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The uses of podcast "Easy Stories in English" to improve the listening skills in students from "Centro Tecnológico Naval"

Los usos del podcast "Cuentos fáciles en inglés" para mejorar la capacidad auditiva en estudiantes del Centro Tecnológico Naval

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Abstract

This mixed method design study aimed to determine the influence of implementing the Podcast platform "Easy Stories in English" to improve the student's listening skills in an Ecuadorian Institute. Students struggle to understand what they listen in this foreign language which is worried as this skill is a key in their military profession. As a matter of fact, using these stories in podcasts can help to become more familiar with colloquial language, accents, and pronunciation. A convenient sample of fifty A2 students participate in this research with the distribution of 25 students in the experiment class and 25 students in the control class. A quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test was applied in this research. In addition, a survey questionnaire and an interview were administered to the experimental group to explore their perception of the use of this podcast in improving listening skills. Findings revealed that there is a significant difference between the two groups, favoring the experimental group. On average 90% of students have a positive attitude toward the use of these podcasts in listening in terms of motivation in learning English, listening to stories, and podcasts as excellent tools to acquire new knowledge and reinforce topics covered in classes. Students perceived that podcasts provided authentic materials, and interesting activities including listening exercises and meaningful tasks for them so they felt more motivated to learn English. This study recommended that teacher may utilize podcasts in teaching listening considering their effectiveness as a technology-based learning tool.

Keywords: english, learning, listening skills, podcasts, stories

Resumen

Este estudio de diseño de método mixto tuvo como objetivo determinar la influencia de la implementación de la plataforma Podcast "Easy Stories en Inglés" para mejorar la capacidad auditiva de los estudiantes de un Instituto Ecuatoriano. Los estudiantes luchan por entender lo que escuchan en esta lengua extranjera, lo que preocupa porque esta habilidad es clave en su profesión militar. De hecho, utilizar estas historias en podcasts puede ayudar a familiarizarse más con el lenguaje coloquial, los acentos y la pronunciación. En esta investigación participa una muestra conveniente de cincuenta estudiantes de A2 con la distribución de 25 estudiantes en la clase de experimento y 25 estudiantes en la clase de control. En esta investigación se aplicó un diseño cuasiexperimental con un pretest y un postest. Además, se administró un cuestionario y una entrevista al grupo experimental para explorar su percepción sobre el uso de este podcast para mejorar las habilidades auditivas. Los hallazgos revelaron que existe una diferencia significativa entre los dos grupos, favoreciendo al grupo experimental. En promedio el 90% de los estudiantes tiene una actitud positiva hacia el uso de estos podcasts en la escucha en términos de motivación para aprender inglés, escuchar historias y los podcasts como excelentes herramientas para adquirir nuevos conocimientos y reforzar los temas tratados en clases. Los estudiantes percibieron que los podcasts proporcionaban materiales auténticos y actividades interesantes, incluidos ejercicios de escucha y tareas significativas para ellos, por lo que se sintieron más motivados para aprender inglés. Este estudio recomendó que los docentes puedan utilizar podcasts para enseñar a escuchar, considerando su eficacia como herramienta de aprendizaje basada en la tecnología.

Palabras clave: inglés, aprendizaje, habilidades auditivas, podcasts, cuentos

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INTRODUCTION

English is now widely used in society having influence on a wide range of industries, such as politics and entertainment. As a consequence, Ecuador has included teaching English as a foreign language including the four basic skills listening, reading, speaking, and writing according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Nevertheless, listening has been recognized as a challenging skill for most of students. When it comes to learning a foreign language, the issue of having low listening skills has become a long-running research topic. As students love technology in their learning process, it can be a good teaching tool; it allows students to interact in an active and creative way of learning to promote reflection, self-paced, and independence.

On the other hand, English language proficiency development interacts with the outside world. Every day, society modifies English to fit their way of life. As a result, students must be aware of recent developments or trends in the English language. English teachers and students can better understand how this language has changed using authentic materials that technological tools can find.

