Evaluating the Effect of Podcasts on Students' English Listening Skills at Nguyen Tat Thanh University

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effect of podcasts on improving the English listening skills of first-year non-English major students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University. A quasi-experimental design was employed, involving two groups: an experimental group that received a combination of traditional listening activities with podcast-based listening, and a control group that received only traditional listening activities. Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted to systematically evaluate the impact of employing podcasts on students' English listening abilities. The findings revealed that integrating podcasts in teaching listening skills significantly enhanced English listening skills of learners compared to traditional teaching methods alone among first-year non-English major students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University.

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1 Introduction

English plays an important role in modern society as a global language, allowing people to connect with others from different cultural backgrounds and facilitating communication, learning, and work [1]. Since English is a dominant language in international communication and trade, learning and using English fluently is crucial in today's interconnected world which fosters our personal and professional development [2]. However, many people find it difficult to use English in real-life contexts, particularly listening skills. This skill not only helps people understand different accents, pronunciations, and real-life contexts, improving their communication skills, but also enhances their overall language proficiency. While many traditional English teaching approaches have been applied, many still constrain learners' opportunities to use language effectively, as these methods often emphasize the memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary, with less focus on practical communication skills [3].

Digital tools, especially podcasts, have been employed as an effective teaching method at Nguyen Tat Thanh University (NTTU) to improve students' English listening ability. However, the impact of podcasts in university has not been thoroughly examined. Therefore, thoroughly evaluating the effect of podcasts is crucial to enhance an interactive learning environment where students can develop their English listening ability and their overall English proficiency. Podcasts are digital audio or video files that provide authentic listening materials and allow users to download or stream online on various topics. It is a promising method that has been applied in many countries. By being exposed to different accents, vocabulary, and real-life contexts from podcasts, learners can become more engaged, hence gradually improving their English speaking skills [4]. In addition, this approach allows learners to listen to authentic content at their own pace, which helps them comprehend and retain it effectively [2]. Furthermore, employing podcasts in learning English encourages

flexible and personalized learning, contributing to the improvement of their listening comprehension [5].

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Listening skills play a key role in language acquisition, as they are an important input that helps learners understand the context in which language is used in real life. Through listening comprehension practice, learners can develop vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, thereby creating a solid foundation for comprehensive language use [6, 7]. However, many learners still have difficulty improving their listening skills due to factors such as fast speaking speed, unfamiliar intonation, lack of context, or fear of making mistakes. In this context, podcasts are seen as a potential tool to expose learners to authentic material. Podcasts allow learners to control playback speed, revisit challenging sections, and select personally relevant topics, thereby increasing motivation and reducing cognitive overload [8]. In addition, podcasts support both bottom-up listening strategies (e.g. identifying sounds and vocabulary) and top-down listening strategies (e.g. using background knowledge and predictions to understand the content) [9].

In addition, the theoretical framework of this study is also reinforced by the theory of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). TEL refers to the application of technology to enhance teaching and learning effectiveness, helping learners to flexibly access content, actively control the learning process and increase interaction with practical materials [10]. In the context of teaching English listening skills, podcasts are a typical form of TEL, providing authentic language input, helping learners practice at the right speed, thereby improving their ability to understand and remember information [9, 11]. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize the current status of non-English major programs in Vietnam. For non-English major students, the curriculum typically includes 4–6 credits focusing on grammar, vocabulary and test-taking skills. The learning content often lacks practical application and places limited emphasis on the development of communicative skills. Therefore, integrating technological tools such as podcasts into the learning process will contribute to creating a flexible,

practical learning environment and stimulating learning motivation for non-major students.

2.2 Empirical Studies on Podcasts.

Many international studies have demonstrated the positive effects of podcasts in improving listening abilities for English as a Second Language (ESL/EFL) learners. A 12-week experimental design was conducted at a university in London. The results showed that after studying with podcasts integrated into lectures, the experimental group of students improved their listening abilities by an average of 20% compared to the control group using traditional methods. Learners also appreciated the rich content and real-life context of podcasts [12]. Similarly, a study at a university in South Korea found that using podcasts helped experimental students improve their listening and language analysis skills by an average of 15% compared to a control group. Podcasts are beneficial because they provide authentic content, cover a wide range of topics, and allow flexible practice outside of class. However, some students struggled with the fast pace of speech and complex vocabulary, suggesting that podcast use requires appropriate guidance for optimal results [13].

