

# USING PODCASTS TO ENHANCE ENGLISH LISTENING SKILLS FOR THE 11TH GRADERS AT AN ENGLISH CENTER IN HANOI

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the use of podcasts to improve 11th graders' listening skills. It aimed to assess the effectiveness of authentic English podcasts and gather student perceptions. Using an action research approach, the study involved 25 pre-intermediate students who took a pre-test, a post-test, and a delayed post-test, and participated in a survey questionnaire and interviews. Results showed that podcasts significantly enhanced listening skills, particularly among lower-performing students. Students appreciated the podcasts for their convenience, authenticity, and positive effects on vocabulary, grammar, and sound recognition, despite challenges like unfamiliar accents. The findings suggest that podcasts are a valuable tool for flexible, independent learning in English education.*

**Keywords:** *Podcasts, listening skills, 11<sup>th</sup> graders, action research.*

## **I. Introduction**

Listening skills are crucial yet challenging to master due to factors like dialects, speech speed, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Among numerous innovative approaches to teaching listening skills, podcasts offer a self-paced, flexible learning tool that effectively supports students, making them popular in the Vietnamese context. This study aims to assess how podcasts improve 11<sup>th</sup> graders' listening skills and their attitudes toward this method. By following the action research approach, it seeks to understand the effectiveness of podcasts and gather student perceptions. The research addresses two key objectives:

(1) to investigate the extent to which using podcasts can enhance the listening skills of 11th graders, and (2) to examine students' attitudes towards the use of podcasts in improving their listening skills. This study highlights the potential of podcasts in language learning, offering insights for educators and curriculum developers. It addresses both the benefits and challenges of integration, with implications for high school institutions. Additionally, the research lays the groundwork for future studies on the role of digital media in language education, contributing to the development of strategies to improve listening skills.

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## **II. Theoretical Basis**

### ***2.1. An overview of listening skills***

#### ***Definition of listening as a skill***

Listening, as described by Rost (2015), involves cognitive processes such as neurological, linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic functions, with hearing, comprehension, and context interpretation being essential. According to Harmer (2007, p. 133), listening is one of the important skills in the learning process of English. Bailey (2020) highlights two key processes: decoding sounds and building meaning from context.

#### ***Types of Listening***

Harmer (2007) identifies two types of listening: intensive listening, used in classrooms to improve skills with teacher guidance, and extensive listening, which occurs outside the classroom for enjoyment and partial understanding. Brown and Lee (2015) expand this to six types, ranging from reactive listening, which involves repeating sounds without understanding, to the more complex interactive listening, which combines listening with other language skills for authentic communication.

#### ***Factors affecting listening***

Wilson (2008) categorizes listening challenges into four main groups: message, delivery, listener, and environment. Message factors include issues like word recognition, pronunciation, unfamiliar vocabulary, and cultural understanding. Delivery factors involve speaker pace, accent, disorganized speech, and limited clarification opportunities. Listener factors include attention span, motivation, learning style mismatches, anxiety, and fatigue. Environmental factors encompass room temperature, background noise, and poor equipment quality.

#### ***Listening sources and strategies***

Wilson (2008) identifies seven listening sources: teachers, students,

guests, textbook recordings, media, songs, and the internet. Listening strategies include cognitive (task-focused), metacognitive (long-term learning), and socio-affective (interaction and attitudes), along with communication, learning, elaborative, and evaluative strategies.

#### ***Stages during a listening lesson and Assessing listening***

Listening lessons generally follow a three-phase format: pre-listening (vocabulary introduction and preparation), while-listening (listening for general and specific information), and post-listening (comprehension checks and discussions).

Rost (2015) highlights the role of assessment in planning, feedback, and curriculum evaluation, and Brown and Lee (2015) propose tasks for assessing various types of listening, including intensive, responsive, selective, and extensive listening.

### ***2.2. An overview of podcasts***

#### ***Definition of podcasts***

A podcast, as defined by Wilson (2008), is a digital tool for publishing audio files on the internet, accessible via platforms like iTunes or Spotify through RSS feeds. Podcasts, originating from “iPod” and “broadcast,” are part of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and offer personalized learning. They can be accessed from computers and mobile devices, making them versatile for education.

#### ***Types of podcasts***

Basenko and Baskakova (2021) identify five types of podcasts for learning English: complete lesson podcasts, vocabulary learning podcasts, phonetics development podcasts, storytelling podcasts, and humor-integrated podcasts, each targeting different language skills. Fox (2008) expands this taxonomy, including drill podcasts for technical

aspects, pedagogical podcasts for presentations, simplified language podcasts for beginners, and student-produced podcasts, which encourage learners to create and share content as part of their coursework.

