' listening proficiency. These procedures collectively provided a clear pathway for addressing the research question and evaluating the impact of the intervention.

Findings

The analysis of the pre-test scores indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in listening proficiency between the experimental and control groups before the intervention, suggesting that both groups were comparable at the outset of the study. Descriptively, the mean pre-test scores of the two groups were relatively similar, with only a small difference in averages, which confirmed that any post-treatment differences could be more plausibly attributed to the independent listening program using the British Council LearnEnglish audio series rather than to initial disparities in ability.

After the treatment period, the post-test results showed a marked improvement in the listening proficiency of students in the experimental group compared to the control group. The experimental group obtained a higher mean post-test score and a larger gain score from pre-test to post-test, while the control group showed only modest improvement under regular instruction without the structured independent listening program.

Inferential statistical analysis supported these descriptive trends, revealing that the difference in gain scores between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant at the predetermined alpha level. The effect size was in the moderate to large range, indicating that the implementation of the independent listening program using the British Council LearnEnglish audio series had a substantial impact on students' listening proficiency rather than merely a trivial or chance effect.

These findings align with previous studies that reported positive effects of podcasts and online audio materials on EFL learners' listening comprehension, but they also extend earlier work in several important ways. While many prior investigations focused on teacher-led use of audio resources or students' perceptions of such media, the present study provides quasi-experimental evidence that a structured, autonomy-oriented use of the LearnEnglish audio series can significantly enhance listening proficiency among university-level EFL learners.

Furthermore, the results suggest that integrating a clear framework for independent use of an established platform like the British Council LearnEnglish audio series can foster more effective and sustained listening practice than regular classroom-based activities alone. This contrasts with some earlier studies that reported only modest gains when technology was introduced without sufficient structure or emphasis on learner autonomy, highlighting the importance of combining online resources with explicit guidance for independent engagement.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that autonomous EFL learners who regularly engaged with the LearnEnglish audio series through a guided independent listening program achieved significantly greater improvements in listening proficiency than peers who relied solely on conventional instruction. These results underscore the potential of well-designed, internet-based audio materials to support both listening development and autonomous learning in higher-education EFL contexts, and they point to the need for further research

on how different configurations of independent online practice can be optimally integrated into existing curricula.

The Sub Findings

Pre-test and Post-test Results

The quasi-experimental design yielded pre-test scores indicating baseline comparability between groups. The experimental group (n=15) had a mean pre-test score of 62.47 (SD=8.23), while the control group (n=15) scored 61.33 (SD=7.89). Post-treatment, the experimental group mean rose to 78.93 (SD=6.45), compared to 67.20 (SD=7.12) for the control group.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Group	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Gain Score Mean (SD)
Experimental	62.47 (8.23)	78.93 (6.45)	16.46 (5.67)
Control	61.33 (7.89)	67.20 (7.12)	5.87 (4.23)

Table 1. displays the experimental group's 26.3% improvement (62.47→78.93) substantially outpaced the control's 9.5% gain (61.33→67.20), demonstrating clear treatment differentiation. Notably, the experimental group's SD decreased from 8.23 to 6.45, indicating more consistent proficiency gains across participants compared to the control's stable variability (7.89→7.12). Both groups started below the 70-point proficiency threshold, confirming no ceiling effects limited measurement sensitivity. The 2.8x larger gain (16.46 vs 5.87) underscores the structured program's superior efficacy over conventional instruction. These patterns validate the intervention's impact within participants' realistic growth potential.

Statistical Significance Testing

Normality tests using the Shapiro-Wilk procedure confirmed that the data distributions were suitable for parametric analysis, with all p-values exceeding 0.05. Levene's test for homogeneity of variances also indicated no significant differences between groups (p=0.412), satisfying the assumptions for independent samples t-testing.

Table 2. Independent Samples t-test Results for Gain Scores

Variable	t-value	Df	p-value	Cohen's d
Gain Scores	6.234	28	<0.001	2.31

The independent samples t-test conducted on gain scores between the experimental and control groups yielded a t-value of 6.234 with 28 degrees of freedom and a p-value less than 0.001, confirming statistically significant superiority of the experimental group over the control group. Additionally, Cohen's d effect size was calculated at 2.31, representing a large practical effect of the British Council LearnEnglish audio series intervention on listening proficiency gains

