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Perceptions of podcast use for listening comprehension: A study of EFL students in the Mekong delta, Vietnam

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Abstract

English has become increasingly vital in the lives and careers of individuals within today's globalized society. As a critical communication tool, a wealth of educational resources, including podcasts, has been developed to assist students in improving English, particularly in enhancing listening comprehension skills. This study was conducted with 138 EFL learners from a private university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. It aims to explore how English language majors perceive the use of podcasts to enhance their listening comprehension abilities. According to data collected through surveys and interviews, podcasts significantly impact students' listening skills, providing insight into students' perceptions. Although challenges persist in practicing listening comprehension, students employ various strategies to facilitate their learning. Additionally, teachers can integrate these resources with instructional strategies to further support students in developing their listening comprehension skills in English.

Keywords: podcast, listening comprehension, listening skills, EFL

Introduction

English has grown absolutely necessary for people to communicate on a worldwide scale (Rahmadani, 2023) ^[1]. English is a language that has been growing more and more common and is used to regulate people's lives in a variety of contexts, including politics, business, entertainment, health care, and education (Rao, 2019) ^[2]. The significance of English in the contemporary developed world cannot be contested, gives people the ability to grow and promote in areas other than communication (Zheng, 2024) ^[3].

In the process of learning English, listening comprehension skills increasingly attract the attention of researchers because it is considered the most used skill and needs special attention (Minh, 2019) ^[4]. Asmawati (2017) ^[5] asserted that listening comprehension is a critical ability since it is essential to daily life and that learning English is challenging without it since hearing is a source of linguistic input. Nevertheless, listening comprehension is still a problem for EFL English language learners (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011) ^[6]. In accordance with Ulum (2015) ^[7], the least developed abilities that EFL students face are listening comprehension skills.

Parallel with that, people these days are using technology more and more, and learning a foreign language is no different (Van et al., 2021) ^[8]. Shahrol et al., stated that a vital component of inspiring students and establishing a dynamic, productive learning environment is the integration of technology and education. As an outcome, Podcasts have become a potent teaching tool in the field of education, aiding students in developing excellent listening abilities (Minh, 2019) ^[4]. One improvement brought about by technology in education is the inventive way that "podcasting" may be used to assess pupils' listening abilities (Gonulal, 2020) ^[9]. Podcasts are one of the more innovative types of audio and video resources that provide language learners with a wealth of opportunity to develop their language abilities, particularly in listening comprehension (Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018) ^[10].

Considering the platforms of technology that are currently available as well as the problems that EFL learners encounter when practicing English listening, research on the effects of podcasts on EFL students, specifically listening comprehension abilities, is needed. Considering the aforementioned context and background in mind, the thesis is created and given to assist students in self-evaluating their progress while learning English through podcasts. More precisely, this study will investigate how podcasts affect a university in the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam English major learners' listening comprehension. In addition, this thesis will find the challenges that students face utilizing Podcasts.

It emphasizes how important English is, especially in terms of listening comprehension. Plus, a plethora of research has been conducted globally to investigate the potential benefits of podcast listening for enhancing English language learners' listening and comprehension abilities when studying English. Notwithstanding such, in Viet Nam, research articles on this topic are still exceptionally uncommon and in short supply. Especially for students at a university in the Mekong Delta, Previous investigation on students' awareness of using podcasts for listening practice has not been done. As a result, this study was conducted to collect data and find out students' perceptions to address these gaps.

Methodology

Research Design

The research was conducted out utilizing a mixed methods approach. Mixed-method is a methodology which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methods to produce positive aspects and accurate data (Truong & Vu, 2023) ^[11]. Researchers that employ mixed methods can comprehend data and charts from statistical analysis as well as phenomena and perceptions (Creswell, 1999) ^[12]. This renders it less likely that research data is missed during gathering, and it is preferable to use just one approach to each research paper (Caruth, 2013) ^[13].