### ***Podcasts as language learning materials***

Podcast resources for language learning were categorized into two main types: 1) authentic content created by native speakers or advanced learners, such as news or radio programs, not specifically aimed at teaching language, and 2) language courses or instructional content tailored for learners (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). This second type is divided into materials for specific audiences, like classroom resources from teachers, and supplementary content for independent learners, distributed publicly as podcasts.

### ***Advantages of podcasts for learning***

Podcasts offer numerous advantages for learning. They provide current, authentic content, exposing learners to diverse accents, speech patterns, and vocabulary, which improves listening comprehension and language proficiency. Podcasts also promote independent learning by allowing students to explore topics of interest, fostering engagement and motivation. Apart from that, their flexibility and convenience enable learners to access content anytime, fitting educational practice into daily routines. Additionally, podcasts support mobile learning, as they can be downloaded onto devices and accessed anywhere. Furthermore, it provides authentic oral language examples in real-life contexts, helping learners grasp everyday communication. Moreover, podcasts allow users to control playback, pausing or slowing down content for better understanding. Overall, podcasts enhance learning through dynamic content,

autonomy, flexibility, and exposure to real-world language.

### ***2.3. Previous studies***

Previous studies demonstrate the effectiveness of podcasts in improving listening skills. Kavaliauskiene (2008) recommended blending podcasts with classroom activities, while Gonulal (2020) noted improvements in pronunciation and vocabulary, despite challenges with speech pace. Syhabuddin and Rizqa (2021) and Putra and Dianti (2022) confirmed significant gains in listening comprehension through podcasts. In Vietnam, Nguyen (2019) and Do (2023) found that podcasts positively impacted ESL students' listening skills, performance, and motivation, recommending their use in listening lessons.

### ***Research gap***

Despite extensive research on using podcasts to improve English listening skills, studies on this topic in Vietnam are limited. To address this gap, the researcher conducted a study titled "Using Podcasts to Enhance English Listening Skills for 11th Graders at an English Center in Hanoi", specifically examining the impact of podcasts on students at the Kiwi English Center.

## **III. Research Methodology**

### ***3.1. Research setting***

The study was conducted at Kiwi English Center, which is an English center that was founded in Hanoi in 2016. The center accepts students from three to 18 years old and offers three main courses: Comprehensive English, CLC Placement Test Preparation, and Cambridge & IELTS Exam Preparation. Classes are typically conducted twice a week.

### ***3.2. Participants***

The participants of this study were 25 11<sup>th</sup> graders studying at Kiwi English Center. The students were 17 years old with a pre-intermediate level of English proficiency. They were selected based on convenience

sampling according to the researcher's access to the class as their host teacher.

### 3.3. Research design

This study employed an action research approach, using Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) four-step model (plan, act, observe, reflect). One cycle was implemented, beginning with the identification of the research problem and planning an intervention involving podcasts. The action phase followed, where the researcher taught using podcasts after a pre-test, then conducted a post-test after one month and continued teaching with podcasts for another month. The observation phase included a delayed post-test, questionnaires, and interviews. Finally, the researcher reflected on the findings through data analysis and discussion to address the research questions.

### 3.4. Data collection instruments

Three data collection instruments were used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. First, listening tests

were administered at different stages: a pre-test, a post-test after one month, and a delayed post-test a month later. Second, a questionnaire was used to collect data on participants' perceptions of using English podcasts in learning, consisting of multiple-choice, open-ended, and rating scale items. Third, in-person interviews with five participants were conducted, and audio recordings were made for analysis.

### 3.5. Data analysis

The quantitative data from the tests and questionnaire were analyzed with SPSS. The test data was analyzed using paired-sample t-tests to determine whether there were significant improvements in the students' scores. On the other hand, the questionnaire data was analyzed descriptively to identify trends in the participants' answers. Regarding the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and then uploaded to QDA Miner (qualitative analysis software), which facilitated thematic analysis.

## IV. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Improvement of 11th graders' listening skills at Kiwi English Center due to podcasts

Table 4.1.1. Participants' grades across the three tests

Grade	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
A+ (90%-100%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	8 (32%)
A (80%-89%)	2 (8%)	3 (12%)	8 (32%)
B+ (70%-79%)	5 (20%)	8 (32%)	3 (12%)
B (60%-69%)	8 (32%)	5 (20%)	3 (12%)
C (50%-59%)	4 (16%)	4 (16%)	2 (8%)
F (0%-49%)	6 (24%)	4 (16%)	1 (4%)

In the pre-test, no students achieved an A+, with 28% scoring above 70% and nearly 25% failing. In post-test 1, the failure rate dropped to 16%, and one student achieved an A+. By post-test 2, 32% earned an A+, and only one student failed, showing overall improvement.

