



## EFL Students' Self-Directed Learning of Listening Comprehension Skill using YouTube Videos

Hafidz Dardarulloh Faishol<sup>1</sup>, Evi Karlina Ambarwati<sup>2</sup>, Wahyudin Fitriyana<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang

Jl. HS. Ronggowaluyo, Telukjambe Timur, Karawang - 41363

E-mail: [1810631060110@student.unsika.ac.id](mailto:1810631060110@student.unsika.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [evi.karlina@fkip.unsika.ac.id](mailto:evi.karlina@fkip.unsika.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>,  
[wahyudin.fitriyana@staff.unsika.ac.id](mailto:wahyudin.fitriyana@staff.unsika.ac.id)<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract :** English has developed into a global language that is widely spoken and used as a second language in a number of countries. As a result, people recognize the importance of English fluency in all aspects of global communication. Technology advances at a breakneck pace in the twenty-first century. YouTube is Indonesia's second most popular social media platform. With YouTube's popularity, it has the potential to become a TELL product as a learning medium. Listening is a critical talent that everyone should acquire and practice. Listening is the process through which listeners process information obtained from visual and aural cues in order to identify what is happening and what the speakers are attempting to express (Rubin, 1995). This study investigated the impact of using YouTube on the listening skills of adult students of English as a foreign language in Bekasi, Indonesia. The findings of this study are based on observations of EFL students who are taught listening skills through the use of audio recordings and demonstrate a low level of motivation to learn. This study also looked into how YouTube can help EFL students become more motivated.

**Keywords:** Listening, Students Motivation, YouTube, Self-Directed Learning

**Abstrak :** Bahasa Inggris telah berkembang menjadi bahasa global yang banyak digunakan dan dijadikan bahasa kedua di sejumlah negara. Akibatnya, orang-orang menyadari pentingnya kemampuan berbahasa Inggris yang lancar dalam segala aspek komunikasi global. Kemajuan teknologi berkembang dengan sangat cepat di abad ke-21. YouTube merupakan platform media sosial kedua paling populer di Indonesia. Dengan melihat popularitas YouTube, platform ini berpotensi menjadi produk TELL sebagai media pembelajaran. *Listening* adalah keterampilan kritis yang harus dikuasai dan dilatih oleh setiap orang. *Listening* adalah proses di mana pendengar memproses informasi yang diperoleh dari petunjuk visual dan auditif untuk mengidentifikasi apa yang sedang terjadi dan apa yang ingin disampaikan oleh pembicara (Rubin, 1995). Penelitian ini menyelidiki dampak penggunaan YouTube terhadap *listening skill* siswa dewasa yang belajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing di Bekasi, Indonesia. Temuan penelitian ini didasarkan pada pengamatan terhadap siswa EFL yang diajarkan keterampilan mendengarkan melalui rekaman audio dan menunjukkan tingkat motivasi yang rendah untuk belajar. Penelitian ini juga meneliti bagaimana YouTube dapat membantu siswa EFL menjadi lebih termotivasi.

**Kata kunci:** Listening, Motivasi Siswa, YouTube, Pembelajaran Mandiri

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current educational landscape, students are becoming increasingly dependent on modern technologies to support their learning. Many classrooms today are equipped with advanced tools such as smartboards and data-show projectors, signaling a shift away from traditional learning environments where a fixed curriculum is delivered face-to-face and assessments rely solely on paper-and-pencil methods. This transformation encourages English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators to embrace the opportunity to integrate more innovative teaching methods into their practice. Research indicates that students generally respond positively to the introduction of new technologies in learning environments (Al Bataineh et al., 2019). Alongside these changes, the rapid development of technology has accelerated the flow of information, particularly through social media platforms. Just as the general

public uses social media to stay informed and interact with others, students also rely on these platforms for communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. Social media tools—such as blogs, wikis, and social networking sites—offer diverse channels for interaction (Kolokytha et al., 2015).

