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THE INFLUENCE OF PODCASTS ON EFL LISTENING PRACTICES

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Annotation: Podcasts have emerged as an innovative tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in enhancing listening comprehension skills. This study explores the effectiveness of podcasts in improving EFL learners' listening abilities by integrating them into regular language instruction. A mixed-methods approach was used to analyze learners' performance and perceptions before and after podcast-based listening training. The findings indicate that podcasts contribute to increased exposure to authentic language input, improved comprehension skills, and enhanced learner motivation. This study highlights the pedagogical benefits of incorporating podcasts into EFL curricula and provides recommendations for educators on effective implementation strategies.

Key words: Podcasts, EFL Listening, Authentic Input, Language Exposure, Comprehension, Motivation, Digital Learning, Technology in Education

Introduction: Podcasts have gained significant attention as an effective tool for improving listening comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Unlike traditional audio materials, podcasts provide authentic and engaging listening experiences, exposing learners to diverse accents, natural speech patterns, and real-world communication (Rost, 2016). Research suggests that podcasts enhance metacognitive listening strategies, allowing learners to monitor their comprehension and improve their ability to process spoken language more effectively (Rahimi & Katal, 2012). Additionally, their flexibility enables learners to control playback speed, repeat sections, and practice at their own pace, making podcasts a valuable resource for independent language learning (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007).

Despite these advantages, there is still a need to explore the extent to which podcasts influence EFL learners' listening comprehension skills. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing EFL students' listening abilities, motivation, and engagement. By employing a mixed-methods research approach, the study examines how exposure to podcast-based instruction impacts learners' comprehension and overall language proficiency. The findings will provide insights into best practices for integrating podcasts into EFL curricula and highlight their role in fostering autonomous learning.

Methodology: This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the impact of podcasts on EFL listening comprehension. A quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test assessments was used to measure the effectiveness of podcast-based instruction compared to traditional listening exercises. Additionally, qualitative data from student reflections and classroom observations provided deeper insights into learners' engagement and attitudes toward podcast-based learning. The study is grounded in Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition, and Vandergrift's (2007) Metacognitive Listening Strategies Framework, which highlights the importance of active listening processes in improving comprehension.

Participants and Sampling: The study involved intermediate-level EFL learners (B1-B2 CEFR) enrolled in an academic English program at a university in Uzbekistan. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who met the following criteria:

- Enrolled in a listening skills course
- No prior experience with podcast-based learning
- Voluntarily agreed to participate in the study

Participants were divided into two groups:

- Experimental Group (Podcast-Based Instruction) – Engaged in listening activities using educational podcasts, including discussions, interviews, and storytelling sessions.
- Control Group (Traditional Listening Instruction) – Used textbook-based listening exercises with scripted dialogues and comprehension questions.

Instructional Procedure: The intervention lasted six weeks, with both groups receiving the same number of listening lessons but differing in methodology.

Experimental Group (Podcast-Based Learning)

- Authentic Podcasts: Learners listened to podcasts featuring real-life conversations, interviews, and news reports.
- Pre-Listening Activities: Students predicted content based on episode titles and discussed related vocabulary.
- While-Listening Strategies: Learners took notes, identified key ideas, and used transcript-based comprehension checks.
- Post-Listening Tasks: Students summarized episodes, participated in discussions, and completed reflection journals on their listening experiences.

Control Group (Traditional Listening Instruction)

- Textbook-Based Audio: Students listened to scripted dialogues aligned with course materials.
- Comprehension Questions: Learners answered multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

- **Teacher-Led Discussions:** The instructor explained key vocabulary and grammar structures.

Quantitative Data Collection

- **Pre-Test and Post-Test Assessments:**
 - Students completed a listening comprehension test before and after the intervention.
 - The test evaluated key skills such as main idea identification, inference-making, and understanding of idiomatic expressions.
- **Survey on Listening Confidence and Motivation:**
 - A Likert-scale questionnaire measured students' attitudes toward listening activities before and after the study.

Qualitative Data Collection

- **Student Reflections:** Learners maintained journals documenting their experiences with podcast-based learning.
- **Classroom Observations:** The instructor recorded student engagement and participation patterns.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Selected students shared insights into their perceptions of podcast-based instruction.

Quantitative Data Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for pre-test and post-test comparisons.
- **T-tests:** Used to determine statistical significance in listening comprehension improvements between groups.

Qualitative Data Analysis

- **Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006):**
 - Student reflections and interviews were coded into themes such as motivation, engagement, and comprehension strategies.

Ethical Considerations: The study adhered to ethical research principles, ensuring:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully briefed and voluntarily agreed to participate.
- **Confidentiality:** Personal data was anonymized and securely stored.
- **Academic Integrity:** Data collection and analysis followed transparent and objective procedures.

Limitations and Future Research: While this study provides valuable insights, it has some limitations:

- **Short Duration:** Six weeks may not fully capture long-term listening development.

