

APPLYING PODCASTS TO ENHANCE NON-ENGLISH MAJOR FRESHMEN'S LISTENING SKILL – A PRE-EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 31/01/2024	The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of English podcasts in improving listening skills for non-English major students and measure their satisfaction with podcasts as a listening resource. Twenty-eight participants, including nine males and nineteen females, were randomly assigned to either a control group or an experimental group. The control group were instructed to spend at least one hour listening to English content from sources of their choice, while the experimental group were tasked with listening to an English podcast at least two times. Students in both groups were provided with a listening worksheet after every two lessons. Additionally, participants underwent a pre-test and post-test to measure their progress over the duration of the experiment. To gauge the experimental group's satisfaction with the use of podcasts in the research, a questionnaire was administered. The data collected from various instruments revealed that non-English major students experienced improvements in their listening skills through the incorporation of podcasts and exhibited a positive attitude towards the utilization of English podcasts in learning English.
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Listening skill	
Extensive listening	
Learner satisfaction	
Learner autonomy	

SỬ DỤNG PODCAST NHẪM NÂNG CAO KHẢ NĂNG NGHE TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN - NGHIÊN CỨU TIỀN THỰC NGHIỆM

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 31/01/2024	Nghiên cứu nhằm đánh giá hiệu quả của podcast tiếng Anh trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng nghe cho sinh viên không chuyên ngành tiếng Anh và đo lường sự hài lòng của họ với nguồn tài nguyên này. Hai mươi tám sinh viên, bao gồm chín nam và mười chín nữ, đã được phân ngẫu nhiên vào hai nhóm đối chứng và nhóm thực nghiệm. Trong nhóm đối chứng, sinh viên được hướng dẫn dành ít nhất một giờ mỗi tuần để nghe tiếng Anh các nguồn tài liệu bất kỳ, trong khi nhóm thực nghiệm được yêu cầu nghe một podcast tiếng Anh ít nhất hai lần. Sau mỗi tuần học, sinh viên làm bài tập trong phiếu bài tập nghe với nội dung liên quan đến chủ đề đã học trong tuần trước. Ngoài ra, sinh viên cũng hoàn thành hai bài kiểm tra đầu vào và bài kiểm tra kết thúc khoá học để đo lường mức độ tiến bộ trong suốt thời gian thực nghiệm. Để đánh giá sự hài lòng của nhóm thực nghiệm với việc sử dụng podcast trong nghiên cứu, một bảng hỏi đã được gửi đến sinh viên. Dữ liệu thu thập từ các công cụ nghiên cứu trên cho thấy sinh viên nhóm thực nghiệm đã có cải thiện về kỹ năng nghe tốt hơn so với sinh viên nhóm đối chứng nhờ việc tích hợp podcast vào quá trình học nghe tiếng Anh. Nhóm sinh viên cũng thể hiện thái độ tích cực đối với việc sử dụng podcast tiếng Anh trong việc học ngôn ngữ này.
Ngày hoàn thiện: 22/3/2024	
Ngày đăng: 22/3/2024	
TỪ KHÓA	
Podcast	
Kỹ năng nghe	
Nghe mở rộng	
Sự hài lòng của người học	
Tính chủ động của người học	

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1. Introduction

1.1. Listening skill and extensive listening

Listening holds paramount importance in language classrooms as it serves as a primary source of input for learners, influencing the acquisition of other language skills [1], [2]. Among the four language skills, listening is widely regarded as the most crucial [3], [4]. Over decades, numerous methods to enhance listening skills have been explored, with consensus among researchers that exposure to the target language is vital for effective language learning. Renadya advocates for the efficacy of exposing English learners to the language through listening, emphasizing extensive listening that encompasses various activities, providing learners with abundant, understandable, and enjoyable input [5].

Extensive listening offers multiple benefits, according to Renandya, including aiding learners with fast speech rates, exposing them to diverse language forms and functions, and boosting motivation for language learning [5]. The advent of information and communication technologies, notably podcasts, has revolutionized language teaching and learning. Podcasts, as a product of this technological evolution, have proven to be a highly effective tool in facilitating and mediating students' listening activities [6].

1.2. Benefits of podcasts in listening skill

The term “podcast” was coined in 2004, denoting the online publication of audio content. It is a fusion of “iPod” and “broadcast”. P. Constantine [7] defines a podcast as a radio broadcast encapsulated in an MP3 file. Hasan and Hoon [8] later characterize podcasts as a series of digital audio and video recordings accessible on the web via Rapid Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds.

Podcasts offer numerous advantages for language learning, particularly in enhancing listening and speaking skills. These audio or video files can be downloaded and played on computers, mobile phones, or any portable device supporting MP3 files [9]. Researchers highlight four notable benefits: 1) learners can engage in global listening, accessing authentic contexts with diverse voices, 2) materials are easily accessible from anywhere, enabling learning in informal situations, 3) learners can read transcripts while listening, motivating those at lower proficiency levels, and 4) podcasts motivate students to study English, allowing self-directed and paced listening experiences [9] - [14].