One platform with which students are especially familiar and comfortable is YouTube, a video-sharing network that enables users to upload and share content publicly (YouTube, 2014). In Indonesia, YouTube ranks as the country's second most popular social media platform (Nurhayati-Wolff, 2021). Given its widespread use, YouTube holds significant potential as a Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) tool, providing learners with accessible and engaging resources for language study.

The concept of self-directed learning (SDL) emphasizes the learner's active role in taking responsibility for their own educational development. This includes setting personal learning objectives, creating study plans, selecting preferred learning resources, and determining strategies that best suit individual needs. Knowles (1975) describes SDL as a process in which individuals—either independently or with limited guidance—identify their learning requirements, locate appropriate resources, apply effective strategies, and evaluate their own progress. SDL is particularly relevant in adult learning contexts, where learners often need to manage their educational activities alongside other responsibilities. Neimi (1985) defines an adult learner as someone who engages in further academic study, either full-time or part-time, after a period of pursuing other personal or professional endeavors.

Within the field of English language education, SDL has been shown to be effective in fostering learners' motivation, particularly in improving listening comprehension skills among EFL students. Previous studies have highlighted that when learners adopt a self-directed approach, they can significantly enhance their listening proficiency (Wang, 2012; Zainuddin et al., 2018; Kovtun et al., 2019). These findings suggest that SDL plays a critical role in the development of English listening skills.

Several studies have provided insights relevant to the present research. For instance, Sui, Yen, and Chang (2023) examined the influence of perceived technology-enhanced environments on self-regulated learning. Kaur et al. (2025) investigated the broader effects of SDL on students' learning experiences. Additionally, research by Tahmina (2023) and Mokodompit et al. (2021) explored YouTube's potential as a tool for English language instruction. More specifically, studies by Yuyun and Simamora (2021), Widiyanto et al. (2021), Lestari et al. (2023), and Arintha et al. (2024) examined the use of YouTube as a medium to enhance listening comprehension skills.

Building on this body of literature, the present study seeks to address a theoretical gap by examining the dual dimensions of YouTube's use in EFL contexts: its potential benefits as a medium for developing English listening skills, and the ways in which adult EFL learners perceive self-directed learning when engaging with YouTube videos to improve their listening comprehension.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a narrative inquiry approach to explore the experiences of EFL university students in using YouTube videos as a self-directed learning tool for listening comprehension. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method that focuses on collecting and analyzing personal stories to understand lived experiences, considering elements such as time, place, events, and context. In this research, narratives are obtained through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, allowing participants to share their language learning histories in depth. These histories provide a chronological and thematic account of their experiences, challenges, and perceptions, offering valuable insights into their learning processes.

The research was conducted in Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia, with participants selected through snowball sampling to ensure relevance and diversity of experiences. The participants were EFL university students aged 19–24 years, each with at least one year of experience using YouTube as a learning tool. This selection ensured that all participants had sufficient background to reflect meaningfully on the topic. The data collection involved adapted interview guidelines based on Coryell et al. (2010) and Patton (2002), providing flexibility for follow-up questions while maintaining a structured framework. Reflective journals, adapted from Barkhuizen (2008), were used to supplement interview data, enabling participants to elaborate on their learning narratives and provide additional details that might not emerge during the interviews.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, grouping codes into themes, reviewing and refining themes, and producing a final thematic report. The categorical-content perspective from Lieblich et al. (1998) was also applied to focus on identifying patterns across narratives. To enhance trustworthiness, inter-rater reliability was ensured by involving four independent reviewers who examined both the coding process and the final themes. This methodological approach was chosen to provide an in-depth, context-rich understanding of how EFL students integrate YouTube into their self-directed learning practices, and to generate findings that reflect both the individual and shared aspects of their experiences.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **FINDINGS**

This study explores how university students utilized YouTube as a self-directed learning (SDL) platform to enhance their English listening comprehension. Through semi-structured interviews and narrative reflections with four EFL participants, three main themes emerged: students' use of YouTube for listening practice, their perceptions of self-directed learning through the platform, and their perceived gains and limitations. Each theme is presented below, supported by direct participant quotes and analytical interpretations grounded in the narrative data.