The increase from the pre-test to post-test 1 was 1.8 points, and from post-test 1 to post-test 2, it was 4.4 points, both with a statistically significant value of

0.000. Overall, post-test 2 scores were 6.2 points higher than the pre-test.

The table highlights that students who scored a C in the pre-test showed the highest improvement with a 28% average increase by post-test 2. B+ students followed with a 21% improvement, while those who initially failed improved by 19%. Students with Bs and As also demonstrated significant progress.

Table 4.1.2. Independent samples t-test of three tests

Test comparison				
Pair	N	M difference	Correlation	Sig
Pre-test and post-test 1	25	1.8	0.931	.000
Post-test 1 and Post-test 2	25	4.4	0.954	.000
Pre-test and post-test 2	25	6.2	0.856	.000

Table 4.1.3. Mean comparison of initial grade groups

Total improvement of grade groups		
Grade Group	N	M
A (80%-89%)	2	3.5 (12%)
B+ (70%-79%)	8	6.38 (21%)
B (60%-69%)	5	5.6 (19%)
C (50%-59%)	4	8.5 (28%)
F (0%-49%)	6	5.83 (19%)

## 4.2. Students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of podcasts as a tool for enhancing their listening skills

### 4.2.1. Attitudes towards learning English with podcasts

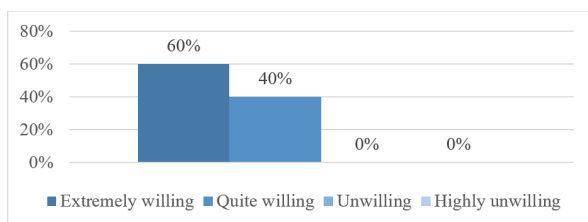


Figure 4.2.1. Participants' willingness to use podcasts in the future to learn English

Participants in the study expressed a strong willingness to use podcasts for

### 4.2.2. Perceived impact of podcasts on listening skills

Table 4.2.2. Participants' perceptions of the impacts of podcasts on listening skills

Category	Items	M	Std. D.
Understanding the speaker	2	4.42	0.542
Convenience of learning	3	4.43	0.530
Authentic language	1	4.56	0.507
Memory	1	4.32	0.627
Recognizing language	3	4.40	0.569
Vocabulary and grammar	2	4.58	0.493
Identifying information	4	4.45	0.524

learning English, with 60% extremely willing and 40% quite willing. They found podcasts convenient and flexible, enabling them to learn anywhere, anytime. Students highlighted benefits such as exposure to authentic language, improved listening skills, vocabulary, and pronunciation, as well as increased cultural awareness. Podcasts were also considered enjoyable and engaging due to the variety of topics available. Most students recommended that teachers incorporate podcasts into listening lessons, as they expose learners to different accents and speaking styles. However, one student mentioned that podcasts should supplement, not replace, live interactions. Regarding topics, students preferred a mix of familiar and new content, with familiar topics fostering engagement and new topics enhancing vocabulary acquisition. Overall, students in both the survey and the interviews had positive attitudes towards using podcasts for English listening, emphasizing their convenience, authenticity, and effectiveness in enhancing language skills.

The participants strongly agreed on the positive impact of podcasts in multiple areas of learning. In terms of understanding speakers, 100% agreed that podcasts helped them recognize various accents and process speech at different speeds. Regarding learning convenience, participants valued podcasts for enabling independent learning at any time and from any location. On authentic language exposure, all participants agreed that podcasts provided real-world language examples. For memory improvement, 92% believed podcasts enhanced their short-term memory. In language recognition, 96% agreed that podcasts improved their ability to identify sounds, stress patterns, and reduced word forms in spoken English. In terms of vocabulary and grammar, most participants (68%) strongly agreed that podcasts improved their vocabulary, with the remaining 32% agreeing. Similarly, 48% strongly agreed and 52% agreed that podcasts improved their grammar. Furthermore, students also reported that podcasts helped them identify key information, with 96% agreeing that podcasts improved their ability to recognize keywords, topics, and speakers' attitudes.

All interviewed students supported the use of podcasts to improve listening skills, citing benefits like exposure to various accents, speaking styles, and real-world content. They also reported vocabulary gains, and many noted grammar improvement from listening to native speakers. Additionally, they mentioned that podcasts enhanced their ability to distinguish main ideas from details, recognize key words, and improve comprehension in various listening situations. Students in the interviews also found podcasts motivating due to their flexibility and topic variety, boosting engagement in learning.

In general, podcasts were viewed as motivating and engaging, offering flexibility and diverse topics, which enhanced student

interest in learning. The study also showed that podcasts helped students distinguish between main ideas and supporting details, aiding comprehension. Overall, participants expressed significantly positive views of the benefits of podcasts in enhancing listening skills, especially in vocabulary, grammar, and authentic language acquisition. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Do (2023) and Pratiwi (2022), which highlighted the motivational and engaging nature of podcasts for learning.

