

USING PODCASTS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LISTENING SKILLS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 11/3/2025 Revised: 31/3/2025 Published: 31/3/2025	This research aims to improve the English listening skills of high school students through the use of podcasts. Experimental activities were conducted over seven weeks with 44 students from class 10A8 at Song Cong High School in semester 2 of the 2024-2025 school year. Participants were divided into two groups: 22 students in the experimental group (using podcasts) and 22 students in the control group (not using podcast). Although all participants completed both pre-tests and post-tests, only the experimental group provided their feedback on using podcasts and suggestions for optimal performance. The researcher used a quasi-experimental method with the experimental group and designed podcast listening exercises using materials from platforms such as YouTube and Spotify, which were relevant to the topics covered in class. Research findings showed significant improvements in students' listening skills, with the experimental group outperforming the control group. Additionally, data collected from questionnaires and tests underwent rigorous analysis to provide a comprehensive overview of the effects of podcasts on listening skills and students' learning experiences. The study also offers recommendations to optimize the integration of podcasts into language learning, making them more effective, engaging, and accessible while mitigating potential implementation challenges.

KEYWORDS

Listening skills
English
Podcasts
High school students
Quasi-experimental

SỬ DỤNG CÁC PODCAST ĐỂ CẢI THIỆN KỸ NĂNG NGHE TIẾNG ANH CHO HỌC SINH TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 11/3/2025 Ngày hoàn thiện: 31/3/2025 Ngày đăng: 31/3/2025	Nghiên cứu này nhằm cải thiện kỹ năng nghe tiếng Anh của học sinh trung học phổ thông thông qua việc sử dụng podcast. Các hoạt động thực nghiệm được triển khai trong vòng bảy tuần với 44 học sinh lớp 10A8 tại Trường THPT Sông Công trong học kỳ II năm học 2024-2025. Người tham gia được chia thành hai nhóm: 22 học sinh thuộc nhóm thực nghiệm (sử dụng podcast) và 22 học sinh thuộc nhóm đối chứng (không sử dụng podcast). Mặc dù tất cả học sinh đều hoàn thành bài kiểm tra trước và sau thực nghiệm, chỉ nhóm thực nghiệm cung cấp phản hồi về việc sử dụng podcast cũng như đề xuất nhằm tối ưu hóa phương pháp này. Nghiên cứu áp dụng phương pháp bán thực nghiệm với nhóm thực nghiệm, trong đó các bài tập nghe từ podcast được thiết kế dựa trên tài liệu lấy từ các nền tảng như YouTube và Spotify, đảm bảo phù hợp với các chủ đề được giảng dạy trên lớp. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy sự cải thiện đáng kể về kỹ năng nghe của học sinh, với nhóm thực nghiệm có thành tích vượt trội hơn so với nhóm đối chứng. Ngoài ra, dữ liệu thu thập từ bảng khảo sát và bài kiểm tra sẽ được phân tích một cách chặt chẽ nhằm cung cấp cái nhìn toàn diện về tác động của podcast đối với kỹ năng nghe và trải nghiệm học tập của học sinh. Nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra các khuyến nghị nhằm tối ưu hóa việc tích hợp podcast vào quá trình học ngoại ngữ, giúp phương pháp này trở nên hiệu quả, hấp dẫn và dễ tiếp cận hơn, đồng thời giảm thiểu những thách thức có thể phát sinh trong quá trình áp dụng.

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1. Introduction

English has established itself as a global language, playing an important role in many fields such as technology, science, education, entertainment, economics and culture. As a result, the demand for English proficiency continues to increase, especially among young learners who recognize its importance for academic and professional success. In the Vietnamese context, English has been integrated into the national education curriculum as a compulsory subject from grade 3 to grade 12, emphasizing its significance in both educational and professional settings. According to Samad and Fitriani (2016), English proficiency helps individuals access global knowledge, increase competitiveness in the job market and foster international collaboration [1].