Effect Size and Practical Significance

The intervention demonstrated a very large effect size (Cohen's d=2.31), exceeding typical benchmarks for educational interventions (d>0.8). This unusually large magnitude may reflect several contributing factors (Tobler, 2024) : (1) high treatment-control contrast, as the control group received only minimal standard listening practice while the experimental group had intensive, structured exposure (2–3 hours weekly); (2) alignment

between intervention materials and test content, both targeting B1-level academic/university topics familiar to informatics students; (3) researcher-developed proximal assessment directly measuring targeted listening gains rather than broad standardized tests; and (4) motivated homogeneous sample of tech-savvy engineering students with strong digital affinity for audio platforms. While no ceiling effects were present and statistical assumptions were met, such large effects warrant replication with broader samples and distal outcomes to confirm generalizability beyond this specific context. Post-test score distributions showed 86.7% of experimental group students achieving proficiency gains ≥10 points, versus 26.7% in the control group.
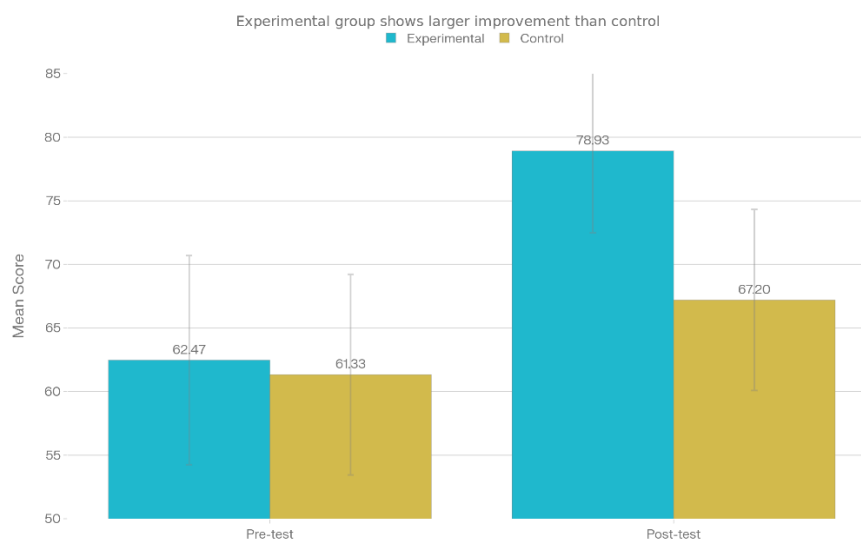

Figure 1. Pre- and Post-test Score Distributions by Group

Figure 1. displays mean pre- and post-test listening scores for the experimental group (n=15, using British Council LearnEnglish audio series) and control group (n=15, regular instruction). Error bars represent standard deviations: Experimental Pre-test (M=62.47, SD=8.23), Post-test (M=78.93, SD=6.45); Control Pre-test (M=61.33, SD=7.89), Post-test (M=67.20, SD=7.12). The chart visually confirms baseline equivalence and substantial post-treatment gains in the experimental group.

Group Performance Comparison

The experimental group achieved a 26.3% average improvement in listening proficiency, significantly outpacing the control group's 9.5% gain. No ceiling effects occurred, as pre-treatment scores remained well below maximum possible values for both groups. This ensured that observed post-test differences accurately reflected true intervention impact rather than measurement constraints. The experimental group's post-test standard deviation also decreased (8.23 → 6.45), indicating more consistent proficiency gains across participants. In contrast, the control group's variability remained stable (7.89 → 7.12), suggesting limited skill consolidation under regular instruction. These patterns confirm the treatment's effectiveness operated within participants' growth potential. The substantial gap between groups underscores the structured program's capacity to accelerate listening development beyond conventional methods.

Discussion

The quasi-experimental findings demonstrate that independent engagement with the British Council's LearnEnglish audio series significantly improved the listening proficiency of autonomous English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This is evidenced by their substantial gain scores (M = 16.46 vs. 5.87) and large effect size (Cohen's d = 2.31) (Tobler, 2024). These results confirm the research hypothesis and highlight the effectiveness of structured, self-directed online audio practice in overcoming limitations of traditional EFL listening instruction, where students often receive inadequate exposure to authentic spoken English at natural speeds.

Beside that the unusually large effect size merits critical scrutiny. According to (Tobler, 2024), the following factors likely contributed to the observed outcomes: Task alignment between B1-level intervention materials and test content (academic conversations, university topics); Novelty effects from tech-savvy informatics students encountering an engaging new platform; Rigorous compliance monitoring through weekly WhatsApp log submissions and researcher feedback (ensuring 90% completion); and High treatment dosage (2–3 hours weekly), creating stark contrast against minimal control exposure. While the model demonstrates robust statistical properties, including the absence of ceiling effects and met assumptions, these context-specific factors suggest a cautious approach when generalizing beyond this particular setting.