Teaching using technology-based media will make it easier for teachers and students in foreign language classes because it is effective, efficient, and more enjoyable to apply. Students can have an intermediary to make learning easier. A new theory called connectivism accepts technology as a significant factor in our learning process, promoting the idea that learning can successfully happen through digital channels, including social media, forums, videos, and blogs. (Downes, 2022). The usage of technology by students in the learning process is essential. To encourage students to use technology more effectively in learning language skills, teachers should set an example of using technology to complement the curriculum (Costley, 2014).

Listening skills and the platforms have been the subject of numerous studies that have been conducted in various situations. For example, Djabbarova (2021) explores online digital tools for teaching listening skills in language learning, highlighting the significance of listening in language acquisition and providing recommendations for using web pages and platforms to enhance the learning process. The following three main factors ensure the development of students' listening skills: (a) linguistic material for speaking, (b) the content of the material recommended for listening to and understanding, (c) and the surroundings in which the material is displayed.

Aubakirova (2022) offers ways of using a kind of technology called podcasts which are the object of this study with the intention to improve listening skills. Podcast is an audio program that students can subscribe to on their smartphones and listen to whenever they like. They can be used both in the classroom and for extracurricular activities. The practical implication lies in the fact that the developed algorithm for working with podcasts can be used in the activities of an English teacher as an additional resource for teaching secondary school students listening and speaking skills. There is no research about podcasts in the city of this study, and as these students enjoy using technology to learn, podcasts are a great tool to improve their listening skills.

Podcasting facilities can assist students in studying according to their own skills to achieve the best results because they can be downloaded offering unlimited access and help students feel at ease while learning to listen. Huntsberger (2006) surveyed 209 undergraduate students at Oregon University in the United States about the usage of podcasting in journalism education. As a result, first-time listeners found podcasting to be educational, approachable, and valuable for their classroom experience. It was also found that 40% of them used podcasts to replace the textbook rather than as supplemental material.

Fernandez, Simo, and Sallan (2009) agree with this study's findings about using podcasts to promote best practices in higher education at Politécnica de Catalunya University (Spain). They also found that podcasting increases the impression of permanent contact between students and teachers, increasing students' motivation and allowing for diverse student skills and learning methods from two perspectives: the possibility of studying anytime, anywhere, and the kind of teaching material. Additionally, they discovered that podcasting increases the perception of ongoing communication between students and teachers, boosts students' motivation, and enables a variety of students' skills and teaching methods from two angles: the ability to learn anytime, anywhere, and the nature of the teaching materials.

Podcasting can help students become more enthusiastic about learning listening skills; even students can become independent learners with an opportunity to select the subjects they find fascinating to hear about outside of the classroom (Aguilar, 2013). Students do not have to work under any time limitations, and they can download and repeat the audio without feeling stressed because podcasts can be accessed at any time and from any location. Another research demonstrated a further advantage of podcasts during a four-week intervention. The study determined that Taiwanese learners who had never encountered authentic English could improve their speaking and listening skills in an EFL context by listening to podcasts in both British and American English. Teachers and students perceived podcasts as authentic tools to improve listening, critical thinking, and collaborative and cooperative work skills (Sotlikova, 2023).

Ambato City has a prestigious educational institution called the Pontifical Catholic University of Ambato- La Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCESA). The language and linguistics department collaborate with UK-based organizations: Learning English is promoted by Cambridge University Press, a representative of Cambridge University, and the British Council, a global organization for links in culture and education. Students can experience the English language in a social setting through the program's teaching methodology, which uses podcasts.