Among the four core language skills, listening plays a fundamental role in effective communication and language acquisition. Rubin and Thompson (1994) emphasized that listening constitutes approximately 60% of human communication, underscoring its importance in overall language proficiency [2]. However, despite its importance, many Vietnamese high school students still encounter significant difficulties in developing their English listening skills, particularly when dealing with native-speaker accents, rapid speech, and varied intonations. Meanwhile, Field (2008) pointed out that traditional teaching methods rely heavily on listening exercises from textbooks, which often do not reflect the diversity of real-life language [3]. Classroom listening is often clearly spoken, slow, and contains few natural language elements such as linking, colloquialisms, or communicative expressions. This can make it difficult for students to listen to English in real-world environments [4]. Nguyen et al. (2020) identified limited exposure to authentic communicative contexts as a primary factor contributing to these challenges, highlighting the necessity of adopting innovative instructional approaches [5].

With the rapid advancement of digital technology, mobile and web-based learning platforms have emerged as valuable tools in language acquisition. In particular, podcasts have attracted attention as an effective means of improving listening skills by providing learners with authentic, varied, and engaging language information. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) highlighted that frequent exposure to real-world spoken English through podcasts can significantly improve listening comprehension [6]. Despite their growing popularity, research on the integration of podcasts into high school English curricula remains limited, especially in the context of Vietnamese education. Therefore, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of using podcasts to enhance English listening skills among high school students. Specifically, it explores the extent to which podcasts contribute to improving listening abilities and overall language proficiency, thereby proposing more appropriate and effective teaching methods.

1.1. Listening skills

Listening is a fundamental skill in language acquisition and communication, requiring both physiological and cognitive processes. Brown (2001) defines it as a psychomotor process in which sound waves are converted into nerve impulses and processed by the brain [7]. As the most frequently used yet often overlooked language skill, listening plays a crucial role in communication, education, and professional interactions. According to Brown (2011), when neglected, it can lead to misinterpretations and communication breakdowns [8]. In language learning, Krashen (1982) stated that listening serves as the foundation for pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar development [9]. Furthermore, listening skills are essential in language learning, serving as the foundation for effective communication and comprehension. Strong listening abilities enable learners to understand spoken language accurately, facilitating interaction and engagement in real-world conversations. Additionally, proficient listening enhances pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency. Therefore, developing listening skills through active practice is essential for achieving greater proficiency in a second language.

1.2. Understanding Podcasts

Radio is regarded as the forerunner of podcasts, originally serving as a medium for broadcasting music and discussions to the public before evolving into a more personalized form of content delivery. The term "podcast," a blend of "iPod" and "broadcast," was first introduced by Rosell, as cited in Saputra [10]. In addition, Adam Curry and Dave Winer pioneered the development of podcasts by creating a system that enabled the automatic download of internet radio programs to iPods, a breakthrough that has since evolved into a widely accessible medium available across multiple platforms and devices, as explained by Watson [11]. Today, podcasts have become a ubiquitous medium, accessible across multiple platforms and devices, with increasing application in educational settings.

Podcasts have gained prominence as a tool for language learning, particularly in Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) environments. They provide an effective means for improving listening and speaking skills by offering real-life listening experiences that help learners develop more natural pronunciation. Essentially, they are audio files regularly uploaded to the internet, accessible anytime, anywhere. Podcast content is diverse, covering topics such as education, fashion, food, sports, and gaming. According to Rahimi and Katal (2019), podcasts significantly improve listening comprehension and pronunciation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners by exposing them to authentic spoken language [12]. Similarly, Wang and Liao (2020) emphasized the role of podcasts in promoting self-directed learning, allowing learners to practice listening skills at their own pace and engage with content that suits their proficiency level [13].

1.3. Characteristics, benefits, and drawbacks of Podcasts

Podcasts come in various formats, each serving different educational and entertainment purposes. According to SZE (2020), common types include comprehensive podcasts that combine listening comprehension activities, interviews, and vocabulary lessons [14]. Whole lesson podcasts present structured lessons, often incorporating news articles with transcripts and worksheets for guided learning. Vocabulary and idioms podcasts focus on word usage, while scripted conversation podcasts feature dialogues between native speakers, accompanied by transcripts to aid comprehension. Other formats include joke podcasts, which engage listeners through humor, storytelling podcasts that enhance listening skills through narrated stories, and poetry podcasts that introduce classic literary works. These diverse formats make podcasts a versatile tool for educators and learners.

