

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PODCASTS ON FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION AT KHANH HOA UNIVERSITY

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 02/02/2023	Listening skill plays an essential role in second language learning process. However, this is a challenging skill and many students find themselves struggling with English listening skill. How to help students improve their listening skill is a great concern of many teachers. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the effectiveness of using Podcasts on first-year English majored students' listening comprehension and their attitudes towards the use of Podcasts in learning listening skill. To achieve the objectives, sixty first-year English majored students at Khanh Hoa University were chosen to participate in this research and divided into two groups with 30 students in the experiment group and 30 students in the control group. This quasi-experimental research was carried out in ten weeks of the academic year 2021-2022. Listening tests based on the curriculum and the close-ended questionnaire were employed to explore their listening achievement as well as perspectives towards the use of Podcasts. The results indicated that using Podcasts in the listening classroom had a positive effect on students' listening achievement, and they had positive attitudes towards this method. Students perceived that podcasts provided authentic materials, interesting activities and enriched their vocabulary, so they felt more motivated to learn English and focused on listening skill. Consequently, it is recommended that teachers should consider applying Podcasts in listening periods to help students learn listening comprehension better.
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KEYWORDS	
Listening comprehension skill	
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HIỆU QUẢ CỦA VIỆC SỬ DỤNG PODCASTS ĐỐI VỚI KỸ NĂNG NGHE HIỂU CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGỮ NĂM NHẤT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KHÁNH HÒA

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 02/02/2023	Kỹ năng nghe đóng một vai trò thiết yếu trong quá trình học ngôn ngữ. Tuy nhiên, đây là một kỹ năng khó và nhiều sinh viên cảm thấy khó khăn trong việc học kỹ năng này. Làm thế nào giúp sinh viên cải thiện kỹ năng nghe là mối quan tâm lớn của nhiều giáo viên. Do đó, nghiên cứu này thực hiện với mục đích khảo sát tính hiệu quả cũng như thái độ của người học khi sử dụng Podcasts trong việc dạy kỹ năng nghe. Để đạt được mục tiêu, 60 sinh viên chuyên ngữ năm thứ nhất trường Đại học Khánh Hòa được chọn tham gia nghiên cứu này, được chia thành 2 nhóm gồm 30 sinh viên trong nhóm thực nghiệm và 30 sinh viên trong nhóm đối chứng. Nghiên cứu thực nghiệm được thực hiện trong 10 tuần của năm học 2021-2022. Dữ liệu được thu thập qua các bài kiểm tra nghe dựa trên chương trình học của sinh viên và phiếu điều tra với các câu hỏi kín. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy việc sử dụng Podcasts trong lớp học nghe có ảnh hưởng tốt đến thành tích học tập của sinh viên, và họ có những phản hồi tích cực đối với phương pháp này. Sinh viên nhận thức rằng Podcasts cung cấp nguồn tài liệu thực tiễn, hoạt động thú vị và giúp họ tăng cường nguồn tự vựng, vì vậy họ cảm thấy có động lực và tập trung hơn khi học kỹ năng nghe. Do đó, giáo viên được khuyến nghị xem xét sử dụng Podcasts trong các tiết dạy nghe để giúp sinh viên nâng cao khả năng nghe hiểu.
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1. Introduction

English is a global language; therefore, learning English has become the general tendency for people of all ages and professions. Of four language skills, English listening skill plays a critical role in foreign language teaching and learning. It is considered an important aspect in communicating with others and in foreign language classroom as well. In language learning process, listening provides input for students. According to Rost [1, p.141-142], if students cannot understand the input, the learning process cannot begin.

Although English listening comprehension is important, it is considered one of the most difficult skills for majored English students in universities today. They face a lot of problems when they listen to a language. Different culture, different accent, unfamiliar and restricted vocabulary, length and speech of listening, and lack of interest are important factors that increase learners' listening comprehension problems. Consequently, how to assist students to improve their English listening comprehension and get them involved in the content of the lesson is a matter to take into consideration. With the aim of creating motivation for teaching and learning environment as well as help students gain the best efficiency in learning listening skill, using Podcasts in teaching and learning listening comprehension is strongly expected to be feasible.

In the area of language teaching, applications for listening have become increasingly popular. Podcasts are considered one of authentic resources for teaching listening. Evans [2] indicated that the term "Podcast" results from the combination of two words "iPod", the popular digital music player from Apple, and "broadcast". Podcasts provide convenience for listeners to select and listen to their favourite program. According to Evans [2], podcasts are digital media files that can be downloaded by listeners and played on electronic portable devices such as taps, smartphones and laptops, and then can be watched or listened to at any time or any place. Furthermore, Podcasts have unique feature and differences from other audios in terms of its content. The audio content presents authentic listening source which allows every listeners benefit from it [3].