Instrument and Participant

The quantitative research approach is a means of providing an explanation using statistical analysis and data (Moroi, 2021) ^[14]. Particularly for this thesis, quantitative methods applied in the data collection stage through questionnaires. The information obtained at this point will serve as a framework for choosing those components that take part in the qualitative research procedure that follows. The questionnaire formed the primary source of data for this study originated from the Teachers' Perception of Using Podcast as A Learning Media to Improve Listening Skills survey (Hasibuan & Male, 2022) ^[15]. Nevertheless modifications are made to suit the present investigation objectives. Participating in the study were 138 English Language majors from a university in the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam. Participants included many students from different school years to produce the most objective results possible and are classified into the following 4 groups: freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior.

The qualitative research approach is regarded as an efficient method to acquire an in-depth comprehension of phenomena through the process of gathering data (Moroi, 2021) ^[14]. Qualitative data gathered by using semi-structured interviews in order to best properly interpret the study's statistical results and provide insight into the research problem. This method divided the student into two groups: "positive effect" and "no

effect" in order to ascertain the impact of podcasts on the listening practice of English language learners at a university in the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam. Four students are chosen to take part in semi-structured interviews from a total of 138 respondents to the questionnaire.

Data collection

Quantitative data after being collected through the questionnaire is processed by coding and analyzing through the Software Package of Statistics for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0 software. To determine the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated. Through the Software Package of Statistics for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0, the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire is estimated to be very high ($= 0.931$).

Prior to being incorporated into the processing software, the raw data gathered from the questionnaire will be converted into binary values. Scale testing is done to make sure the questionnaire can attain reliability. The data utilized to assess the reliability of the questionnaires is Cronbach's alpha numbers, which are produced by scale testing analysis (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) ^[16]. In order to provide validity and accuracy to the metric's interpretation, researchers need to measure this metric. When the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient reaches 0.7 or higher, which is regarded as a good scale and reliable (Bujang *et al.*, 2018) ^[17].

Cases participating in the piloting study had data collected and processed using the Software Package of Statistics for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Specifically, the data was processed through Reliability Analysis to test the reliability of the questionnaire with 20 items. The results revealed that Cronbach's Alpha is extremely high ($= 0.931$). Thereby, the questionnaire utilized in this investigation is an absolutely reliable means of gathering data (Table 1).

Table 1: Reliability Statistic for the questionnaire in the pilot study

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.931	30

Results

Table 1 illustrates the general perspectives of 138 English language students at a university in the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam on the effect of podcasts on listening comprehension. The participants were provided with responses to questionnaires. The total mean of all clusters yields a rather high index ($M = 3.79$), indicating that students are cognizant of the value along with advantages that podcasts bring with regard to honing listening comprehension skills. The analysis of data reveals that some students found podcasts improved learning, notably evidenced by the highest score of 4.93. As seen by the data analysis, a small percentage of learners hold the belief that Podcasts do not genuinely provide the anticipated advantages which is demonstrated by the bare minimum score is only 1.37. Determining the reasons as well as providing some coping mechanisms for students are critically solved. For the foregoing reason, the study splitted students into two primary groups: the "no effect" and the "positive effect."

Table 2: Students' overall perception of impact listening podcasts on listening comprehension

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Total Mean	138	1.37	4.93	3.97	0.60

Four individuals across the board participated in the interviews. Two groups comprised two individuals who felt positively about podcasts and two individuals who did not perceive them to have any effect on Podcasts. All four respondents also agreed that practicing listening comprehension skills with podcasts had numerous advantages, however not all of them believe podcasts are a useful tool for this. Almost all four individuals had some trouble practicing their listening skills with podcasts. More precisely, the most common issue they run with is vocabulary.

The cluster's overall mean score of 3.82 demonstrates that in general, learners find that Podcasts bring many benefits to learning. Overall data about the usefulness of using Podcasts are illustrated in Table 3. More specifically, there are perceptions that podcasts are extremely effective, evidenced by the highest mean score of 5.00. However, some respondents also believe that podcasts don't help with listening comprehension, as a result, the lowest mean score is incredible (M=1.26).