## **1. Students' Use of YouTube for Listening Practice**

All participants demonstrated consistent engagement with YouTube as a primary medium for improving listening comprehension. They perceived the platform as both an accessible learning resource and a flexible environment that promoted autonomy. Most participants had used YouTube for several years, gradually incorporating it into their everyday study routines. One participant shared that she began using YouTube while still in high school and continued throughout university, explaining that “YouTube has become part of my learning habit. It’s easy to access, and I can learn anytime I want.” (Interview, Participant 2) This consistent use suggests that YouTube has evolved from a supplementary tool into a habitual learning space that supports sustained language exposure.

Participants reported using YouTube strategically to support listening practice. A frequently mentioned approach was the selective use of subtitles to scaffold comprehension. They described an intentional process of watching with English captions to aid understanding, followed by rewatching the same material without subtitles to test comprehension and build confidence. This pattern of alternating between assisted and unassisted listening functioned as a self-regulated cycle of practice. In addition, repetition and note-taking emerged as key behaviors that enhanced vocabulary retention. Students often paused videos to jot down new words or expressions, replaying specific segments until they fully grasped the pronunciation or meaning. As one participant described, “When I don’t understand a sentence, I replay it several times and write down new vocabulary so I can remember it.” (Interview, Participant 3)

Another prominent technique was shadowing—repeating phrases after the speaker to imitate rhythm, stress, and intonation. Participants found this practice helpful not only for pronunciation but also for maintaining concentration during listening. One participant remarked, “Repeating what I hear makes me more confident and helps my speaking too.” (Interview, Participant 1) This aligns with previous research suggesting that shadowing connects listening and speaking processes in second language learning. Moreover, learners demonstrated autonomy in choosing content that matched their interests, including music, travel vlogs, motivational talks, and film reviews. They emphasized that personal interest played a vital role in sustaining motivation. As Participant 4 noted, “I learn faster when the topic is something I like, such as travel or music.” The freedom to select topics of interest empowered learners to tailor their study experiences to their individual goals and preferences. Collectively, these patterns reveal that YouTube serves as a learner-controlled ecosystem where students design their own listening pathways through a combination of intentional strategies, technological features, and self-motivation.

## **2. Perceptions of Self-Directed Learning through YouTube**

The second theme highlights students’ perceptions of YouTube as a self-directed learning environment. Participants expressed positive emotional and motivational responses when engaging with English content, emphasizing feelings of enjoyment, independence, and self-efficacy. They appreciated that YouTube allowed them to study at their own pace, free from external constraints such as schedules

or assessment pressures. One participant explained, “I feel free when I study with YouTube. I can pause, replay, or choose topics that I really like.” (Interview, Participant 4) This sense of control reflects the core characteristics of SDL, where learners take responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating their learning activities.

Participants also discussed how YouTube’s multimodal nature—combining visual and auditory elements—enhanced comprehension and made listening practice more engaging. Visual cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and on-screen text provided additional context that facilitated meaning-making. As Participant 3 explained, “Seeing gestures and expressions in the video helps me understand the message, not just the words.” These multimodal supports allowed learners to infer meaning even when vocabulary or pronunciation posed challenges. The data also suggest that students perceived YouTube not merely as a digital resource but as a personalized learning environment that responds to their interests and learning rhythms. For instance, several participants described adjusting playback speed to match their listening ability or using playlists to organize preferred materials. These practices demonstrate a high level of learner agency, reflecting the metacognitive aspect of SDL, where students monitor and regulate their own progress.

Emotionally, students reported that learning with YouTube reduced anxiety and increased their confidence in listening comprehension. They described a sense of comfort in being able to repeat content privately without fear of judgment, which allowed them to make mistakes and learn at their own pace. The ability to select authentic and enjoyable content further sustained motivation. In this way, YouTube acted as both a learning tool and a motivational support system, combining autonomy, enjoyment, and accessibility. These perceptions underscore the emotional dimension of self-directed learning, suggesting that learners are more likely to persist when they find intrinsic pleasure and personal relevance in the activity.