In addition, some researchers have proved the benefits and reasons for using Podcasts in language learning classrooms in their studies [4], [5]. Similarly, Al Qasim and Al Fadda [6] concluded that the use of Podcasts affects Saudi participants' listening comprehension positively. Constantine [3] stated that even at the beginning levels, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners can benefit from the use of Podcasts by only listening from three to five minutes a day. He also claimed that the intermediate students are able to access authentic texts and exposed to different voice and for the advanced level, they must be able to learn from listening. Moreover, podcasts provide learners with "full access authentic resources" in non-English speaking contexts [7, p.47]. Furthermore, Podcasts provide a 'real-life listening' source which all foreign language students are allowed to benefit from it. Lu [8] demonstrated that Podcasts have significant impact on the learners' listening comprehension through his four-week study. The purpose of the research was to investigate how podcasts in both UK and US English could improve the listening and speaking proficiency of EFL learners which involved a Taiwanese learner who had not previously been exposed to authentic English. The study discovered that the use of Podcasts in listening instruction had a positive impact on his listening comprehension. He also gained confidence in his ability to comprehend English overall. Ashraf, Naroozi and Salami [9] emphasized the positive effect of Podcasts on Iranian EFL second-year students' listening comprehension. Similarly, Hawke's [10] study reported significance improvement on science students' scientific English listening skills through Podcasts. As supplementary materials, Podcasts assist students pay attention on its content and motivate them to learn listening both using bottom up and top down strategies.

Many worldwide studies proved that students have positive response towards learning English through podcasts [11], [12]. Moreover, Putman and Kingsley's [13] developed a study asking science students perception towards the use of Podcasts in English classroom. The findings revealed that Podcasts help students gain more science vocabulary as well as motivate them to

learn vocabulary. Some studies also concluded that Podcasts enhance students' motivation due to its various and interesting topics [14], [15]. Furthermore, in Li's study [16], the respondents admitted that they enjoyed listening to Podcasts and Podcasts were easy to access. Even though many studies above confirm the positive attitudes towards the use of Podcasts, there exist some studies that reveal no benefit of using Podcasts to students [17].

In addition, although there are many researchers about the field of teaching English listening comprehension, no specific studies on using Podcasts in teaching and learning listening skill to the first-year English majored students at Khanh Hoa University have been found. Consequently, the researcher hopes that this study can partly help the teachers and students at this school find out the interesting and effective strategy to teach and learn English listening comprehension.

All the reasons mentioned above have inspired this study to be conducted. The study was carried out with two main aims: (1) to investigate the effectiveness of using Podcasts in teaching English listening skill, and (2) to explore students' attitudes on using Podcasts in listening lessons. In order to account for the goal of the study, the researcher poses the two following questions:

- 1) How teaching listening with Podcasts affects students' listening comprehension?
- 2) What are the first-year English majored students' attitudes towards using Podcasts in teaching listening skill at Khanh Hoa University?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

This study applied the quasi-experimental design in the form of pre-test and post-test to examine the effectiveness of utilizing Podcasts in teaching English listening comprehension.

2.2. Research sites and participants

Sixty first-year English majored students at Khanh Hoa University were chosen as participants in this study. These students had learned English for at least seven years at school. They, aged 18, were randomly separated into two groups, namely the control group with 30 participants and the experimental group with 30 participants. This selection was based on the learners' equivalence in English language proficiency. The researcher was in charge of teaching these groups, which was considered as the convenience of the study.

The study was carried out in 10 weeks from the beginning of November 2021 to the beginning of January 2022.

Before the treatment, the researcher prepared everything carefully. The textbook entitled "Active Listening 1" by Steven Brown and Dorolyn Smith [18] was used as the teaching material for both groups. Ten topics in the textbook were chosen to teach the two groups according to the curriculum of Listening 1, including meeting people, families, numbers, free time, great outfit, in the house, time, movie, a typical day and location. After that, the ten listening lessons were planned in two different methods. The experimental group was taught with the application of Podcasts. Since Podcasts was the treatment of the study, the researcher had chosen ten Podcast files which were suitable with the topics to teach students. They practiced the listening exercises on Podcasts on their digital devices such as laptops, mobile phones, or tablets. On the contrary, the control group received no special treatment. They were taught by following the listening activities designed in the book.

2.3. Research instrument

The method was used to collect data including pre-test and post-test, and the questionnaire.

In terms of pre-test and post-test, the author developed them for the control and experimental groups with the same language content and in the same matrix. Moreover, the listening comprehension tests were constructed to meet the criteria of validity and reliability tests. When designing the tests, the researcher utilized a variety of test tasks such as multiple-choice items,

true/false items and gap-filling items. Furthermore, the tests were designed with topics presented in the textbook and based on the requirements in the curriculum of listening skill at Khanh Hoa University to assess how well the participants could master.