Podcasting compliments a constructivist approach; it is a composite of different views incorporating active, social, and creative aspects of learning. Constructivism is concerned with internalizing knowledge and skills because this theory supports that the learners construct knowledge rather than passively take in information. Podcasting is concordant with how constructivism views the learning process, where an individual constructs his/her representation of knowledge through active exploration, observation, processing, and interpretation (Desdous & Boutas, 2018). Also, Rodríguez & Argudo (2023) stated that the constructivist theory emphasizes the role of social interactions between student-student, teacher-student, and student-media as influencing what students learn. Budiasningrum & Rosita (2022) stated that podcast exercises and assignments motivate students to use their creativity and sharpen their listening skills.

For those mentioned above, this study aimed to explore Podcast impact on learners' listening skills, as well as to examine its effect on the student's motivation and attitude toward the learning process. So, in the project's development, two research questions can be resolved. First, a quantitative question: How effective is the implementation of Podcasts in improving listening skills? Second, a qualitative question: What are students' perceptions about using podcasts to improve their listening skills? The quasi-experiment proved the following hypothesis: There are differences resulting from using the podcast "Easy Stories in English" in the listening comprehension level of proficiency of the control group and experimental group of students from "Centro Tecnológico Naval".

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts the mixed method action research design, which includes a quasi-experimental research design working with Fitty A2 students according to the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). There were 25 students in the control and 25 in the intervention group. The researchers applied a convenient sampling as he could research the two courses he was teaching in that period. They are adult military students who live in a Naval Base in Salinas City. Their previous knowledge and motivation help them to adapt podcasts in classes to improve their listening skills. The virtual classes were implemented, and there was no mortality; one possible reason is that all the intervention was done asynchronously.

The independent variable of this research is a podcast, "Easy Stories in English," one of the most relaxing ways to listen to English and pick up new vocabulary with stories. Ariel Goodbody has written and produced the Easy Stories in English podcast, which provides short fiction for non-native learners of English. His "Easy Stories in English" podcast begins with brand-new vocabulary before diving into a narrative. It is that easy. In this manner, students learn the vocabulary and may hear it right away in context. Furthermore, there is a good mix of beginner, elementary, and advanced levels. Language acquisition is complex. Without memorizing vocabulary lists or complicated grammar rules, students can learn English easily with Easy Stories in English. Every week, the author provides a story that is appropriate for their English proficiency. The stories are dramatic, funny, and enjoyable but never too challenging. This podcast is for students who are sick of wordy textbooks. The dependent variable is listening skills, a "passive" skill primarily involving receiving and processing information without actively producing language. However, in the last decades, listening has been seen as a dynamic and reflexive process in which "the message is not fixed but is created in the interactional space between participants." (Newton, & Nation 2020, p.39). Five English listening skills are predicting content, listening for gist (finding the general meaning), detecting signposts (understanding the topics), listening for details (finding specific information), and inferring meaning (guessing the meaning). (Ahmed, 2015)

A pre-test and a post-test were applied to identify podcasts' effectiveness in improving listening skills. Furthermore, a questionnaire was applied to collect information about the relationship between podcasts and English Listening Skills. The research approach is also qualitative, as the researchers wanted to know the perceptions, experiences, and opinions of students from this institution.

Instruments

The researchers established three instruments validated by experts in English. First, the students took a pre-test and post-test focused on A2 English Level Cambridge Key English Test (KET), which was divided into three parts: Listening part 1: Pictures with multiple choice questions, listening part 2: Fill in a form, and Listening part 3: Multiple choice. Each section has five questions with multiple-choice options. The test lasted 45 minutes, and the students worked in a welcoming environment, which helped to reduce the affective filter typical of the situation. The pre-posttest was applied to obtain, measure, and analyze information on the research topic. The researchers considered this instrument because it is the most appropriate to compare the results obtained by the participants and because of their similarities and to avoid information biases. It also helped to analyze if there was a significant difference between the results of both groups. The researchers used the one-way statistical analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Students had five 45-minute listening intervention sessions in which they practiced asynchronously on the "Easy Stories in English" Podcast. They are about stories based on real and fictitious situations; students listen and complete some tasks. The sessions are divided into three parts:

- Pre-listening activity where students predict information and get into a new vocabulary.
- Listening activity where students practice listening for gist, detailed information, and inferences in a multiple-choice task

- Post-listening activity where they gave their point of view about the podcast they heard texts, did re-telling, predictions, and connections to life.
- After applying the interventions, both groups did their post-test with the same characteristics as the Pre-Test.