1.3. Aims of the research

Despite podcasts being utilized in language classrooms worldwide for almost two decades, there is a noticeable dearth of studies examining the efficacy of podcasts in Vietnamese language classrooms. Most studies involving podcasts have primarily focused on English major students. Notably, at Thai Nguyen University, limited research has explored the effects of podcasts on language skill development for non-English major students, rendering this study particularly imperative.

This research endeavors to address two pivotal questions: 1) In what ways do podcasts influence students' listening skills? and 2) To what extent do students express satisfaction with the use of podcasts in enhancing their listening skills?

2. Method

2.1. The population of the study

The research targeted a population of twenty-eight non-English major students from Thai Nguyen University who enrolled in evening classes. All participants were freshmen attending an English center in Thai Nguyen city, motivated by a desire to enhance their communication skills. The group comprised nine males and nineteen females.

Conducted over a 7-week period, aligning with the course duration, the research commenced with a placement test to determine the students' English proficiency and select appropriate textbooks. Following this, twenty-eight students with similar scores were chosen for the course.

The initial lesson served as an icebreaker, fostering interactions between participants and teachers. This facilitated the identification of students' expectations, learning styles, and revealed their perceived challenges in listening to English. The students expressed minimal exposure to English in games, rare engagement with English songs, movies, or videos, and found traditional listening exercises in course books stressful and dull. These insights prompted the researchers to introduce podcasts as extensive listening resources. The students, demonstrating a high level of commitment, willingly embraced this novel approach.

2.2. The research instruments

The researcher employed the four following instruments including: five English podcasts, five listening worksheets, a pretest, a post test and a questionnaire.

Podcast audios: Five carefully selected audio podcasts from the British Council's website (<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/general-english/audio-series/podcasts>) were utilized. The website, overseen by the British Council, offers lessons covering various language skills and aspects, including reading, speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Additionally, it provides listening comprehension exercises aligned with the podcasts, benefiting students pursuing self-study. The sound quality on the website is excellent, minimizing difficulties for students. The selected podcasts belonged to the first series, specifically episodes 2 (weekend away), 3 (clothes), 5 (pets), 6 (travel problems), and 7 (family), chosen for their relevance to the students' English levels. Each podcast typically ranged from 25 to 30 minutes.

Listening worksheets: Five worksheets, each containing 10 question items (five gap filling and five multiple-choice), were sourced from official listening books designed for the A2 target level of the course. The worksheets corresponded to the topics discussed in previous lessons, covering weekend activities, clothes, pets, traveling, and family. Each correct answer earned students one point, with a maximum score of 10 per worksheet.

Pre-test and post-test: Students took a placement test, sourced from the Cambridge KET test series, before the course commenced. This test, chosen for its ability to assess English levels from A1 to B1, aligned with students' expectations of reaching A2 proficiency after their first term. After six weeks (24 hours of instruction), students underwent a post-test randomly selected from the KET Cambridge test series, with a maximum score of 25 points.

Questionnaire: To gauge participant satisfaction with podcasts as extensive listening resources, the researchers adapted a questionnaire designed by Pawarisa and Pornchai [14]. The questionnaire featured twelve items using a 5-level rating scale based on the Likert concept, with scoring criteria ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) [15]. Given the participants' non-English majors, Vietnamese translations were provided when necessary.

2.3. Data collection

The participants in the pre-experimental research were randomly assigned to two groups: the control and experimental groups, each comprising nine or ten male and five or four female students. The research unfolded in five steps:

Step 1: Pre-test delivery: In the first week of the course, a pretest was administered to gauge the participants' English proficiency levels.

Step 2: Student analysis: During the initial lesson, a student analysis took place, involving discussions between teachers and students regarding learning expectations and styles.

Step 3: Experimental phase: Both groups engaged in extensive English listening activities for approximately one hour weekly. The control group had the flexibility to choose content from English songs, movies, or games. To ensure compliance, they documented their chosen materials. The experimental group, in contrast, was assigned a specific podcast episode to listen to at least twice weekly. After one week, both groups received a listening worksheet based on the prior week's topic. The scores from the five worksheets were meticulously recorded for analysis.

Step 4: Post-test delivery: In the 14th lesson, a post-test was administered, and results were compared with the pre-test to assess changes in the students' achievement. These changes were instrumental in evaluating the effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing their listening skills.

Step 5: Questionnaire distribution: Following the experiment's conclusion, the experimental group students were surveyed to gauge their satisfaction with the podcast-based approach to improving listening skills.

2.4. Data analysis

To assess the influence of podcasts on students' listening skills, the average scores obtained by the students in the five listening worksheets, pre-test, and post-test were calculated. The analysis was conducted using SPSS 20. Additionally, the questionnaire results were scrutinized to explore students' evaluations of the podcast's role in their acquisition of listening skills.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The impacts of podcasts in developing students' listening skills

It is essential to highlight that the impact of podcasts on the students' listening skills was examined through two avenues: the score records from the five listening worksheets and those from the pre-test and post-test.