2.3 Podcasts in the Context of Vietnamese Education

In Viet Nam, some studies have initially demonstrated the positive effects of podcasts in developing English listening ability for non-major students. A quasi-experimental research with 60 first-year students at Khanh Hoa university was conducted to evaluate the effect of using podcasts to improve students' listening skills. After 10 weeks of doing research, students in the experimental group, which incorporated podcasts into their listening practice, showed a significant improvement in their listening ability compared to the control group, and also expressed their positive attitudes towards this method for fostering their understanding authentic contexts, and enriching their vocabulary [14]. Likewise, 44 students at Cong Hai school experienced a semi-experimental method for 7 weeks to improve their English listening skills through the use of podcasts. The students were divided into two groups: the experimental group (using podcasts) and the control group (not using podcasts). The results showed that the experimental group achieved significant improvements in listening skills and had a more positive learning attitude than the control group.

The study confirmed that podcasts are an effective tool to support the development of listening skills and made recommendations to optimize the integration of podcasts into English teaching in high schools [15].

However, both studies also pointed out some difficulties when applying podcasts to teaching English listening skills. Specifically, many students and pupils have difficulty in fast speaking speed, specialized vocabulary, and the lack of illustrations or supporting subtitles, making it difficult for them to keep up with the listening content. In addition, the habit of practicing listening at home has not been clearly formed, leading to ineffective and ineffective learning. Some learners also lack specific instructions from teachers on how to exploit podcasts in a way that is appropriate to their level and learning goals. This shows that the use of podcasts requires appropriate content selection, clear listening activity design, and learner support strategies if it is to achieve optimal results in the Vietnamese educational environment.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A quasi-experimental approach was adopted in this study, a method commonly used in the field of education when randomization is not feasible. The quasi-experimental research is a type of research in which the researcher cannot randomly assign subjects to groups, but still conducts interventions and compares between the experimental group and the control group to test the effectiveness of an impact factor [16]. The outstanding advantage of this method is that it allows the researcher to survey in the actual classroom context, where learners are grouped according to available courses. This helps ensure high practical applicability and saves resources. However, the main limitation is the lack of randomization in grouping, so the results can be affected by extraneous variables, thereby weakening the strength of causal inference compared to a true experimental design [17].

In this study, the independent variable was podcast use, and the dependent variable was students' English listening ability. A total of 200 first-year non-English major students at NTTU participated in the study. The students were divided into experimental and control groups based on their pre-registered classes. After 6 weeks of doing research, students in both groups were required to take a post-test and participants in the experimental group answered the questionnaires about their attitudes towards using podcasts. The results were used to evaluate the effect of this method towards students' English listening skills.

3.1.1 Description of the Podcasts -integrated Lesson plan for First-Year Non-English Major Students.

Lesson Structure in the Experimental Group Using Podcast-Integrated Instruction

- Warm-up (5 min): students discuss the topic, share ideas, and predict the content before listening to the podcasts.
- Pre-listening (5 min): teachers provide students with key vocabulary and context.
- While-listening, (15-20) min: students listen to (3-8) minute podcasts and complete tasks such as filling in the blanks, answering multiple-choice questions, or noting specific details
- Post-listening, (10-15) min: students discuss the content of the podcasts, complete summary tasks, and engage in reflective activities to consolidate their learning.
- Homework: students re-listen to the podcasts, record a short summary and reflection and teachers can provide 2-3 additional podcasts on the same topic for students to listen to at home for extra practice.