Then, the researchers applied a questionnaire to the intervention group to know their experience of using podcasts in classes. It is a time-efficient method of data collection and provides a level of anonymity and privacy to participants. Students are encouraged to be more honest when it is applied. Finally, Interviews are a valuable qualitative research method used to gather in-depth information and insight from participants about their experiences, perspectives, and attitudes on a particular topic. Three students from a volunteer sampling had a non-structure interview with questions about how they felt using Podcasts to improve their Listening Skills and some suggestions they would give after the application.

Concerning validity, the pre-test and post-test were taken from the Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2023 web page. The questionnaire and interview were adapted from two studies. (Tapia, 2014; Harahap, 2020). Both instruments were validated. First, two experts judged the validation of both questionnaires. Some students from the same level but not from the sample were chosen to read the questionnaires before piloting with two students from the intervention group. Then, both instruments were applied to the whole group.

RESULTS

During the intervention, students little by little increased their listening scores in the three types of listening practices: gist, detail, and inferences that they practiced after using the podcast "Easy Stories in English"

Table 1

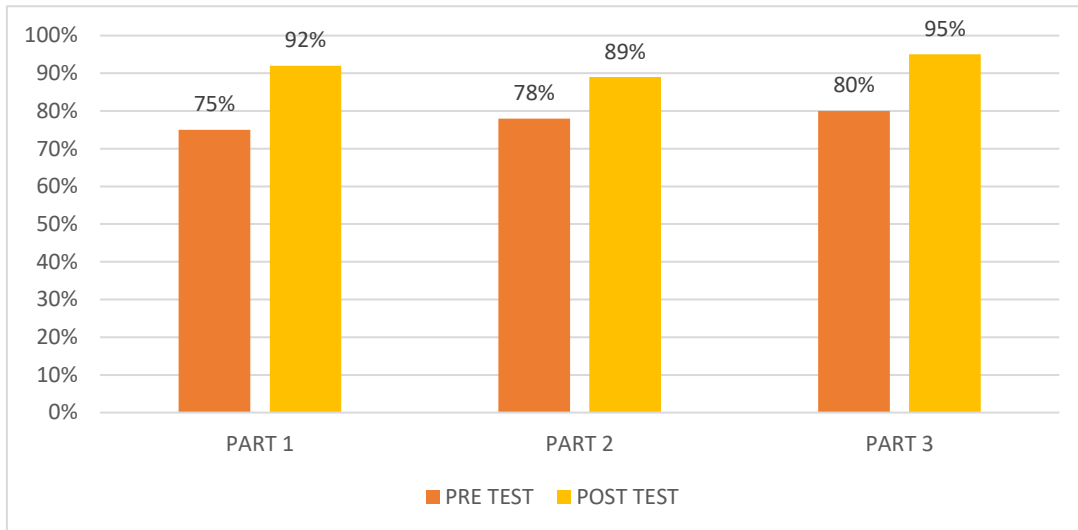
Scores in the three types of listening practices

	Gist	Detail	Infering	Average
Intevention 1	75	82	72	76%
Intevention 2	90	91	73	85%
Intevention 3	92	89	83	88%
Intevention 4	94	95	89	93%
Intevention 5	92	92	95	93%

