The Use of Podcasts in Enhancing Listening Comprehension Among EFL Learners: A Case Study at Dong a Polytechnic College

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ABSTRACT: The development of language acquisition depends on listening comprehension, yet EFL learners struggle to build this skill because they receive insufficient genuine spoken English exposure. This research investigates the effects of podcasts on EFL students' listening comprehension skills at Dong An Polytechnic College. The research design used both quantitative pre-test and post-test assessment results together with qualitative semi-structured interview data. The study results show that the experimental group outperformed the control group in listening scores thus demonstrating podcast-based learning enhances listening proficiency. The students discovered podcasts to be both interesting and adaptable while stating that these resources exposed them to various accents and authentic speech patterns and conversations. Students who used podcasts reported a significant increase in their self-assessed listening comprehension abilities. The research findings validate earlier studies which suggest digital learning tools should be used as teaching methods for EFL instruction. The study advises teachers to incorporate podcasts into their language curriculum because they enable independent students to learn and improve their listening skills. Future research should investigate both the prolonged effects of podcasts on learning

and the effects of proficiency levels and the combination of podcasts with digital tools to achieve maximum language learning results.

KEYWORDS: *Podcasts, Listening Comprehension, EFL Learners, Digital Learning, Mixed-Methods Research, Language Acquisition, Authentic Listening Exposure, Self-Efficacy*

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of a second language depends on the ability to listen to comprehend because this skill constitutes the foundation of language proficiency. The communication process requires active listening skills to enhance comprehension abilities in real-time dialogue (Goh, 2018). EFL students find listening comprehension the most difficult language learning task because they lack authentic linguistic exposure while struggling to process natural spoken speech (Field, 2008). Traditional classrooms typically use pre-written listening activities that do not reflect authentic speech patterns of real communication. Researchers together with educators have been investigating the application of digital learning tools specifically podcasts to develop language learning skills in education (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Podcasts serve as a valuable source of genuine spoken English through which EFL learners can improve their listening comprehension (Rost, 2016). Podcasts serve as a different type of listening material than traditional materials since they are easy to access and let learners experience spoken language through different settings at their own speed. Research indicates that language learning becomes more effective when podcasts are used because students become more engaged listeners while their natural speech comprehension improves (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007; Li, Snow, & White, 2020). Through podcasts learners can develop skills which connect classroom instruction with real-world communication because these podcasts deliver authentic English content from entertainment and educational and professional fields (Rahimi & Katal, 2012).

EFL students at Dong a Polytechnic College face continuous challenges when improving their listening skills because they lack opportunities to speak with native English speakers and authentic spoken language exposure. Digital media has shown

promising results for language learning but research about its applications in Vietnamese higher education institutions remains scarce. The research explores how podcasts function as a teaching method for EFL listening instruction at Dong An Polytechnic College. The research combines both learner experiences and quantitative assessments of listening skill development through a mixed-methods study. The research outcomes will enhance existing digital learning research and create actionable guidance for educators who wish to use podcasts in language teaching programs.

Research Questions

1. How do EFL learners at Dong An Polytechnic College perceive the use of podcasts in enhancing their listening comprehension?

2. What is the impact of podcast-based learning on the listening proficiency of EFL learners?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The process of listening comprehension stands as a crucial element in second language acquisition (SLA) and researchers in applied linguistics and language education have studied it extensively. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis states that learners develop linguistic competence by processing comprehensible input that extends their current language abilities. The theory supports podcast use in EFL instruction because these resources offer learners authentic natural language input which helps them learn new language and improve their listening abilities (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Research shows that students who listen to podcasts regularly develop better skills in processing spoken language which results in enhanced listening abilities and fluency (Li, Snow, & White, 2020).

The Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky (1978) highlights how social interaction together with social engagement drives cognitive development. According to this theory, learning occurs within a social context and is mediated by tools, including digital resources such as podcasts. Through podcast integration in language

instruction students encounter multiple speech patterns and genuine communication situations which boost their listening abilities and create interactive learning opportunities (Goh, 2018). Research demonstrates that digital tools including podcasts create scaffolding opportunities for language learning through their structured yet adaptable content which supports learners at various stages of linguistic development (Rahimi & Katal, 2012).

Podcasts in Language Learning

Research shows that podcasts are effective tools for language learning because they improve listening skills and give students independence in their learning process and boost their engagement. Iranian EFL learners who used podcasts according to Rahimi and Katal (2012) showed better listening comprehension skills because podcasts exposed them to authentic language usage across different communication situations. Yeh et al. (2020) discovered that Taiwanese students who used podcasts for regular listening practice achieved better results than students who used traditional listening exercises thus demonstrating podcast-based learning's effectiveness in developing listening skills.