Podcasts offer several benefits, such as flexibility, enabling learners to acquire knowledge while on the move or multitasking. Moreover, they provide a vast learning resource that enhances listening comprehension, pronunciation, and vocabulary acquisition. They are also a low-cost, accessible learning tool that spreads knowledge to a broad audience. Additionally, podcasts have become a valuable tool in teaching listening skills, offering real-world content that exposes students to various accents and expressions. Unlike scripted audio files in textbooks, podcasts familiarize learners with natural language in different contexts. Learners can select content suitable for their proficiency level, adjust playback speed, and practice in a personalized way. Furthermore, educators can integrate podcasts into language lessons in multiple ways. For instance, they can assign specific podcast episodes as listening assignments, followed by comprehension quizzes or discussion activities. Teachers may also encourage students to create their own podcasts as a speaking exercise, fostering both creativity and language production skills [15]. Besides, podcasts can be used for note-taking exercises, transcription tasks, or shadowing practice, helping learners improve their listening accuracy and pronunciation.

Despite their numerous advantages, podcasts also present certain limitations. According to Alm (2021), one major drawback is the lack of visual support, which can make it difficult for

learners to understand complex concepts, especially in subjects that rely on diagrams and illustrations, such as science and mathematics [16]. Additionally, Alm (2021) also highlighted accessibility issues, noting that individuals with hearing impairments may struggle to engage with podcasts, particularly when transcripts or slower speech options are unavailable [16]. Moreover, García-Sánchez (2023) identifies the overwhelming volume of podcast content as a challenge, making it difficult for listeners to find reliable and high-quality sources [15]. Wang and Liao (2020) further point out that some learners may find it hard to maintain focus during long audio discussions, especially if the content is delivered in a monotonous tone or lacks interactive elements [13]. Despite these challenges, podcasts remain a valuable educational tool, particularly when supplemented with additional resources to enhance accessibility and engagement.

2. Research method

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to examine the effectiveness of using podcasts in improving high school students' English listening skills. Conducted over seven weeks at Song Cong High School, the study involved 44 students from class 10A8, aged 15–16 years old. 22 of them were randomly chosen to join the experimental group and were asked to use Podcasts as a method to improve their English listening skills ($n = 22$), while the others took part in the control group. In addition, through the pre-test, the researchers would find that the participants have difficulty listening to English, so their listening ability is limited. They were chosen as the subject of the study because they used podcasts in the hope of improving their listening skills effectively. The remaining 22 people were assigned to a control group that did not use Podcasts to improve listening skills ($n = 22$). In fact, they were asked to do a test against the experimental group to determine how different the results of both groups were in the pre-test and post-test.

To assess students' listening proficiency and attitudes, the study utilized pre-tests, post-tests, and questionnaires. The pre-test and post-test were taken for the listening tests of the grade 10 final exam and consisted of 20 questions assessing skills such as identifying main ideas, specific details, and inferring meaning. The research procedure included a pre-test and pre-questionnaire (including 5 open-ended questions) in week 1 to assess listening ability and attitudes about listening skills and the challenges they encountered while learning to listen. During weeks 2–6, the experimental group participated in two podcast-based listening sessions per week. The listening materials were designed by the researcher and sourced from platforms such as YouTube or Spotify, based on the topics covered in the classroom textbook. Each listening exercise consisted of two to three parts (about 10 - 15 questions) and lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. Meanwhile, the control group completed listening activities from the textbook. In the final week, participants took a post-test comprising 20 questions, and the experimental group completed four open-ended questions in a post-questionnaire responding to the effectiveness of podcasts in improving listening skills.

This study used Google Forms to collect and categorize questionnaire responses and Excel 2019 to calculate statistical data from the listening tests. Data collected from questionnaires and tests were meticulously analyzed to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of the podcasts on students' listening skills and learning experience. A comparative analysis between the test group (using podcasts) and the control group (not using podcasts) was conducted to identify any notable differences in user proficiency. Students' scores after taking the test showed how effective podcasts were in improving listening skills. By using quantitative data collection methods, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the podcasts in developing listening abilities among high school students.

3. Findings and discussion

The researcher analyzed the outcomes of the Pre-test and Post-test to demonstrate progress following 7 weeks of experimentation. At the end of the 7 weeks, the score showed an increase, suggesting that the students' efforts after the course led to positive results.