Intervention group: pre-test and post-test

Graphic 1

Intervention Group: Pre-Test and Post-Test Results



Graphic 2

Control group: pre-test and post-test

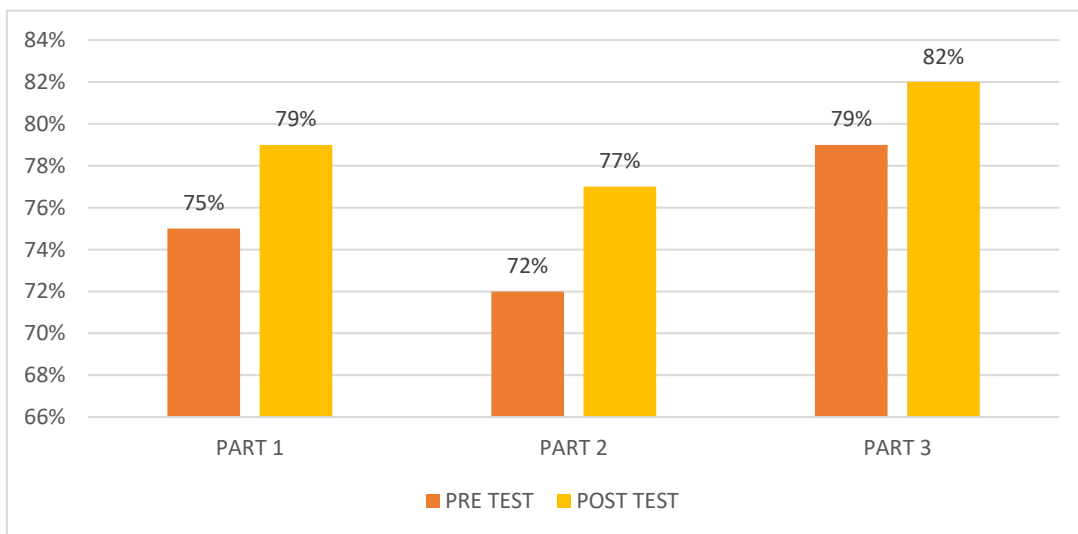


Table 2

Intervention and Control Group Results

GROUPS	PRE- TEST	POST-TEST	IMPROVEMENT
INTERVENTION GROUP	77,66%	92%	14,34%
CONTROL GROUP	75,33%	79,3%	3,97%

The scores of the Intervention Group (Figure 1) increased according to Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3 by 17%,11%, and 15% (average 14%). On the other hand, the scores of the control group just

increased by 4%,5%, and 3%, (average of 4%) between the Pre-Test and Post- Test (Figure 2) (table 2)

Intervention and control group results

Table 3

Pre-Test and Post-Test Analysis

ANOVA: Single Factor

SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Control	25	-27	-1,08	5,24333333
Intervention	25	58	2,32	5,22666667

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	144,5	1	144,5	27,6026743	3,37858E-06	4,04265213
Within Groups	251,28	48	5,235			
Total	395,78	49				

The one-way ANOVA showed a significance value (sig. 0.000003) lower than < 0.05 . As a consequence, this intervention using Podcasts has a significant impact on students' listening comprehension. The higher score achieved by the intervention class has proven the effectiveness of podcasts as media to improve students' listening achievement. This fact makes it remarkably evident that using English podcasts to teach listening significantly impacts students' listening comprehension. This finding supports research showing that students who received podcast instruction outperformed those who received traditional instruction in listening comprehension. (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013).

Questionnaire: intervention group

Table 4

Questionnaire Intervention Group

QUESTIONS	RANGE OF IMPORTANCE			
	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
I like podcasts to improve my listening skills	0%	0%	92%	8%
The podcasts' level is according to my English level	0%	4%	8%	88%
My teacher does a pre-listening and post-listening activity in the class to make sure the students know what the audio going to be about.	0%	0%	0%	100%
Podcast gave me the motivation in learning English	0%	0%	4%	96%
The podcast gave me a new vocabulary	0%	0%	8%	92%
I think listening is easier using podcasts.	0%	0%	4%	96%
I enjoy listening to the podcast stories.	0%	0%	0%	100%
I need technological resources to improve my listening skills	0%	4%	32%	64%

Podcasts should be implemented in listening subjects in the classroom	0%	0%	0%	100%
I consider the podcast as an excellent tool to acquire new knowledge and reinforce topics covered in classes.	0%	0%	4%	96%