Table 3: Descriptive statistic for students' general perception of usefulness of Podcast as a learning media in improving listening comprehension

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Usefulness	1.26	5.00	3.82	0.75

Table 4 presents the results of a survey conducted to find out how helpful students thought podcasts were for practicing listening skills. Above all, with the highest mean score of 3.98, students concur that podcasts aid in the development of their English language learning skills. Additionally, according to the second highest mean score (M=3.90) data in this cluster, learners believe that podcasts motivate them to learn listening English skills. Whilst the data suggests that students agree that podcasts can aid language learners in improving their English proficiency, the assessment has the lowest mean score (M=3.62) among the items in this cluster. Additionally, almost all of the items employed to determine the usefulness of podcasts have mean values that are rather high (M>3.60).

Table 4: Descriptive statistic for students' perception of usefulness of Podcast as a learning media in improving listening comprehension

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Podcast contributes positively to my learning experience	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.90
Podcast has helped me to develop an ability in learning English	1.00	5.00	3.98	0.92
Listening to Podcast makes me fluent in English	1.00	5.00	3.62	0.98
Since listening to podcast, I feel like my listening skill have improved	1.00	5.00	3.88	0.93
Podcast motivates me to practice my listening skill	1.00	5.00	3.90	0.95
I feel pronunciation learning on Podcast is easy to understand	1.00	5.00	3.67	0.53
Podcast has a lot of audio features that attract my attention to learn English listening	1.00	5.00	3.73	0.97
The Podcast can support me in building self-confidence and make the learning situation enjoyable	1.00	5.00	3.71	0.99
The Podcast helps me master listening skill and motivate me to learn English	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.95
Native speakers on the Podcast show me clearly how to pronounce words accurately in real communication	1.00	5.00	3.93	0.77
Since listening to Podcast, I feel like my pronunciation has improved	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.90

The interview strategy yielded qualitative results that revealed a wide range of student viewpoints. Although some believe that podcasts are very helpful, students little utilize them for a variety of reasons. For example, students may not need to download the podcasts to their devices or may only use the channels that include specific voice tones.

*... Mobile networks and wifi are available in most locations, so downloading is not necessary...
... I only listen to my favorite channels and rarely switch to other channels, so I only get used to certain tones...*

Regarding the usefulness of Podcasts when used for listening practice, after reaching out to the interview participants about the usefulness of podcasts for listening practice, all four individuals concluded that podcasts are very useful. Each interviewee has a distinct viewpoint on usefulness when it comes to these domains. Particularly for their varied material, students in the interview believe that podcasts can be helpful for learners. They said:

*... Diversity of lag content is the most outstanding usefulness that I see in Podcasts...
Additionally, Podcasts offer great learning efficiency owing to their temporal flexibility. They stated as follows:
... High flexibility in time allows me to practice actively or passively while doing anything...*

Discussion

According to research findings, using podcasts to help learners with their English listening comprehension can be extremely helpful. Podcasts are helpful in many ways. More precisely, according to a current study conducted at a university in the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam, students firmly believe that podcasts can aid in their English language proficiency development. Numerous universities have also confirmed this through earlier research. In line with the findings of Laiya *et al.* (2022) ^[18], students think that using podcasts can help them improve their English language learning abilities. Hasibuan and Male (2022) ^[15] came to a similar conclusion, stating using podcasts to enhance English listening skills is extremely helpful.

The interviewees went into further detail to clarify their views regarding podcasts' utility, saying that they can study whenever they want rather than having to finish their coursework on academic subjects in class, which fosters greater flexibility and excitement. In line with the findings of Minh's (2019) ^[4] study, he said that students are excited about podcasts since they offer convenient learning and a wide range of materials. In a similar vein, Sansinadi and Wardhani (2020) ^[19] said that podcasts offer a wealth of English-language content to aid pupils in learning, particularly in the field of listening after school. Additionally, Ramli and Kurniawan (2017) ^[20] found that if a student's preferred learning topic is podcasts, they will use podcasts to practice listening because they may listen at any time and from any

location.

Conclusion

Overall, students have positive views about using Podcasts to apply to learning English listening. For many reasons, because of the convenience, flexibility and variety of content, students love to learn with Podcasts. However there are still certain issues that students face.

This study shows the current situation of a university in the Mekong Delta students when using Podcasts to practice listening. From there, teachers will have an objective view and come up with appropriate learning strategies for the school's students. Not only that, students can also refer to Podcasts as a suggestion for learning resources.

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