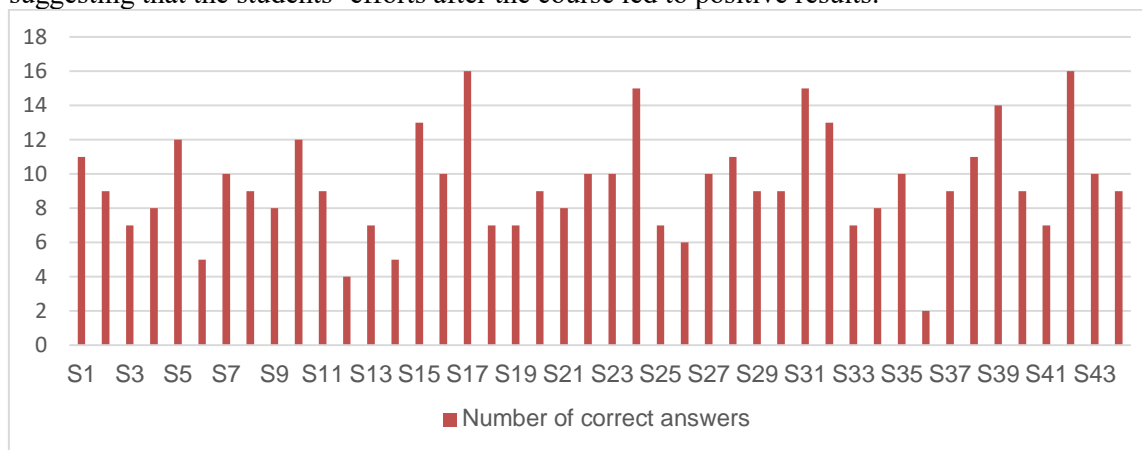


Figure 1. The results of Pre-test

As shown in Figure 1, the pre-test results reflect the listening skills of 44 students before the experiment. The test consisted of 20 questions, and the number of correct answers for each student is represented by the bars in the chart. Some students performed relatively well, with the highest number of correct answers reaching 17, indicating strong listening skills. On the other hand, the lowest number of correct answers was 2, suggesting significant difficulties in listening comprehension for some students. While some students answered fewer than 5 questions correctly, the majority scored between 6 and 12, indicating that their listening skills were only average. The distribution of results varies widely, reflecting significant differences in listening abilities among the students.

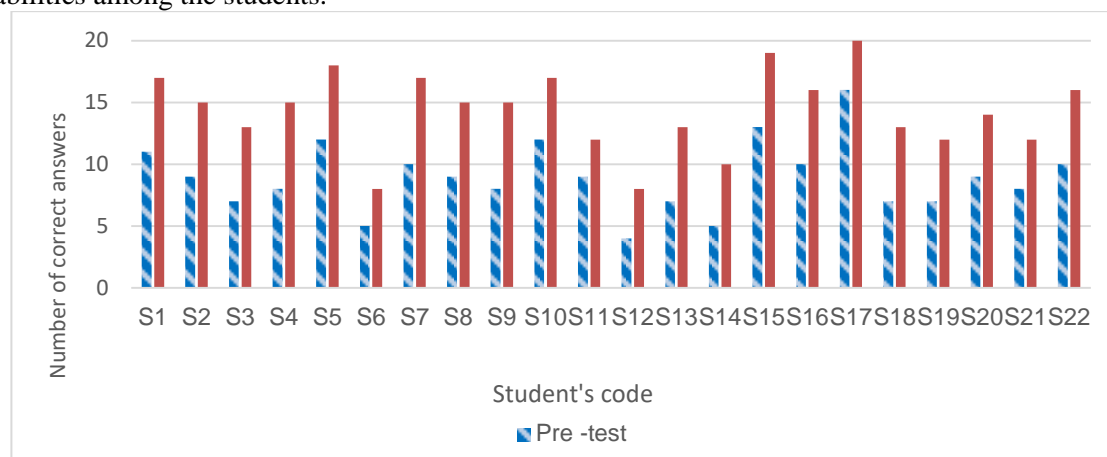


Figure 2. The result of students' scores in two tests (pre-test and post-test) in the experimental group

Through the research process, it can be seen that the scores of students in the experimental group across two tests (Pre-test and Post-test) changed considerably after using podcasts to improve listening skills (Figure 2). The results demonstrated that the post-test scores were significantly higher than the pre-test scores for most students. Specifically, in the pre-test, many students achieved only 4 to 10 correct answers, whereas in the post-test, the number of correct answers increased significantly, with many students scoring between 10 and 18. Some students showed remarkable improvement, with a few achieving an increase of 5–7 points or more.