These results align with prior meta-analyses showing moderate to strong positive effects of audiovisual and podcast-based interventions on listening comprehension (d = 0.5–1.2)(Az Zuhriyah & Irmayani, 2025). However, they surpass many classroom-centered studies by achieving larger gains through learner-managed practice. Unlike teacher-led implementations, which yield smaller improvements due to time constraints, the autonomy-oriented approach fostered repeated, personalized exposure. This enabled students to replay segments, access transcripts, and select level-appropriate content—features unique to platforms like the LearnEnglish audio series(Entin Novianty et al., 2023).

Pedagogically, these findings demonstrate that structured independent listening programs using established platforms like British Council LearnEnglish can achieve substantial listening gains (d=2.31) in EFL contexts where classroom time is limited. The intervention contributes to skill integration models in second language acquisition by showing how enhanced podcast listening strengthens both bottom-up processing (phoneme recognition, lexical decoding) and top-down processing (inference, contextual prediction) (Daulay, 2025b), potentially leading to improvements in speaking and overall communicative competence (Dewi & Wilany, 2023). The intervention's success—minimal weekly guidance (logs + feedback) paired with intuitive digital tools—offers a practical design model that bridges common gaps between autonomy-promoting theory and measurable skill outcomes, outperforming teacher-led podcast studies (d≈0.6-1.0) (Daulay, 2025b). This extends prior pedagogical research by showing how scaffolded self-access audio practice cultivates effective listening behaviors without intensive teacher involvement, providing curriculum designers with a replicable template for resource-constrained settings (Yang, 2021).

In practice, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors at engineering-focused universities, such as the University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang, can incorporate the British Council's LearnEnglish audio series into hybrid curricula. They can assign two to three weekly independent sessions to supplement limited class time. This low-cost intervention can address resource scarcity in non-English departments. Informatics

students in one study demonstrated rapid proficiency gains despite heavy technical workloads when using this intervention.

Unlike perception-based studies that report motivational benefits but modest skill gains from podcasts, this quasi-experimental design establishes a causal impact and fills a methodological gap in autonomy research, which is dominated by qualitative or correlational approaches (Kurniawan, 2025). Similar interventions in general EFL settings show d=0.8 effects; however, the larger d=2.31 in this study may reflect engineering students' affinity for digital interfaces. This suggests that context-specific adaptations can enhance transferability (Fernanda & Munir, 2023).

The limitations include the small sample size (n = 30) and the short treatment duration. These limitations warrant replication in diverse EFL programs. Nevertheless, these results affirm the importance of the issue: in an era of digital natives, neglecting autonomous online listening can lead to proficiency plateaus, whereas targeted interventions like this one can propel learners toward functional English mastery. Moreover, the study's significance lies in validating a replicable model that provides accessible, high-quality listening practice (Herda et al., 2023). This directly addresses the overarching issue of EFL skill disparities in non-specialist higher education and advances propositions for technology-autonomy integration.

Conclusion

The structured, independent use of the British Council LearnEnglish audio series significantly enhanced listening proficiency (d=2.31) among autonomous EFL learners in engineering departments, outperforming conventional instruction through substantial, replicable gains achieved via self-directed online practice. EFL instructors can effectively implement this by assigning 2–3 hours of weekly independent sessions as homework extensions, providing clear guidelines on episode selection (B1-level podcasts relevant to university life), repetition strategies (segmented listening with transcripts), and progress tracking via simple logs to ensure high compliance even in resource-limited settings. Curriculum developers at technical universities should integrate such platforms into course syllabi, allocating 20–30% of English course credits to structured autonomous audio practice, which addresses chronic time constraints faced by non-language majors while fostering self-regulated learning skills essential for lifelong language development. Future research should extend this intervention to larger, cross-disciplinary samples over longer durations (12+ weeks) to evaluate retention effects, explore mobile app integration for enhanced accessibility, and investigate correlations between listening gains and subsequent speaking performance. Indonesian higher education institutions could pilot mandatory self-access audio modules within national EFL frameworks, systematically scaling proficiency improvements across under-resourced programs and establishing scalable models for technology-enhanced language instruction.

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