In addition, based on the previous research studies as described above, the closed-ended questions were used to explore the students' attitudes on using Podcasts in teaching and learning listening comprehension. The questionnaire constructed in the form of the five-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was adopted from the study [5] by Al Qasim and Al Fadda. In this study, the questionnaire was modified into two main sections. The first one was designed in order to know some personal information about the students in the experimental group such as ages, genders and a period of time of learning English. The second one included nine items, which were designed to collect data on the participants' attitudes towards the use of Podcasts in teaching listening comprehension. In this part, students' opinions about the following aspects: the preference of using Podcasts in listening lessons, the students' attitudes towards the usefulness of Podcasts for learning English listening skill and their reasons were exploited.

2.4. Data collection and analysis procedures

Before starting the treatment, the listening comprehension tests were administered to all participants as pre-tests to assess their listening comprehension. Then the experimental group received the treatment with the use of Podcasts while the control group was taught by the traditional methods of teaching listening skill. Both groups studied the same listening topics. After more than two and a half months, two groups finished the process of learning and were administered the same listening tests as post-tests. The participants completed the listening comprehension test individually in thirty minutes. The tests were scored carefully. In order to explore the impact of using Podcasts in teaching English listening comprehension, the researcher used the t-test as an instrument to assess the significance of the mean difference. After collecting data from the participants' scores on the pre- and post-tests in the experimental and control groups, the researcher analyzed data through Microsoft Excel and SPSS software.

In terms of the student questionnaire, it was administered to the first-year English majored students in the experimental group in order to explore their attitudes and their evaluation about the effectiveness of using Podcasts in teaching listening skill afterwards as well. With an attempt to make the results of the questionnaire more reliable, the researcher tried to explain the items so that all participants could understand all the requirements of the questionnaire before finishing them. Then, the respondents submitted them to the researcher after completing the questionnaire in fifteen minutes.

Based on the data collected, an analysis and comparison to consider the change in results of the two groups were carried out after applying the two different ways of teaching English listening comprehension.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results

In order to investigate the effectiveness of using Podcasts in teaching and learning English listening comprehension, the researcher utilized the t-test. The data were calculated and analyzed based on the students' marks in the pre- and post-tests in the experimental and control groups. The tables below show the illustration of data analysis and interpretation.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the students' performance on listening comprehension in the pre-test. The mean score of the control group was 14.77 and the mean score of the experimental groups was 14.63. The standard deviation of the control group was 1.85 and 2.08 for the experimental group. In addition, the value of statistics t was less than that of the critical t ($0.26 < 2.00$). It means that there is no significant difference between the two groups in

the pre-test. This indicates that the two groups were quite equivalent in listening comprehension before the experiment.

Table 1. *Summary of pre-test results*

Group	Control	Experimental
N	30	30
M	14.77	14.63
SD	1.85	2.08
Mean difference		0.14
t statistics		0.26
t-critical		2.00
Degree of freedom		58

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the students' performance on listening comprehension in the post-test. The mean score of the control group was 14.93, while the mean score of the experimental group was 16.17, and the standard of deviation of the control and experimental groups was 1.87 and 2.04 respectively. Furthermore, the value of statistics t was greater than that of the critical t ($2.44 > 2.00$). This result implies that there is significant difference between experimental and control groups at the end of the research period. It could be inferred that the use of Podcasts had a positive impact on the experimental students' listening comprehension.

Table 2. *Summary of post-test results*

Group	Control	Experimental
N	30	30
M	14.93	16.17
SD	1.87	2.04
Mean difference		-1.24
t statistics		-2.44
t-critical		2.00
Degree of freedom		58

To better confirm the significance of the statistics, the results on the pre-test and post-test of each group were submitted to pair samples T-test. Table 3 presents the results of the paired T-test in the control group and table 4 shows the results of the paired T-test in the experimental group.

Table 3. *Summary of Paired T-test of control group*

Control group	Pre-test	Post-test
N	30	30
M	14.77	14.93
t statistics		-0.42
t-critical two-tail		2.04
Degree of freedom		29

Table 4. *Summary of paired T-test of experimental group*

Experimental group	Pre-test	Post-test
N	30	30
M	14.63	16.17
t statistics		-13.35
t-critical two-tail		2.04
Degree of freedom		29

According to Table 3, it can be seen that the value of t-statistics was 0.42. The table of t-critical with 29 degrees of freedom for 0.05 level, showed t-critical of 2.04. The value of t-statistics was smaller than that of t-critical ($0.42 < 2.04$). These results reveal that the difference between the pre-test and post-test in the control group was not significant. In contrast, Table 4 shows that the value of t-statistics was 13.35. Considering the degree of freedom (29), the t-

critical was 2.04 in the table. The value of t-statistics was greater than that of t-critical ($13.35 > 2.04$) which means that the pre-test and post-test were different from each other in the experimental group and this difference was statistically significant.