### **3. Perceived Gains and Limitations**

The third theme addresses students’ perceived gains and limitations in using YouTube for self-directed listening practice. All participants reported noticeable improvements in understanding authentic spoken English. They described being able to follow conversations more easily, recognize new vocabulary in context, and comprehend various accents with less difficulty. Some participants also linked their progress in listening to improvements in pronunciation and speaking fluency. One participant commented, “I feel more confident when I listen to English speakers now. It’s easier to catch what they mean.” (Interview, Participant 1) This sense of achievement was often accompanied by increased motivation to continue learning independently, illustrating how successful experiences reinforce autonomous behavior.

However, participants also identified several limitations. A common challenge was distraction—YouTube’s open and entertainment-driven nature sometimes diverted learners from educational content. As one participant admitted, “Sometimes I plan to study, but I end up watching unrelated videos.” (Interview, Participant 3) Another limitation was the absence of structured feedback. While

students felt they were improving, they found it difficult to objectively measure progress or verify their accuracy without teacher guidance. Participant 2 reflected, “I feel that I’m improving, but sometimes I’m not sure how much because there’s no teacher to tell me.” These reflections reveal that self-directed learners often struggle to evaluate their progress without external benchmarks, underscoring the importance of feedback in sustaining SDL effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, participants unanimously agreed that YouTube remained a highly effective and motivating platform for improving listening skills. Its accessibility, diversity of content, and real-world language exposure provided an engaging alternative to traditional classroom materials. Learners emphasized that success depended largely on maintaining focus and discipline, suggesting that YouTube is most beneficial when learners combine intrinsic motivation with clear learning goals. The findings collectively indicate that YouTube facilitates both skill development and learner autonomy, though its open-ended nature requires self-regulation and periodic external support to optimize learning outcomes.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study investigated how university students utilized YouTube as a platform for self-directed learning (SDL) to improve their English listening comprehension. The findings revealed three major themes: students’ use of YouTube for listening practice, their perceptions of self-directed learning through the platform, and their perceived gains and limitations. This discussion connects those findings to relevant theories and previous research on Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) and SDL.

The first theme demonstrated that YouTube effectively supports autonomous listening practice. Students employed deliberate strategies such as toggling subtitles, repeating video segments, taking notes, and shadowing speakers. These behaviors illustrate metacognitive control and self-regulation—key aspects of Garrison’s (1997) model of SDL, which emphasizes self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation. Learners demonstrated an ability to plan and assess their learning independently, reflecting Knowles’s (1975) concept of self-directed learners who take initiative in identifying needs, selecting resources, and evaluating outcomes. Consistent with findings by Wang (2012) and Zainuddin et al. (2018), students in this study showed that autonomy can emerge naturally when digital environments provide flexible and meaningful resources. Their selective engagement with YouTube’s features—especially subtitles and replay—transformed the platform from a form of entertainment into a structured learning space tailored to personal goals.

The second theme highlights the emotional and motivational benefits of YouTube-based learning. Participants reported that YouTube made them feel more relaxed, confident, and engaged compared to traditional classroom learning. The sense of freedom to choose content, manage time, and control learning pace contributed to intrinsic motivation. These outcomes align with Deci and Ryan’s (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which posits that autonomy and enjoyment foster deeper engagement and persistence in learning. Previous studies by Yuyun and Simamora (2021) and

Widiyanto et al. (2021) also emphasized that authentic online media enhances motivation by creating enjoyable, real-world contexts for language exposure. Furthermore, the visual and auditory features of YouTube videos supported comprehension, as learners could interpret meaning through gestures, facial expressions, and context. This multimodal aspect corresponds with Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which suggests that combining visual and auditory channels reduces cognitive overload and promotes better understanding. Thus, YouTube not only supports independent learning but also fosters emotional satisfaction, which helps sustain consistent engagement with English input.

