The Challenges Perceived in Teaching English with Audiobooks for Tenth-Grade, First-Semester Visually Impaired Students at SLB 1 Tabanan

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to explore the challenges perceived by English teachers and tenth grades first semester visual impaired students at SLB N 1 Tabanan regarding the potential use of audiobooks for learning English before their introduction. Employing a qualitative research design, the study adopted the Successive Approximation Model (SAM). Data were collected through classroom observation, interviews, and reflective journaling. Qualitative data from field notes and interview transcripts were analyzed using content analysis by Krippendorff (2004). The findings reveal that although audio-based media are commonly used, they are generic, minimally interactive, and inadequately adapted to students' needs, resulting in reduced engagement, limited speaking confidence, and fluctuating motivation. Both teachers and students expressed positive perceptions of audiobooks, highlighting the need for clear narration, appropriate duration, bilingual explanations, and easy accessibility. Thus, the study confirms that well-designed audiobooks hold strong potential as an inclusive learning medium to enhance listening and speaking skills for visually impaired students and to bridge the gap between inclusive education theory and classroom practice. Teachers, learning designers, and other education stakeholders can use the implications of these findings to improve the efficacy, accessibility, and inclusivity of English language instruction for students with visual impairments.

INTRODUCTION

Educating students with disabilities requires a specialized approach that addresses their unique learning needs. Students with visual impairments, also known as visually impaired students (VIS), face unique challenges in accessing and processing learning materials. This is due to their limited or even complete lack of visual perception. According to Gkora and Karabatzaki (2023), students with disabilities often experience decreased persistence and motivation in classroom activities. This problem undoubtedly impacts their learning outcomes (Gkora and Karabatzaki, 2023). Also, repeated failure can lead to demotivation, hindering students' ability to set learning goals and actively engage in the learning process (Stahopoulou & Siskou, 2023). Good learning media is media that can convey learning material effectively, attract students'

attention, create a pleasant learning atmosphere, and motivate them (Ratminingsih, 2016).

According to Fanshawe et al. (2023), children with VIS in Indonesia face barriers in adapting to the national curriculum and often rely on technological assistance to compensate for their visual limitations. Screen reader applications such as VoiceOver for iOS and TalkBack for Android have been shown to facilitate daily tasks and increase independence (Jain et al., 2021; Khan & Khusro, 2021). However, despite technological advances, the availability of specifically designed and easily accessible English language learning materials for VIS remains limited, especially in special schools (Zahra et al., 2022). According to Khadijah et al. (2020), VIS should ideally have access to structured, engaging, and inclusive learning media, which leverage their sensory strengths to develop core language skills such as listening and speaking, particularly in auditory learning. Thus, several studies have consistently shown that authentic, interactive, and engaging materials can improve listening and speaking skills if designed to be inclusive (Ozverir et al., 2018; Nariswari et al., 2021).

According to Buck (2001), listening comprehension is a fundamental skill for foreign language acquisition. Therefore, it forms the core of their language learning process in the case of VIS (Woottipong, 2014). According to Ratminingsih (2016), listening skills should be prioritized over other skills in the early stages of learning, especially for young learners who are considered beginners in foreign languages. Besides that, speaking proficiency is also crucial for effective communication in today's global world (Rao, 2019; Akhter et al., 2021). According to Utami and Santosa (2023), EFL teachers and students find it easier to teach and learn English in this technological era, including speaking, because technology facilitates the availability and sharing of materials, reduces student fear, and increases opportunities for practice. They also state that many teachers still rely on conventional lecture methods and limited digital resources, such as sending YouTube videos or PowerPoint files via WhatsApp, which often fail to fully engage VIS. Furthermore, audio-visual materials can also help students become more adept at using technology wisely and productively.