3.1.2 Description of Listening Lesson Plan Using Traditional Method (Control Group)

Lesson Structure in traditional lesson plan is built on the current non-major English program at the university. Teachers use available listening passages in the textbook, combined with basic practice activities. The structure of the lesson usually includes three stages:

- Pre-listening (10 min): the teacher introduces new vocabulary, asks questions to predict the content of the listening passage, and activates students' background knowledge.
- While-listening (20 min): students listen to a recording from the textbook (usually a conversation or a simple speech at a slow speed) and complete exercises such as filling in the blanks, answering true/false questions or multiple choice questions.
- Post-listening (10 min): students discuss the content of the listening passage, summarize the main ideas, and review the vocabulary and structures learned through extended exercises.

- Homework: students review the listening or read the transcript, write a (3-5) sentence summary, and write (5-7) sentences with the new words/structures. They can prepare a short dialogue with 3-5 new phrases to practice next session.

3.2 Setting and Participants

Sample size formula

$$n = \frac{Nz^2p(1-p)}{d^2(N-1) + z^2p(1-p)}$$

N: population (The estimated total number of first-year students at NTTU taking English classes at the District 7 campus is 400)

z: value corresponding to the chosen confidence level (if 95% reliability, z-value is 1.96)

p: estimated percentage of the population. Assuming unknown, p = 0.5%

d: margin of error, desired margin of error is 0.050

n – sample size of the study

Using the formula, we get the following result: n = 196 for this study

n = 200 is chosen.

The study was carried out on 200 first-year students from different majors at NTTU. Students were between 18 and 20 years old, regardless of their background, including region, gender, and religion. These students were assigned to experimental groups (n=100) and control groups (n=100) based on their existing classrooms, rather than being randomly assigned. Therefore, this study is classified as a quasi-experimental design – a method suitable for real-life educational settings where random assignment is difficult. Both groups took the post-test after six months (from January to July 2025) at Foreign Languages Center.

3.3 Instruments.

3.3.1 Podcast

Podcasts used in the experiment included conversational, contextual, academic podcasts, and specific themes such as science, work, study, history, culture and travel. The difficulty level of the podcasts was carefully designed to match the students' listening abilities. Each episode lasted about 3-8 minutes, and the participants listened to four to six episodes each week.

After listening to podcasts, students were required to complete assignments to ensure their listening comprehension. Students re-listened to these podcasts at home and recorded a summary. In addition, teachers can provide 2–3 new podcasts on the same topic for students to listen to at home as a way to further enhance their listening comprehension.

3.3.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were designed to collect data related to students' attitudes towards using podcasts to improve their listening skills. Students in the experimental group answered 10 questions based on Likert-scale items, and 3 open-ended questions. The Likert-scale items were used to evaluate students' perceptions of the benefits, and challenges when they used podcasts, while 3 open-ended questions encouraged students to provide personal impressions, and suggestions for improvement.

3.3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Students took a listening test before starting the new semester. Then, learners in the experimental group were taught by listening to podcasts in addition to traditional listening activities of the listening class during their 12 weeks of the semester. The teacher prepared varied podcasts (3-8 minutes) that matched students' levels and required them to complete assignments after listening to the podcasts. Meanwhile, those in the control group followed traditional methods, including discussions, listening exercises from textbooks, and audio materials that were unrelated to podcasts. After six weeks, students in both groups were required to take a post-test to evaluate their listening skills. In addition, participants in the experimental group also completed the questionnaire about their attitudes towards podcasts.

3.3.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data from the listening data from students' listening test, SPSS software was used. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated for pre-test and post-test scores of each group. To identify statistical significance of between both groups, independent samples t-tests were carried out. In addition, other paired samples t-tests were used to assess the pre-test to post-test the gains within each group. In terms of questionnaire data, it was collected and presented by proportions with Likert-scale.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Experimental Group

Table 1 Results of the t-test comparing students' listening skills before and after using podcasts

Paired Samples Statistics				
Group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post_Test_Experimental group	17.880	100	2.459	0.246
Pre_Test_Experimental group	10.800	100	1.985	0.198

Paired Samples Test								
	Paired Differences							
Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Post_Test_Exprimental group Pre_Test_Experimental group	7.080	1.779	0.178	6.727	7.433	39.795	99	0.000

From Table 2, the Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0,000, which is less than 0,050, and the mean difference is 7,080. This indicates that there is a statistically significant improvement in students' scores. Specifically, the average score of post- test in the experimental group is 17,880, which is higher than the pre-test score of 10,800, indicating that students performed better after the learning intervention.