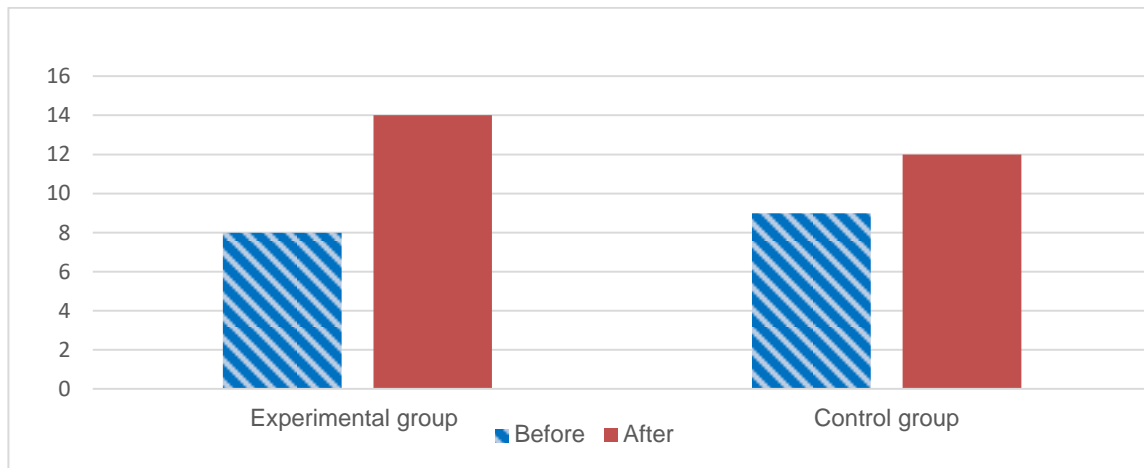


Figure 3. Students' average correct answers before and after the experiment

The bar chart in Figure 3 illustrates the average number of correct answers before and after the experiment for both the experimental and control groups. Before the treatment, the experimental group had an average score of approximately 9 correct answers, while the control group had a slightly higher average of around 10 correct answers. After the intervention, the experimental group demonstrated a significant improvement, increasing to about 14 correct answers, whereas the control group also showed progress but to a lesser extent, reaching approximately 12 correct answers.

Table 1. Comparison of the pre-test and post-test results

Test Type	Group Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	Experimental Group	22	8.91	2.75
	Control Group	22	9.86	3.22
Post-test	Experimental Group	22	14.31	3.14
	Control Group	22	12.59	3.30

Table 1 presents the results of the pre-test and post-test for listening skills in the study on using podcasts to enhance students' listening abilities. Before the intervention, the experimental group had a lower mean score (8.91) compared to the control group (9.86). Additionally, the standard deviation for the experimental group (2.75) was smaller than that of the control group (3.22), indicating less score dispersion in the experimental group. After the learning process incorporating podcasts, the mean score of the experimental group significantly increased to 14.31, whereas the control group also showed improvement but to a lesser extent, reaching 12.59. The standard deviation for both groups changed as well, with the experimental group increasing to 3.14 and the control group to 3.30, reflecting greater score variability in the post-test.

The results indicated that using podcasts as a listening tool significantly improved students' listening skills, as evidenced by the notable increase in the experimental group's post-test scores. While both groups showed progress, the experimental group exhibited a greater improvement, suggesting that podcasts provided more engaging and effective listening practice. However, some limitations should be considered. The study was conducted over a short period (7 weeks) with a small sample size (44 students), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, factors such as students' prior exposure to English and their motivation levels were not controlled, which could have influenced the results. Future research should explore longer intervention periods and larger, more diverse samples to validate these findings further.

4. Conclusion

The use of podcasts in improving listening skills for high school students at Song Cong High School has proven to be a valuable and effective listening learning method. Throughout the study, podcasts have demonstrated significant benefits in improving students' listening skills. The findings of the study indicate that students who participated in listening lessons using podcasts showed significant improvements in their listening proficiency. Although there were still some challenges, integrating podcasts into lessons made the learning process less stressful and more engaging, thus motivating students to actively participate in listening learning to improve that skill. In conclusion, the findings of this study provide convincing evidence of the effectiveness of listening topics in podcasts in improving listening skills for high school students.

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