As a promising solution for VIS, the use of audiobooks offers a flexible, accessible, and motivating language learning experience (Fansury et al., 2019; Guha, 2020). According to Abodunrin (2024), audiobooks are well-suited to VIS needs because they provide structured auditory input, authentic language exposure, and opportunities for independent learning. Also, previous studies have shown that audiobooks can significantly improve language comprehension and retention for students with disabilities (Utomo & Istiqomah, 2020; Assiddiqhi & Rosa, 2021; Saputra et al., 2022). However, Dewi et al. (2024) noted that most of these developments have used the ADDIE model, which can be rigid and less responsive to iterative feedback in an inclusive education context, even if systematic. Preliminary observation at SLB N 1 Tabanan revealed that English learning materials for VIS were largely limited to WhatsApp-based communication and general resources, without specific tools specifically designed to develop their auditory and speaking skills. Therefore, this study adopted Successive Approximation Model (SAM) to address this gap, which emphasizes iterative design, rapid prototyping, and continuous feedback (Allen & Sites, 2012). Compared with linear models like ADDIE, SAM allows for earlier revision and better adaptation to user needs.

Furthermore, this study integrates Heyzine's Flipbook technology into audiobook development, which can improve accessibility through interactive navigation, embedded audio, and self-paced learning features (Mayer & Fiorella, 2022). The combination of SAM methodology and the Heyzine platform represents a novelty in this study, although it is rarely applied in the context of VIS in Indonesia. Thus, this study aims to explore the challenges perceived by English teachers and tenth grade first semester visual impaired students at SLB N 1 Tabanan regarding the potential use of audiobooks for learning English before their introduction. So, what challenges do English teachers and tenth grade first semester Visual Impairment Students at SLB N 1 Tabanan perceive regarding the potential use of audiobooks for learning English before they are introduced to be researchers' research question.

METHOD

This research was conducted at SLB N 1 Tabanan, Bali, with tenth-grade visually impaired students as participants. This school was chosen because the students needed appropriate and easily accessible media for English learning, and because audio-based resources were still limited. Meanwhile, the object is the audiobook itself to improve listening and speaking skills by utilizing students' hearing strengths and overcoming the limitations of existing printed materials. A qualitative approach was used for data analysis. Qualitative data from field notes and interview transcripts were analyzed using content analysis involving the processes of unitization, sampling, recording, reduction, abductive inference, and narrative (Krippendorff, 2004). This analysis yielded themes reflecting the challenges of VIS in English language learning, which will form the basis for designing the audiobook.

For small-scale projects that require continuous feedback and iterative improvements, this study uses Successive Approximation model (SAM) and is applied due to its flexibility, practicality, and suitability (Reiser & Dempsey, 2018). The Preparation Phase, which includes observing classroom interactions, interviews with teachers and students, and examining existing materials such as Braille textbooks and YouTube videos to understand students' learning needs, the challenges they face, and the resources available for English language learning. In the preparation stage, a needs analysis was conducted through observation and informal interviews with teachers to identify learning challenges and curriculum alignment. Observations were conducted during the Preparation Phase to capture classroom dynamics, student participation, and teaching practices, which were documented in structured field notes using QualNotes Blueprint (Berengueres, 2025). Meanwhile, interviews with teachers and students provided further insights into learning challenges, technology use, and expectations for audiobooks, following an interview guide adapted from Guha (2020). A document study was conducted to analyze existing curriculum documents, lesson plans, and worksheets to ensure that the audiobook content aligned with the official learning objectives. Researchers also maintained a reflective journal to record decisions, progress, and challenges encountered during the process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings

The findings of this study were derived from three primary data sources: classroom observations, interviews with an English teacher, and interviews with VIS. Data analysis was conducted using Krippendorff's (2004) content analysis framework, which involves unitization, sampling, recording or coding, reduction, inference, and narration. Through this process, several recurring patterns emerged that reflect the actual conditions of English language learning for VIS prior to the implementation of audiobook media. The results are organized thematically and supported by tabulated evidence.