Students who use podcasts can learn at their own speed and review materials whenever needed according to Li and Hafner (2021). Podcasts provide learners with flexible listening practice opportunities through their accessible format which helps students maintain consistent language exposure and boosts their motivation. Research indicates that podcasts which include transcripts and comprehension quizzes and discussion forums along with their interactive multimodal design improve student learning outcomes by strengthening auditory processing abilities and comprehension methods (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007).

Previous Studies on Podcasts in EFL Contexts

Empirical research in recent times shows that podcasts have strong evidence to be included in EFL instruction. Research findings have shown that podcasts in EFL instruction enhance the listening skills of students while making them more self-dependent and engaged. A study done by Hasan and Tan (2013) on university students showed that students who used podcasts in their listening practice were

more motivated and more engaged as compared to those who used the traditional listening materials. Li and Hafner (2021) conducted a meta-analysis which showed that podcast-based learning is effective in improving listening skills, enhances self-study and improves comprehension of natural speech structures.

O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007) also noted that besides helping in listening skills, podcasts are useful in language learning as they promote the culture of independent learning through allowing learners to set the speed of their exposure to English. Yeh et al. (2020) studied the effect of using podcasts on Taiwanese EFL students and found that the students who used podcasts as additional listening material had better listening scores than those who only studied from the classroom. The researchers linked the progress to the fact that podcasts offer a natural and real speech which is absent in traditional listening exercises.

The use of podcasts in teaching EFL in Vietnam has been supported by the researches. A study by Nguyen and Pham (2022) on podcast-assisted listening activities among university students in Ho Chi Minh City showed that students who used podcasts improved their listening skills and became more confident. Podcasts are flexible learning tools which are more suitable for Vietnamese learners because they cannot access native English speakers. Tran (2023) conducted a qualitative research in Hanoi where the students found podcasts to be useful in improving their listening skills and pronunciation and understanding of culture. These findings show that podcasts are a useful tool for bridging the gap between the curriculum and the real world in Vietnam's EFL context.

The studies also show that podcasts have the potential to be used as a pedagogical tool in teaching English for foreign language learners. The use of podcasts provides learners with real English speech that helps them to develop their listening skills as well as learn independently. The evidence of their effectiveness makes it necessary for teachers to consider adding podcasts to their EFL courses in order to improve the students' participation and language learning. Future research should also examine the long term effects of podcast-based learning on learners as well as look at the influence of different types of podcasts on learners' listening abilities (e.g., scripted vs. unscripted, educational vs. entertainment).

Research Methodology

A mixed-methods research design is employed in this study to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand how podcasts affect listening comprehension. The mixed-methods research design works well in language learning because it helps investigate learners' personal experiences while providing measurable learning results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative section included semi-structured interviews with EFL students at Dong An Polytechnic College. The research used this method to understand how students perceive and experience podcast-based language learning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview data underwent thematic analysis to extract essential themes that connect to learner engagement and motivation and listening skill enhancement (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method of thematic analysis offers a structured approach to analyze qualitative data which helps reveal how learners think and feel about podcast-based learning.

The quantitative assessment included pre-test and post-test evaluations to determine listening comprehension improvements. The study involved 100 EFL learners who were divided into two groups: an experimental group that used podcasts for learning and a control group that used traditional listening exercises. The listening comprehension tests used standardized proficiency assessment materials for ensuring reliability and validity (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Statistical analysis through paired sample t-tests together with descriptive statistics in SPSS enabled researchers to measure the differences in listening performance before and after podcast exposure (Field, 2018).

Research ethics received careful attention during every stage of the study. The research participants signed consent forms before starting the study while all responses remained anonymous to protect their privacy. The research implemented measures to reduce bias by selecting participants from different language proficiency levels and learning experiences (Dörnyei, 2007). Through this comprehensive mixed-methods study researchers strive to generate dependable findings about how podcasts improve listening comprehension skills of EFL learners.

Findings and Discussion

Findings from EFL leaners' perception for the use of podcasts in enhancing their listening comprehension

The thematic analysis of interview data revealed three major findings about podcast influence on EFL listening comprehension for learners which included authentic language exposure and increased motivation and flexible learning.