The third theme concerns students' perceived gains and limitations. Participants noted substantial improvement in recognizing vocabulary, understanding natural speech, and following different accents. These outcomes reinforce Schmidt's (1990) *Noticing Hypothesis*, which argues that conscious attention to linguistic features facilitates acquisition. The learners' self-regulated cycle of listening, replaying, and shadowing exemplifies how noticing can occur through active engagement with authentic input. However, students also identified key limitations. Some experienced distractions caused by unrelated videos, reflecting the challenge of maintaining focus in open-access digital spaces. Others expressed uncertainty about their progress due to the absence of feedback or evaluation, echoing Brockett and Hiemstra's (1991) argument that self-directed learners still require some form of external scaffolding to assess performance. These concerns point to what can be described as a "scaffold gap," in which learners benefit from autonomy but risk plateauing without guidance or validation.

To address this gap, educators can integrate YouTube within a semi-guided framework that balances independence with structure. Al Bataineh et al. (2019) emphasize that digital tools are most effective when supported by pedagogical guidance. Teachers can recommend appropriate channels, design reflective listening journals, and offer formative feedback to help learners critically evaluate their progress. Such hybrid approaches bridge informal self-learning and formal instruction, ensuring that autonomy does not lead to isolation or unproductive habits.

Theoretically, the findings reaffirm Candy's (1991) notion that self-direction exists on a continuum between teacher-led and learner-managed learning. In this study, learners demonstrated autonomy not as a static trait but as a dynamic process mediated by technological affordances and personal motivation. Pedagogically, the results highlight the value of integrating YouTube into English instruction as both an independent study tool and a classroom supplement. Teaching students how to use features like subtitles, playback speed, and playlists strategically can strengthen their metacognitive awareness and listening competence.

Overall, this study suggests that YouTube serves as a powerful medium for promoting self-directed listening development. Its accessibility, multimodal input, and authentic content enable learners to take ownership of their learning process. However, its open-ended nature also requires guidance to prevent distraction and overconfidence. Therefore, successful implementation of YouTube-based learning should combine learner autonomy with structured support, ensuring that students remain focused, reflective, and purpose-driven in their self-directed language learning journeys.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study investigated how university students utilized YouTube as a platform for self-directed learning (SDL) to enhance their English listening comprehension. The findings revealed that YouTube functions not only as a technological resource but also as an autonomous learning environment where learners can manage their study routines, select materials according to their interests, and sustain motivation through engaging content. Three key insights emerged from the analysis.

First, students demonstrated various self-directed strategies, such as selective use of subtitles, repeated listening, note-taking, and shadowing techniques, to enhance their listening comprehension. These practices reflect a high level of learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness, aligning with the principles of self-regulated learning in which learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their progress independently. Second, students' perceptions of self-directed learning through YouTube were overwhelmingly positive. They described the experience as enjoyable, flexible, and empowering, reporting increased motivation and confidence in their ability to learn outside the classroom. Third, while students perceived improvement in their listening comprehension, they also identified challenges such as distractions and the lack of structured feedback or evaluation. These challenges indicate that complete independence in digital learning can limit measurable progress without external support or reflection.

Overall, the study concludes that YouTube serves as an effective medium for promoting learner autonomy and enhancing English listening skills. Its accessibility, authentic materials, and multimodal features enable learners to personalize their study experiences and engage in continuous exposure to natural language input. However, to optimize learning outcomes, both learners and educators must approach YouTube use with strategy and guidance.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed. Learners are encouraged to use YouTube purposefully by setting specific learning goals, maintaining consistent study routines, and selecting content that matches their proficiency level. Applying active strategies such as pausing, replaying, summarizing, and taking notes can help transform passive watching into meaningful practice. Learners should also cultivate digital discipline to avoid distractions and reflect regularly on their progress.

Educators, on the other hand, are advised to integrate YouTube into classroom instruction as a supplementary tool that extends learning beyond formal contexts. Teachers can recommend suitable educational channels, design reflective listening tasks, and provide formative feedback to help learners evaluate their improvement. Finally, future research may explore how sustained engagement with YouTube affects other language skills and investigate the long-term relationship between SDL, digital literacy, and motivation.

In essence, YouTube offers significant potential as a self-directed learning platform when used strategically and reflectively. With proper guidance and self-regulation, it can transform from an

informal medium into a powerful space for authentic, autonomous, and sustained language development.

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