#### *4.2.3. Factors affecting listening to podcasts*

##### ***Content-related factors***

The study revealed that content-related factors had minimal impact on students' podcast listening experience. Only 20% agreed that unknown words were a challenge, and fewer participants agreed with issues like unfamiliar grammar, topics, or cultural understanding. Most students disagreed with these challenges, suggesting that carefully selected podcasts mitigated content difficulties. The interviewed students found unfamiliar vocabulary both challenging and a learning opportunity, though some felt overwhelmed by too many new words.

##### ***Delivery-related factors***

Similarly, delivery-related factors had little effect, with only 20% citing fast speech as an issue. Unfamiliar accents, multiple speakers, and lack of coherence were not seen as significant barriers. However, interviews highlighted challenges like fast speech, strong accents, lack of feedback, and absence of visual context. Interviewed participants found fast speech, strong accents, and lack of visual cues challenging. Although podcasts offer flexibility, they lack the interaction and feedback of live conversations.

##### ***Listener-related factors***

Additionally, listener-related factors also had minimal impact on

podcast learning, with only 24% agreeing that concentrating for a long time was challenging, and more than 80% disagreeing with factors like anxiety, tiredness, or lack of motivation.

### ***Environment-related factors***

Finally, environment-related factors were not significant, as over 80% disagreed that room temperature, background noise, or poor equipment affected their experience. While students acknowledged that good-quality equipment and quiet environments were important, they generally learned in comfortable conditions. The interviewed participants noted that good-quality equipment is crucial for clear listening, and background noise can make focusing difficult as they emphasized the importance of quality headphones and minimal noise. Overall, students had positive experiences, facing few obstacles, which indicated optimal podcast integration into lessons.

## **V. Conclusion**

### ***5.1. Conclusion***

This study concluded that podcasts have significant potential to enhance high school students' listening skills, with students expressing positive perceptions of using podcasts for learning English. However, a few factors negatively impacted their learning experience. Despite these challenges, the use of podcasts created an ideal environment for improving English listening skills, as evidenced by notable improvements in the students' listening scores across all tests. Specifically, podcasts helped students better understand spoken English, contributed to memory development, expanded their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, aided in identifying key information, and enhanced their ability to recognize language patterns. Additionally, podcasts provided an authentic and engaging learning experience. These findings lead

to the conclusion that podcasts effectively improved the listening skills of the 11th graders who participated in this study.

At the start of this study, the researcher wanted to discover whether or not the use of podcasts could help 11<sup>th</sup> graders at Kiwi English Center to improve their listening skills. The outcome of this study has shown the tremendous potential of using podcasts as a tool when teaching listening, both in terms of actual listening scores and students' perceptions of learning with the tool. Therefore, this action research has yielded positive results and caused the researcher to adjust their approach to teaching listening. It is the researcher's belief that these positive results can be replicated in other educational contexts involving 11<sup>th</sup> graders.

### ***5.2. Recommendations***

Teachers are encouraged to incorporate podcasts into their lessons, selecting content aligned with students' language abilities and interests. However, educators should remain mindful of potential challenges related to delivery, content, or environment. The study had two main limitations: a small sample size, limiting generalizability, and potential self-reported bias in identifying factors affecting podcast use. Future research could address these limitations by increasing the sample size, incorporating direct observation, and exploring the long-term impact of podcasts on English language learning. Overall, this research highlights the value of podcasts in enhancing listening skills and offers practical implications for English education.

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## SỬ DỤNG PODCASTS ĐỂ CẢI THIỆN KỸ NĂNG NGHE CHO HỌC SINH LỚP 11 TẠI TRUNG TÂM TIẾNG ANH Ở HÀ NỘI

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này khám phá việc sử dụng podcast để cải thiện kỹ năng nghe tiếng Anh của học sinh lớp 11. Nghiên cứu nhằm mục đích điều tra tính hiệu quả của podcast tiếng Anh và đánh giá nhận thức của học sinh với công cụ này. Phương pháp nghiên cứu chính là phương pháp nghiên cứu hành động. Đối tượng nghiên cứu bao gồm 25 học sinh lớp 11 tham gia làm bài kiểm tra trước, bài kiểm tra sau, khảo sát và phỏng vấn. Kết quả cho thấy podcast đã cải thiện đáng kể kỹ năng nghe của học sinh, đặc biệt là ở những học sinh có kết quả thấp. Học sinh đánh giá cao podcast vì sự tiện lợi, tính xác thực và tác động tích cực đến vốn từ vựng, ngữ pháp và khả năng nhận dạng âm thanh, mặc dù vẫn có những điểm hạn chế nhất định. Nghiên cứu cho thấy podcast là một công cụ có giá trị tốt để học tập linh hoạt và độc lập trong giáo dục tiếng Anh.

**Từ khóa:** Podcast, kỹ năng nghe, học sinh lớp 11, phương pháp nghiên cứu hành động.

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