As mentioned above, the researcher used the questionnaire as a tool to examine participants' perception and the effectiveness of using Podcasts in learning English listening comprehension. Therefore, a large amount of data were collected and Table 5 will show the response of participants towards the use of Podcasts in studying English listening comprehension.

Table 5. *Students' responses towards the use of podcasts*

Item	Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
1	Podcasts enhance students' motivation in learning English listening skill.	0	0	20	63.3	16.7
2	Podcasts help students improve their listening skill.	0	6.7	10	73.3	10
3	Podcasts is very portable and easy to use.	0	0	3.3	76.7	20
4	The length of podcast episodes is appropriate for students to concentrate on listening.	0	3.3	10	70	6.7
5	The activities in Podcasts are interesting.	0	0	6.7	73.3	20
6	Podcasts offers authentic materials of English listening.	0	0	10	63.3	16.7
7	Podcasts help students enrich their vocabulary.	0	0	3.3	20	76.7
8	Podcasts should be used in teaching listening skill.	0	0	20	6.7	73.3
9	The topics selected are appropriate and useful.	0	10	10	60	20

As can be seen in Table 5 – statement 1, 80% of the participants (16.7% strongly agree and 63.3% agree) were in agreement that Podcasts could enhance their motivation in learning English listening skill and 20% were neutral. The result in the second statement indicated that the listening skill of the majority of the students was improved after listening to Podcasts. The data collected from the third statement positively showed that 20% of the participants strongly agreed and 76.7% agreed that Podcasts are portable and easy to use. In statement 4, it is noticed that 6.7% of the respondents strongly agreed and 70% agreed that the length of podcast episodes is appropriate for them to concentrate on listening, but only 3.3% disagreed with that and 10% chose neutral. In statement 5, a large number of students (20% strongly agree and 73.3% agree) perceived that the tasks and the activities presented in Podcasts are interesting. In terms of its authenticity, most students thought that Podcasts provide them with authentic materials of English listening. Interestingly, 96.7% of the students in the study admit that their vocabulary could be enriched after practicing listening to Podcasts. In addition, the result in the statement 8 revealed that the majority of the participants (73.3% strongly agree and 6.7% agree) recommend that the teacher should use Podcasts in the listening classroom. In the last statement, 80% of respondents acknowledged that the topics selected were appropriate and useful while only 10% of the students disagreed and 20% were neutral.

3.2. Discussion

In this section, the findings were discussed in two major parts, namely the participants' performance on the pre-test and post-test and their attitudes towards the use of Podcasts in listening classroom.

To begin with, it can be inferred from the results of the data analysis that the participants in the experimental group gained better scores after the intervention. They achieved better results for the post-test than that of the pre-test. In addition, their scores in the post-test were higher than those of their counterparts in the control group. The differences in mean scores via t-test are proved to be significant. Specifically, when calculating and comparing the results of the control group and the results of the experimental group, the researcher found out that the t-value in the experimental group was greater than that in the control group. It means that the participants who received the

instruction through the use of Podcasts performed better in the post-test. In other words, Podcasts can enhance students' listening comprehension better than traditional classroom treatment.

Secondly, the obtained results from the questionnaire showed that the respondents' attitudes towards the implementation of Podcasts in learning English listening comprehension are highly positive. Most of the students actively participated in the listening activities. They felt motivated to complete the English listening tasks. In addition, the activities in Podcasts were interesting, which raised their interest and stimulation on the lesson. Furthermore, authentic materials from a variety of topics in Podcasts helped students enrich their vocabulary and improve their listening comprehension. The data showed that students concentrated more on the lesson thanks to the appropriate duration. Moreover, students perceived that Podcasts were portable and easy to use, so students could download the materials easily and access them anytime.

Finally, the effectiveness of Podcasts on improving listening comprehension of the first-year English majored students' is proved through the findings from the literature review and the obtained results from this study. Consequently, the teacher should apply this approach into the classroom to meet the learning objectives.

4. Conclusion

Due to the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the use of Podcasts in classroom plays a major role in the promotion of the first-year English majored students' listening comprehension skill. Based on the data collected from the T-test, the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group since the mean difference between the pre- and post-tests and the value of t-statistics was much bigger than that of t-critical. Moreover, students' attitudes towards the application of Podcasts in listening comprehension lessons were also found positive.

Beside certain success, several limitations could be recognized in this research. The first limitation is about the small size of the sample. Another one is constrain of the time and the limited capability of the author. Finally, the number of the listening topics taken into the treatment process is quite limited. While the present study has its own limitations, it is hoped to provide direction for future research. It is recommended that further research needs to be carried out in a larger time frame and on a larger scale. Also, more listening topics should be included to make the results more persuasive.

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