The initial findings reveal that English learning for VIS at SLB Negeri 1 Tabanan was predominantly conducted using audio-based but non-specialized media, such as WhatsApp voice notes, YouTube videos, and teacher explanations. Although these media were accessible, they were not specifically designed for VIS, leading to reduced engagement and frequent boredom. Teachers reported difficulty in modifying materials from standard platforms such as *Merdeka Mengajar*, mainly due to limited time, resources, and technological skills. In addition, learning sessions were constrained by short instructional durations and interruptions caused by school-wide activities. Interviews with VIS further revealed that although students were familiar with smartphones and assistive features such as TalkBack, previously used audiobooks had limitations, including robotic voices, unclear intonation, and restricted access time. Students emphasized the importance of easy accessibility, concise duration, and natural narration. These findings indicate a clear discrepancy between ideal inclusive learning conditions and actual classroom practices. To systematically capture these issues, interview data were coded and categorized into major themes. The results of this coding process are presented in Table 1, which summarizes the

dominant themes, sub-themes, and representative statements derived from interviews with teachers and students.

Table 1. Coding Results from Interview Data Using Content Analysis

Theme	Focus of the Theme
Teaching Materials	Use of audio-based but non-customized resources
Learning Challenges	Limited inclusive materials and varied student abilities
Learning Experience	Combination of traditional and digital tools
Use of Technology	Frequent use of accessible mobile applications
Learning Preferences	Need for clear, bilingual, interactive audio
Perspectives on Audiobooks	Positive attitudes with specific improvement notes
Availability and Accessibility	Importance of quick and easy access

As shown in Table 1, both teachers and students highlighted the lack of customized instructional materials for VIS. While audio was the dominant mode of instruction, its repetitive and non-interactive nature limited learning effectiveness. Students expressed a preference for audiobooks with expressive narration, bilingual explanations, interactive elements, and manageable duration, indicating specific design criteria needed for effective media development. In addition, Observational data provided further insight into the actual teaching practices and classroom dynamics. These findings are summarized in Table 2, which presents the main themes observed during English instruction for VIS.

Table 2. Coding Results from Observations Using Content Analysis

Theme	Observed Classroom Condition
Learning Experience	Simplified materials with limited variation
Learning Activities	Use of non-visual games to reduce boredom
Teaching Challenges	Time constraints and differing student abilities
Student Responses	Sensitivity to unclear or fast audio
Teacher Workload	Limited number of specialized teachers
Class Structure	Mixed-grade VIS in a single class
Audiobook Use	Positive perception but limited usability

Table 2 indicates that teachers attempted to adapt instruction through simplified vocabulary and non-visual games; however, these strategies were not sufficient to maintain long-term engagement. Observations also revealed that mixed-grade classrooms and limited teacher availability further complicated material adaptation. Both teachers and students responded positively to audiobooks in principle, but usability issues reduced their effectiveness in practice. Across all data sources, seven major themes emerged: teaching materials, learning challenges, learning experience, technology use, learning preferences, perspectives on audiobooks, and accessibility. Teachers and students consistently emphasized that audio-based learning is essential for VIS, but its effectiveness depends heavily on clarity, duration, interactivity, and ease of access. Learning routines typically began with greetings and verbal interaction to create a comfortable atmosphere, reinforcing the importance of emotional engagement in learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that VIS at SLB Negeri 1 Tabanan experience significant barriers in learning English, particularly due to the dominance of visually oriented or non-inclusive learning media. Students encounter difficulties in understanding learning materials, developing speaking confidence, and maintaining motivation when instruction relies heavily on Braille books, WhatsApp voice notes, and YouTube videos. Although these media are accessible to some extent, they lack variation, interactivity, and adaptation to the auditory learning characteristics of VIS, leading to boredom and reduced engagement.

These findings confirm that access alone does not guarantee meaningful learning. Despite

students' familiarity with assistive technologies such as TalkBack and note-taking applications, the absence of specifically designed English learning materials limits their ability to learn independently and effectively. This condition aligns with previous studies reporting that visually impaired learners often face restricted access to appropriate academic support and inclusive instructional resources (Tahiri, 2023; Sohaib et al., 2021). Zahra et al. (2022) also emphasize that teachers struggle to convert visual-based materials into auditory formats due to limited facilities and pedagogical training, which further constrains learning quality.