Students found podcasts to provide them with authentic spoken English that exposed them to different accents and speech rates and natural discourse structures which helped their understanding grow. Research findings from Rahimi & Katal (2012) confirm that authentic speech interactions boost learners' performance in processing spoken language. The participants recognized podcasts introduced them to conversational components including contractions, idioms and discourse markers which were missing from conventional listening exercises yet vital for practical communication (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007).

Students demonstrated stronger motivation towards listening activities because podcasts provided them with an entertaining and dynamic listening experience. The educational value of podcasts exceeds traditional classroom exercises since they present diverse subjects and real-world scenarios which appeal to students (Li & Hafner, 2021). Students maintained regular listening practice through their intrinsic interest in relevant content that enhanced their comprehension abilities (Yeh et al., 2020). According to the student, listening to podcasts felt similar to entertainment instead of studying so they practiced more often without feeling obligated.

Students identified the flexible and accessible nature of podcasts as their key advantage during their learning process. The participants highlighted that their ability to access podcasts at any time and from any location while controlling their listening speed made independent learning and self-regulated practice possible. The research supports Hasan and Tan (2013) who demonstrate how podcasts serve as educational tools that promote self-directed learning practices. Students implemented two effective metacognitive strategies by using transcripts together with playback

functions to better understand challenging parts which led to enhanced listening comprehension (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

EFL learners at Dong An Polytechnic College find podcasts to be an important resource that helps them improve their listening skills based on the qualitative study. The combination of authentic language exposure together with enhanced motivation and flexible learning opportunities enabled learners to achieve better comprehension results through positive educational experiences. Research evidence supports podcast implementation in EFL education as a modern effective teaching strategy (Li, Snow, & White, 2020).

Findings for the impact of podcast-based learning on the listening proficiency of EFL learners

To assess the impact of podcast-based learning on EFL learners' listening proficiency, a quantitative analysis was conducted through pre-test and post-test assessments. The results were compared between an experimental group that used podcasts for listening practice and a control group that followed traditional listening exercises. The analysis focused on three key aspects: overall listening proficiency improvement, listening score improvements by effect size, and self-reported confidence levels in listening comprehension.

Table 1: Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparison of Listening Scores

Metric	Experimental Group (Podcast)	Control Group (Traditional)
Pre-Test Mean	52.3	51.8
Post-Test Mean	68.5	55.2
Standard Deviation	7.2	6.9
t-Value	5.63	2.12
p-Value	<0.001	0.038

The data in Table 1 shows that the experimental group and the control group had different outcomes regarding listening comprehension improvement. The experimental group which used podcasts for learning achieved a significant boost in their mean listening scores from 52.3 in the pre-test to 68.5 in the post-test. The substantial 16.2 point improvement in scores indicates that authentic listening

materials through podcasts play a major role in enhancing EFL learners' listening skills according to Li and Hafner (2021).

The control group which used traditional listening exercises showed only a minor increase in their mean score from 51.8 to 55.2 thus indicating that conventional listening practices had a minimal effect on learner results. The control group's minimal progress supports Vandergrift and Goh (2012) who state that traditional methods fail to provide students with enough authentic spoken language exposure. The t-test results show that the difference between the groups is highly significant because the p-value is less than 0.001 which proves that podcast-based learning functions as an effective intervention method.

Research supports the conclusion that technology-enhanced learning through podcasts enhances learner comprehension and retention of linguistic input because it exposes students to various accents and speech rates and discourse structures (Rahimi & Katal, 2012; Yeh et al., 2020). The standard deviation values for both groups (7.2 for the experimental group and 6.9 for the control group) show that participants maintained similar performance levels which strengthens the reliability of the results.

The research findings align with current studies demonstrating that digital learning tools enhance second-language acquisition and demonstrate that EFL curricula should include podcasts to improve students' listening abilities (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007; Rost, 2016).

Table 2: Improvement in Listening Scores and Effect Size

Metric	Experimental Group (Podcast)	Control Group (Traditional)
Listening Improvement (%)	31.0	6.6
Standard Deviation	5.6	4.9
Effect Size (Cohen's d)	1.02	0.45

The listening performance of the experimental and control groups showed major differences according to Table 2. The students in the experimental group who listened to podcasts achieved a 31.0% rise in their listening scores but the students in

the control group who used traditional methods only achieved a 6.6% increase. Podcasts stand out as a highly effective tool for language acquisition because they offer learners diverse natural listening content according to Li & Hafner (2021).