Table 2 The results from the Questionnaire about students' attitudes towards oral presentations

QUESTIONS	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
1/ Listening to podcasts has helped me improve my listening skills	0.333	0.583	0.084	0.000	0.000
2/ Podcasts are an engaging way to learn English,	0.250	0.583	0.167	0.000	0.000
3/ I feel more confident in my English listening ability after listening to podcasts,	0.167	0.583	0.167	0.083	0.000
4/ The podcasts I listen to are too difficult for me to understand,	0.000	0.083	0.167	0.417	0.333
5/ I enjoy listening to podcasts because they provide real-life context and conversations,	0.083	0.667	0.167	0.083	0.000
6/ I find it easy to follow the podcasts when I listen to them,	0.167	0.667	0.083	0.083	0.000
7/ Listening to podcasts motivates me to improve my English listening skills,	0.333	0.500	0.167	0.000	0.000
8/ The variety of topics in podcasts keeps me interested in learning English,	0.167	0.750	0.083	0.000	0.000
9/ I prefer listening to podcasts over traditional classroom listening activities,	0.334	0.500	0.083	0.083	0.000
10/ Listening to podcasts has helped me learn new vocabulary and phrases in English,	0.333	0.667	0.000	0.000	0.000
11/ I find podcasts to be more effective for learning English than other resources,	0.167	0.750	0.083	0.000	0.000
12/ I am comfortable listening to podcasts in English, even if the speakers have different accents	0.083	0.667	0.167	0.083	0.000

Three open-ended questions
1/ What do you like most about listening to podcasts for learning English?

2/ What challenges do you face when listening to podcasts in English?

3/ Any suggestions to improve your experience with listening to podcasts for learning English?

Most students in the experimental group showed positive attitudes towards using podcasts to improve their listening skills. However, some students still encountered difficulties in listening to podcasts and need more time and effective methods to enhance their listening skills.

3. 4.2 Control Group

Table 3 T-test's Results comparing students' listening skills before and after using traditional listening method

Paired Samples Statistics				
Group	**Mean**	**N**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Post_Test_Control group	14.770	100	2.792	0.279
Pre_Test_Control group	10.740	100	1.829	0.183

Paired Samples Test								
	Paired Differences							
Group	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**95% Confidence Interval of the Difference**		**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
				Lower	**Upper**			
Post_Test_Control group – Pre_Test_Control group	4.030	2.873	0.287	3.460	4.600	14.029	99	0.000

From the Table 3, Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.000, which is less than 0.050, indicating a statistically significant difference in the means between the two variables, Post-Test Control and Pre-Test Control. The Mean Difference is 4.030, meaning that the average score of Post-Test Control (14.770) is higher than that of Pre-Test Control (10.740). Therefore, there is an improvement in students' scores after using traditional listening method.

3.4.3 Comparison between the Post-Test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups

From Tables 2 and 3, it could be seen that *t-statistic* of the control group was 7.080, indicating that the effect of listening to podcasts in experimental group was more significant than that of the control group, which had a t-statistic of 4.030.

In conclusion, after using podcasts alongside standard classroom activities, the experimental group had a significant improvement in their English listening skills compared to the control group in terms of both the scores and stability of the results.

3.5 Students' Attitudes towards Podcasts.

The questionnaire showed that most students in the experimental group, who integrated podcasts with regular classroom activities, had a positive attitude toward this approach. Most participants (91.6%) agreed that podcasts improved their listening skills, with many finding them interesting (83.3%) and effective for learning vocabulary (100%). Students also appreciated the variety of topics (91.7%) and real-life contexts (75.0%). Furthermore, 83.3% of students were more motivated after listening of podcasts, and 91.7% saw them as more effective than other resources. However, some faced difficulty levels and different accents. Three open-ended questions revealed students' positive impressions on podcasts. Many valued the wide range of topics and real-life contexts which were engaging and helpful for learning vocabulary. However, some struggled with different accents, especially unfamiliar idioms or fast pace. Many suggested adding transcripts or highlighting key vocabulary to improve understanding.