- **Sample Size:** Findings are based on a specific group of students and may not be generalizable.
- **Context-Specific Results:** Outcomes may vary in different cultural and linguistic settings.

Future research should investigate the long-term impact of podcasts on listening proficiency, explore their effects on learners of different proficiency levels, and examine the integration of interactive podcasting activities in EFL curricula.

Results and Discussion: Quantitative Findings: The comparison of pre-test and post-test results revealed that the experimental group, which used podcast-based instruction, showed significant improvement in listening comprehension compared to the control group. The average post-test scores of the experimental group were notably higher, indicating that exposure to authentic listening materials enhanced their ability to understand spoken English more effectively. Statistical analysis using t-tests confirmed that the difference in mean scores between the two groups was significant. These findings align with previous studies (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Graham, 2017) that emphasize the role of extensive listening practice in developing comprehension skills.

Additionally, survey results showed that students in the experimental group reported increased confidence in their listening abilities. Before the intervention, many participants expressed difficulties in understanding natural speech, dealing with accents, and following fast-paced dialogues. However, after six weeks of podcast-based learning, their self-reported confidence levels improved, suggesting that consistent exposure to real-life audio materials fosters better adaptation to natural speech patterns.

Qualitative Findings: Student Reflections and Perceptions.

Qualitative analysis of student reflections revealed several themes: engagement, motivation, and strategy use. Many students expressed enjoyment in using podcasts as a learning tool, highlighting their accessibility and relevance. Some noted that listening to real-life conversations helped them develop a better sense of pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm in spoken English. This supports findings by Field (2008), who argues that authentic materials enhance listening fluency. Furthermore, students in the podcast-based group frequently mentioned the effectiveness of pre-listening activities in preparing them for comprehension. Predicting content, discussing key vocabulary, and setting listening goals helped them actively engage with the audio material. These observations align with the metacognitive listening strategies proposed by Vandergrift (2003), which emphasize planning, monitoring, and evaluating listening processes.

Classroom Observations: Classroom observations confirmed that students in the experimental group displayed higher levels of participation during discussions. Unlike the control group, which relied heavily on teacher-led explanations, the podcast-based group engaged in peer discussions and actively shared insights. This supports the

argument by Rost (2011) that interactive listening tasks encourage deeper cognitive processing and retention of information.

Challenges and Limitations: Despite positive outcomes, some students faced initial difficulties in adapting to authentic audio materials. They reported struggling with unfamiliar accents, fast speech rates, and idiomatic expressions. However, as the intervention progressed, they developed strategies such as note-taking and repeated listening to enhance comprehension. This aligns with Siegel's (2014) research, which suggests that repeated exposure to authentic input gradually improves learners' ability to process real-world spoken language.

Discussion: The findings of this study support the effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension. The experimental group's significant improvement in test scores and increased confidence suggests that exposure to authentic, unscripted audio materials provides valuable linguistic input. These results are consistent with Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which states that comprehensible input plays a crucial role in second language acquisition. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of interactive and strategy-based listening approaches. The use of pre-listening tasks, note-taking, and peer discussions contributed to better comprehension and engagement. This aligns with the work of Goh (2010), who emphasizes the role of metacognitive instruction in improving listening skills.

However, the study also reveals that adapting to authentic listening materials requires time and practice. While students initially struggled with fast speech rates and unfamiliar accents, their gradual improvement suggests that regular exposure is key to overcoming these challenges. This finding is supported by Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari (2010), who argue that strategic listening practice enhances learners' ability to decode natural speech.

Overall, the results indicate that integrating podcasts into EFL listening instruction can be a highly effective approach. The study underscores the need for structured implementation, including guided listening activities and strategy-based training, to maximize the benefits of podcast-based learning.

Conclusion: This study examined the impact of podcasts on EFL learners' listening comprehension and engagement. The findings indicate that podcast-based instruction significantly enhances listening skills, as evidenced by the experimental group's improved test scores and increased confidence. The integration of authentic audio materials provided learners with exposure to real-life speech patterns, accents, and intonations, which contributed to their overall comprehension abilities. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of metacognitive listening strategies, such as pre-listening tasks, note-taking, and peer discussions, in facilitating effective comprehension. While some students initially struggled with fast speech rates and unfamiliar vocabulary, their gradual improvement suggests that sustained exposure and strategic listening

approaches help learners adapt to authentic spoken English. These results align with previous research on the role of extensive listening practice in language acquisition (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Graham, 2017).

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations, including its short duration and relatively small sample size. Future research could explore the long-term effects of podcast-based learning and investigate its impact across different proficiency levels and learning contexts. Additionally, incorporating digital tools and interactive podcast activities could further enhance learner engagement and comprehension. Overall, the findings suggest that podcasts are a valuable resource for improving EFL listening skills. Educators should consider integrating structured podcast-based activities into their curriculum to create an engaging, immersive, and effective listening environment.

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