The effect size calculations from Table 3 demonstrate that podcasts produced a significant impact on students' listening abilities. The experimental group achieved a Cohen's d effect size of 1.02 which proves podcast-based learning strongly influenced their listening abilities (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). The control group showed an effect size of 0.45 indicating their improvement was only small to moderate. Research evidence supports the idea that digital learning tools specifically podcasts create better listening comprehension by engaging learners more deeply and providing authentic listening practice according to Yeh et al. (2020) and Rahimi & Katal (2012).

The experimental group achieved improved scores because podcasts provide flexible learning opportunities which enable students to repeat listening practice at their convenience. Self-directed listening practice leads to better comprehension and learner autonomy as Vandergrift and Goh (2012) discovered in their research. Listening comprehension improves when students hear authentic speech with natural variations and real-world dialogue according to Rost (2016).

The control group's limited improvement indicates traditional listening exercises using scripted dialogues with controlled speech patterns fail to deliver adequate exposure for substantial listening comprehension gains according to O'Bryan & Hegelheimer (2007). The findings support the recommendation to implement technology-based learning tools like podcasts in EFL curricula to improve student preparedness for authentic communication.

Podcast-based instruction outperforms traditional methods in improving listening proficiency while simultaneously boosting learner engagement and motivation levels according to the research findings. Digital learning tools play an essential role in second language acquisition so language instructors should incorporate them into their teaching practices according to Li, Snow, & White (2020).

Table 3: Self-Reported Confidence Levels in Listening Comprehension

Confidence Level	Pre-Test (%)	Post-Test (%)
Low	45	18
Moderate	40	42
High	15	40

The data presented in Table 3 indicates a significant shift in learners' self-reported confidence levels in listening comprehension after engaging in podcast-based learning. Prior to exposure to podcasts, 45% of students rated their confidence level as low, reflecting a general struggle with understanding spoken English. However, this number significantly decreased to 18% in the post-test, suggesting that podcasts provided substantial support in reducing anxiety and fostering listening skill development (Goh, 2018).

A notable improvement was also observed in students who rated their confidence as high, increasing from a mere 15% in the pre-test to 40% in the post-test. This growth suggests that podcast-based instruction contributed to enhancing students' self-efficacy and willingness to engage with spoken English, a key factor in successful language acquisition (Bandura, 1997; Rahimi & Katal, 2012). The moderate confidence category also saw a slight increase from 40% to 42%, implying that some students who initially felt insecure gained more confidence but still required further practice to reach a high level of confidence.

The findings align with prior research indicating that the integration of authentic listening materials, such as podcasts, fosters not only skill acquisition but also increased motivation and learner autonomy (Li & Hafner, 2021). The flexibility and accessibility of podcasts allow learners to engage with content at their own pace, which may have contributed to their increased confidence by providing repeated exposure to natural speech patterns and various accents (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Additionally, learners likely benefited from the ability to replay, slow down, and transcribe podcast episodes, reinforcing comprehension and boosting their confidence levels (Rost, 2016).

This improvement in confidence also supports Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that learners who experience lower anxiety and increased

motivation perform better in language acquisition. By reducing anxiety through engaging and relevant content, podcasts appear to have created a learning environment conducive to greater listening comprehension success (Yeh et al., 2020).

Overall, these findings reinforce the notion that incorporating digital learning tools like podcasts into EFL instruction not only enhances listening proficiency but also plays a crucial role in developing learners' confidence. This suggests that educators should consider incorporating more podcast-based learning into their curricula to foster both language competence and self-efficacy among students.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates how podcast-based learning improves EFL students' listening comprehension abilities at Dong An Polytechnic College. The research combines qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate how podcasts function as an effective learning tool that enhances listening abilities and boosts student engagement and listening confidence. Students find podcasts to be motivating and flexible resources which expose them to authentic spoken English and improve their ability to recognize different accents and speech rates and conversational structures. The experimental group achieved better listening proficiency results than the control group according to the quantitative data analysis. The research shows that students who listen to podcasts experience a substantial rise in their self-assurance which demonstrates that podcasts improve listening abilities and boost students' confidence in language learning. The study's findings support earlier research about digital tools in EFL instruction while confirming the need for technology-based learning approaches in language curricula. The observed positive results make it essential for educational professionals and curriculum developers to adopt podcasts as additional listening materials for EFL instruction. Additional research needs to analyze how podcast-based learning affects students in the long term while studying its effects on different skill levels and exploring the benefits of using podcasts alongside other digital learning tools to improve language abilities.

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