Table 1 illustrates the mean scores achieved by the students in the five listening worksheets. While both groups showed overall improvement after lessons, the rate of progress differed between them. In the initial worksheet, the experimental group scored nearly 0.1 lower than their counterparts in the control group. Subsequently, both groups attained identical total points for the second worksheet. However, starting from the third worksheet, the experimental group consistently outperformed the control group. Notably, while the control group showed no progress in the fourth and fifth worksheets, the experimental group sustained their advancement. Furthermore, the average scores after completing the five worksheets in the experimental group were 0.48 higher than those in the control group.

Table 1. The efficiency of using podcasts in enhancing students' listening skill

No. of listening worksheets	Means of scores	
	Control group	Experimental group
1	6.21	6.14
2	6.35	6.35
3	6.71	7.92
4	7.50	8.07
5	7.50	8.21
Average	6.85	7.33

The effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing listening skills is further assessed through the test results outlined in Table 2. Similar to the findings deduced from the listening worksheets in Table 1, there was no significant disparity among the scores obtained by the two groups in the pretest. Notably, all students exhibited improvement in their listening performance after the course. However, students who utilized podcasts as an extensive listening source in English outperformed their peers who engaged in extensive listening from various sources by a margin of 1.14 points.

Table 2. The students' achievements on listening skill before and after the experiment

Test	Means of scores	
	Control group	Experimental group
Pretest	13.14	13.00
Posttest	19.28	20.42

3.2. The level of satisfaction towards the practice of using podcasts in enhancing listening skills

The twelve-item questionnaire was administered exclusively to the experimental group, providing insights into their attitudes toward podcasts as illustrated in Table 3. Participants rated statements on a scale of 1-5, ranging from the lowest to the strongest agreement. Accordingly, a mean above 4.5 indicates strong agreement, 3.6 to 4.49 signifies agreement, and 2.5 to 3.5 suggests objection or indecision regarding the statement's accuracy in their context.

The results clearly indicate strong agreement from the students that the podcasts are interesting, possessing high sound quality, diversity, engagement, cost-effectiveness, and usefulness for self-study. Additionally, they expressed an agreement on the podcast's duration, acknowledging its positive impact on developing listening skills. Furthermore, the students indicated that podcasts sparked their enthusiasm for learning English. Regarding the concluding statement (numbered 12), students affirmed their satisfaction with the intervention for developing English listening skills using podcasts.

Table 3. The students' satisfaction towards the practice of using podcasts in developing their listening skill

Statements	Means	Interpretation
1. The presentation of podcast for practicing English listening skills for comprehension is interesting.	4.43	Strongly agree
2. The five episodes of podcast have clear audio quality.	4.85	Strongly agree
3. The content of podcast is diverse and engaging.	4.57	Strongly agree
4. Each episode of podcast has an appropriate length.	4.28	Agree
5. Podcast enables the development of English listening skills for comprehension from native speakers.	4.0	Agree
6. Podcast creates a relaxed and engaging learning atmosphere.	3.85	Agree
7. Practicing English listening skills for comprehension with the help of podcast increases enthusiasm for learning.	4.28	Agree
8. Podcast allows self-review and self-practice.	4.57	Strongly agree
9. Podcast can be replayed and practiced as many times as desired.	4.85	Strongly agree
10. Podcast is cost-effective and can be used anytime, anywhere.	4.57	Strongly agree
11. Consistently using podcast to improve English listening skill leads to better language learning.	4.28	Agree
12. Overall, there is satisfaction towards the intervention of developing English listening skill using podcasts.	4.42	Agree
Total	4.41	Agree

4. Conclusion

The research aims to explore the effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing the listening skills of non-English major students, particularly those lacking effective English learning strategies. Additionally, the study seeks to measure the satisfaction levels of these students in utilizing podcasts to boost their listening skills.

The data derived from the five listening worksheets, along with the pre-test and post-test, substantiate that podcasts contribute to students' progress in listening skills. This conclusion aligns with findings from various researchers [8] - [14]. Furthermore, the questionnaire data underscores students' perception of podcasts as interesting, engaging, and motivating [7], [9], [14], with overall satisfaction in incorporating podcasts into their listening lessons.

The research reveals that the non-English major students recognize podcasts as a valuable listening resource. However, these students may encounter challenges in selecting podcasts suitable for their proficiency levels, and they might easily neglect English listening outside the classroom due to environmental and motivational factors. To address these challenges, potential solutions include 1) selecting podcasts tailored to students' English levels and interests, 2) encouraging students to listen to podcasts repeatedly for increased exposure to English, 3) regularly assessing students' podcast engagement through listening worksheets, and 4) integrating

podcasts as a digital learning resource into the curriculum's self-study sessions. The consistent application of these suggestions has the potential to enhance students' learning autonomy and language skills more rapidly.

The results of this pre-experimental study serve as an initial foundation for more in-depth researches, with a larger number of participating students, to establish a more reliable and accurate understanding of the role of English podcasts in developing listening skills for students.

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