From the questionnaire above (Table 3), most students liked podcasts to improve their listening skills. Moreover, 96% of students (88% always and 8% often) agreed that the podcasts' level is according to their English level. Interestingly, 100% of students said the teacher always does activities before and after podcasts to ensure their understanding. Most of the students, 96%, said podcasts always motivate them to learn English. Then, the vast majority of students (92% always and 8% often) perceived that podcasts gave them new vocabulary. 96% of students thought that listening is always easier using podcasts. Furthermore, all the students, 100%, always enjoy listening to the podcast's stories.

Regarding the need for technological resources to improve their listening skills, 64% of students said they always need them, and 32% said often. Regarding implementing podcasts in class, 100% of the students stated that podcasts should always be implemented in the classroom. Most of the students, 96%, considered that podcast is always an excellent tool to acquire new knowledge and reinforce topics covered in classes.

Interview: intervention group

In the first question related to the importance of listening, all the students said that listening is really important. Student A stated, "Listening is a fundamental component of good communication because it allows us to understand the needs and emotions of others." Students B and C said that listening helps gather information and different perspectives, which is relevant for making decisions and solving problems. In the second question, all the students explain why podcasts would be a powerful way of communication and learning. Student B stated, "Podcasts are easily accessible on various platforms, making them available to a wide audience". Students A and C mentioned that Podcasts could be listened to while commuting, exercising, or doing chores, making them a convenient way to consume content. Even students said many listeners feel a personal connection with podcast hosts because this creates a sense of familiarity and trust.

The third question was about the feeling of how effective listening could enhance their podcast experience. Student B said, "By paying attention and engaging with the content, you are more likely to stay interested and retain the information". Students A and C mentioned that paying close attention to podcast content helps listeners better understand the topics discussed and any complex concepts presented. The last question was about podcast recommendations for listeners eager to explore different genres. Student C recommended "The Tony Robbins Podcast" because it provides insights for personal development. Students A and B mentioned that "Reply All Podcast" explores the internet and technology's impact on our lives.

CONCLUSION

The article's authors investigated the utilization of podcasts as a pedagogical tool to improve EFL students' listening skills. It aids educators in understanding the value of this kind of technological tool to assist language learning for efficient instruction. The findings of the research are positive. Students stated their positive insights about using the podcasts in the EFL classroom. They consider that:

Using podcasts to improve listening skills can be a highly effective and enjoyable tool for students of all ages.

Podcasts cover a wide range of topics and genres, allowing listeners to choose content that aligns with their interests and goals. This variety keeps the learning experience engaging.

Podcasts expose listeners to authentic, real-world language usage, including various accents, vocabulary, and conversational styles. This can be more valuable than scripted language found in textbooks.

Podcasts can be accessed anytime and anywhere, making them a flexible option for improving listening skills. Whether during commutes, workouts, or downtime, podcasts offer convenient opportunities to practice listening.

Active listening is essential for comprehension and retention. Podcasts encourage active engagement as listeners need to follow the conversation, interpret context, and make inferences, thus improving listening skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Select podcasts that match students' current language proficiency level. Begin with podcasts designed for learners if the students are beginners, and gradually move to more advanced content as their skills improve.

Listen to podcasts with various accents, speeds, and topics to enhance listening versatility. This diversity helps students become more comfortable with different forms of spoken language.

Take notes while listening to podcasts. Summarize key points, new vocabulary, or engaging ideas. Review and revisit notes to reinforce the understanding.

Incorporate podcast listening into the daily routine of listeners. Regular sessions can be more effective than sporadic and lengthy sessions.

Engage in discussions with others about the podcasts students listen to. Reflect on what they have learned and share their insights. It reinforces their comprehension and critical thinking skills.

Do further research with other kinds of podcasts with a more representative sample from all English levels taken from different Institutions and Universities in the country.

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