3.6 Summary of Results

The results revealed the improvement in listening skills of both the control and experimental group. However, the results of the experimental group were more pronounced after listening to podcasts. Additionally, the results from the questionnaire also expressed students' positive attitudes after learning listening skills through podcasts. These findings revealed that integrating podcasts into standard lessons is an effective approach for learners to improve their listening proficiency.

4 Discussion

4.1 Interpretation of Results

The post-test results of the experimental group were significantly higher than that of the control group, indicating that listening to podcasts had positive impacts on the listening ability of learners in Viet Nam. This also demonstrated a comprehensive effect on many aspects of listening skills, including different topics, accents, vocabulary, real-life contexts, and speed. The questionnaire also expressed students' positive attitudes towards this approach as they appreciated their improvement in English listening skills after listening to podcasts.

4.2 Comparison with Previous Studies

This study's findings are consistent with previous research showing the positive effects of podcasts on English listening skills in ESL/EFL contexts. The results are consistent with international studies [12, 13] in which the use of podcasts helped learners improve their listening skills by 15–20%. At the same time, results of the present study are similar to domestic studies [14, 15], showing that podcasts help increase learning interest and the ability to receive language in real-life contexts. However, similar to previous studies, students in this study also had difficulties with fast speaking speed, difficult vocabulary, and unfamiliar pronunciation, which have been examined in previous studies [13-15]. Thus, the study not only reinforces the previous conclusions but also contributes to expanding the empirical evidence in the context of Vietnamese higher education.

4.3 Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings play an important role in improving English listening teaching approaches, which are considered effective tools for enhancing students' listening abilities. However, there are still many challenges that students may encounter when listening to podcasts, as well as in the process of preparing podcasts for learners. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to provide comprehensive instruction for students and to prepare appropriate podcasts as a way to enhance students' listening skills. Moreover, the positive attitudes of learners also foster an engaging and active learning environment for students to practice their listening skills effectively.

5 Conclusion

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of podcasts on improving students' English listening skills at Vietnamese universities. This helps learners gain exposure to different topics, accents, vocabulary, and authentic contexts. A quasi-experimental method was employed, which included questionnaires and pre- and post-test evaluations. Despite improvements in both groups, it is evident that students in the experimental group, who used both podcasts and routine classroom listening practices, significantly outperformed the control group. In addition, the questionnaire also revealed students' positive attitudes towards podcasts. However, some students still faced certain challenges when listening to podcasts. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating podcasts into language learning and teaching to enhance students' English proficiency and professional development.

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Đánh giá hiệu quả của việc sử dụng podcast đối với khả năng nghe tiếng Anh của sinh viên Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành

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Tóm tắt Mục tiêu của nghiên cứu này là đánh giá hiệu quả của podcast trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng nghe tiếng Anh của sinh viên năm nhất không chuyên ngữ tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành. Thiết kế nghiên cứu bán thực nghiệm đã được áp dụng, gồm hai nhóm: nhóm thực nghiệm được học kết hợp giữa các hoạt động nghe truyền thống và nghe qua podcast, trong khi nhóm đối chứng chỉ thực hiện các hoạt động nghe truyền thống. Các bài kiểm tra trước và sau thí nghiệm được tiến hành để đánh giá một cách hệ thống tác động của việc sử dụng podcast đối với khả năng nghe tiếng Anh của sinh viên. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy việc tích hợp podcast vào giảng dạy kỹ năng nghe giúp cải thiện đáng kể kỹ năng nghe tiếng Anh so với việc chỉ sử dụng phương pháp giảng dạy truyền thống đối với sinh viên năm nhất không chuyên ngữ tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành.

Từ khóa Podcast, Kỹ năng nghe tiếng Anh, Sinh viên không chuyên ngữ, Thiết kế bán thực nghiệm, Giảng dạy ngôn ngữ