Another major issue identified in this study concerns teachers' dependence on generalized instructional modules, such as those provided by *Merdeka Mengajar*, with minimal modification for VIS. Teachers reported limited time, insufficient technological skills, and a lack of specialized resources as primary obstacles in developing adaptive materials. Consequently, instruction often focuses on simplified content delivery rather than meaningful language use. According to Tomlinson (2011), effective materials should generate impact, stimulate emotional and intellectual engagement, provide opportunities for communicative language use, and expose learners to authentic language. The materials used in the observed context fail to meet these criteria, as they offer limited interaction, minimal contextual relevance, and few opportunities for students to actively use English in meaningful ways. This mismatch helps explain students' low confidence and reduced motivation in speaking activities.

The results further reveal that the sensory learning characteristics of VIS have not been fully considered in instructional media design, particularly their reliance on auditory input. The absence of expressive narration, appropriate intonation, and interactive elements reduces the effectiveness of audio-based instruction. This finding highlights the importance of designing materials that align with learners' sensory strengths and affective needs. Previous research supports this interpretation, indicating that inclusive learning for VIS requires materials that are auditory-centered, emotionally engaging, and contextually meaningful (Guha, 2020). When instructional design ignores these characteristics, learning becomes mechanical and fails to foster confidence or communicative competence. Therefore, the lack of inclusive media not only affects comprehension but also limits students' emotional involvement and willingness to participate actively in learning.

The findings of this study strongly support the use of audiobooks as an alternative and inclusive learning medium for VIS. Teachers and students expressed positive perceptions toward audiobooks, particularly when they feature clear narration, appropriate duration, bilingual explanations, and interactive elements. These preferences indicate that audiobooks have the potential to address both cognitive and affective learning needs. This interpretation is consistent with Guha (2020), who highlights that well-designed audiobooks can increase motivation and engagement among learners with visual impairments. Similarly, Saputra et al. (2022) found that structured and accessible audio-based materials encourage independent learning and improve learning outcomes for students with special needs. By providing repeated exposure, authentic pronunciation, and contextualized language use, audiobooks can bridge the gap between theoretical principles of material development and classroom practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that English language learning for tenth grade first semester visually impaired students at SLB N 1 Tabanan has not yet fully met the principles of inclusive and effective instruction, particularly in addressing learners' dominant auditory learning characteristics. Although audio-based media have been used in classroom practice, such as WhatsApp voice notes and YouTube videos, these resources remain generic, minimally interactive, and insufficiently adapted to the specific needs of visually impaired students. As anticipated in the introduction, this condition results in reduced engagement, limited speaking confidence, and fluctuating motivation among students, indicating a clear gap between expected inclusive learning practices and actual implementation.

The findings further demonstrate that accessibility alone does not ensure meaningful learning. The absence of customized instructional media, combined with teachers' limited time, technological skills, and reliance on generalized instructional modules, constrains opportunities for communicative language use and independent learning. In line with the discussion, this study confirms that instructional materials which do not consider learners' sensory strengths, affective needs, and emotional engagement tend to limit both comprehension and active participation in English learning.

Furthermore, this study highlights audiobooks as a promising and contextually relevant solution for visually impaired students. Teachers' and students' positive perceptions toward audiobooks indicate that audiobooks have strong potential to enhance listening comprehension, speaking confidence, and learner motivation, particularly those with clear narration, natural intonation, bilingual explanations, appropriate duration, and interactive features. This supports the initial expectation that well-designed auditory-centered media can bridge the gap between inclusive education theory and classroom practice. Also, the development of audiobook materials for teaching English to VIS is the focus, particularly for VIS in the first semester of SLB 1 Tabanan's tenth grade. Thus, the findings of this research suggest the teacher to make better use of audio-based learning media such as audiobooks as an alternative to VIS-friendly materials. Then, the research implication demonstrates a strong correlation between identifying learning problems. Teachers, learning designers, and other education stakeholders can use the implications of these findings to improve the efficacy, accessibility, and inclusivity of English language instruction for students with visual impairments.

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