

Using Podcasts for Extensive Listening Practice: Effects on EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension and Motivation

Zahraa Satar Jabar

Department of English language, College of Education, Sawa University, Al Muthanna, Iraq,

Email: zahraajab@sawauniversity.edu.iq

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Abstract: This study explores how teaching podcasts as a listening strategy can improve the Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' listening comprehension and motivation. In this study, 80 female students from two separate private institutes in Baghdad took part in a quasi-experimental design research. Two groups of participants were developed (experimental and control). The experimental group received instruction about how to use podcasting while listening, whereas the control group was provided with traditional listening instructions. Data were gathered through use of the oxford placement test, IELTS listening tests, and the language motivation questionnaire. The results show that using podcasts improved overall performance on the part of participants in the experimental group and created increased motivation. The study highlights that the learning approach using podcasts helped the students from the experimental group perform better in the test and also enhanced motivation. It was found that the usage of podcast-based learning strategies would help the learners reduce anxiety and improve listeners' comprehension and that the approach would make the learners feel positively towards their abilities regarding learning English.

Key Terms: podcasting listening strategies, EFL learners, listening performance, language motivation

Introduction

English language proficiency is seen as part of global competence, with the development of EFL curricula and teaching methods in Iraq aligning with general socio-economic strategies in the country. As Iraq's status in international relations continues to rise across the globe, teaching English language proficiency has become a contributing factor in educational reform in Iraq (Alqahtani, 2021; Assulaimani, 2019). The development in English language proficiency in Iraq has occurred in direct proportion to contributions in areas of educational reform, business and commercial activities, and international diplomacy (Al-Seghayer, 2021; Al-Shehri, 2020). Iraq's educational framework has observed a trend in which English is seen not just for communication but rather a primary means to pursue Iraqi economic diversity and further internationalization across all levels (Alshammari, 2020). Meanwhile, this growing concern for internationalization in economic markets has overshadowed oral and aural aspects of developing these English language proficiency skills in favor of complete writing activities in reading and writing English language proficiency skills (Alsaleem, 2019). This discrepancy has led to a gross neglect of listening comprehension in the Iraqi educational system. The ability to listen effectively is one of the cornerstones of effective language learning, cross-cultural communication, and for practical use of the English language (Alsaleem, 2019).

The importance of the role of listening comprehension as a basic process of language learning and a basic skill of listening comprehension emphasizes the need for instructors to concentrate on developing listening ability among Iraqi EFL learners (Al-Shehri, 2020). The Iraqi educational setting has frequently placed a greater emphasis on teaching language skills that can easily be evaluated through testing (Dabeel, 2023) and this has produced a lack of recognition of the value of developing listening comprehension skills. Yet the importance of listening comprehension for acquiring and developing a language ability cannot be understated. Listening comprehension provides access to various kinds of linguistic input and therefore, facilitates intercultural communication, making it one of the most important building blocks of second language development (Alkhelaiwi, 2023). Iraqi EFL students face challenges that relate to several different root causes. One major cause is the inability of students to engage in authentic language experiences, which are critical to learning a true language, and there exist many traditional pedagogical practices that have de-emphasized aural skills development (Shehzad et al., 2021).

A void of attention on the empirical research that exists to develop listening comprehension skills within the Iraqi educational system creates a very difficult challenge for both those that are seeking to develop listening comprehension pedagogy and the students who are attempting to learn this important skill in the language learning process (Alseaders, 2021). Therefore, this study has a great deal of significance well beyond mere academic interest; it represents a sizeable investment on behalf of the Iraqi educational system to advance the learners' general language ability and give them the essential communication skills necessary to positively influence and advance in a rapidly-growing global community that is rejecting many of the traditional barriers of communicating, learning, and growing together (Otair & Abd Aziz, 2017).

1.2. The Present Study

The main goal of this study is accomplished through the analysis of the effects that developing strategies for listening to podcasts have on the students at this time; with the intention of providing direction for future research within the cultural framework of Iraq, and their success in terms of developing listening skills, and maintains their language motivation. The research also provides further exploration of the learner's perceptions and attitudes about their own language skills, in addition to their cognitive ability to acquire a second language. The results provided in the study indicate that incorporating podcasts within EFL classes can enhance learning opportunities/outcomes when correct strategies are used for their integration. The study introduces a way for using podcasts more effectively within EFL teaching, as well as indicates a relatively untouched region for teachers, policymakers, and related organizations that wish to advance learning within a similar setting. Following these rationales, this study has been guided by a range of research questions.

RQ₁: Does podcasting intervention affect EFL students' listening performance?

RQ₂: Does podcasting intervention affect EFL students' language motivation?

2. Literature Review

Recent studies undertaken to investigate how teaching methods can improve learners' awareness and control of their own metacognitive processes in learning an L2 have found that tools involving audio presentations, such as in podcasts, can play an important role in improving understanding by those exposed to an L2 through an audio-based format. In the study by Chen and Lin in 2020, Chinese-speaking participants learning EFL were exposed to a class involving a podcast-centered approach to learning. The class employed podcasts as a main vehicle for instruction by the tutor. The results of this study confirmed that those in the podcast training groups displayed increased awareness and use of varied strategies in improving L2-listening skills.

In another study, Lee and Kim (2018) highlighted the connection between L2 listening comprehension performance and the metacognitive strategies applied by Korean EFL learners. The study found a positive correlation between metacognitive awareness and the performance of L2 listening

comprehension among the participants. Applying specific strategies, such as podcasting, was successful for improving L2 listening comprehension performance among the participants.

Wang and Yan (2018) also examined the potential of podcasting in improving the listening comprehension of L2 of college-level students. Based on their study with Chinese EFL learners, the researchers concluded that podcasting was highly successful in improving the overall listening comprehension of the participants, as well as their awareness of listening strategies.

A study conducted by Wu and Wu (2019) investigated the effects of Metacognitive Instruction Program on L2 listening comprehension among Taiwanese EFL learners. The results of the study revealed that there was an improvement in the application of metacognitive strategies and listening comprehension performance of the learners in L2.

Zarei and Khezrlou conducted a study to determine whether training learners on listening strategies could help improve L2 listening comprehension skills among Iranian EFL learners. The results showed that the strategy training program significantly improved the listeners' comprehension of L2 listening, as well as their awareness of language and strategy use.

A study of the impact of listening instruction in the first language on anxiety and listening skills in Chinese EFL learners was carried out by Zhang and Zhang in 2020. Both anxiety levels and the learners' listening skills improved after the instruction. Anxiety levels reduced significantly.

Choi and Lee (2019) addressed the effect of a podcasting strategy instruction program on listening comprehension for Korean EFL listeners. The program provided learners with direct metacognitive teaching—planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The result indicated improved listening test achievement and decreased listening apprehension for study participants.

In a recent study conducted by Khayyer and Qafisheh in 2021, the impact of listening instruction in the first language on the listening comprehension skills of EFL learners in Iran was investigated. Throughout this research, the learners were trained on several strategies with a focus on predicting, monitoring, and evaluation of listening comprehension. Based on the research study, the listening instruction in the first language influenced the learners' listening comprehension development and listening anxiety.

In their research conducted in 2020, Akbari and Tabatabaei examined the effect of working memory capacity on the listening comprehension abilities of Iranian EFL learners when explicit metacognitive strategy instruction is provided to them. The results showed that explicit metacognitive strategy instruction resulted in improved performance in listening comprehension tasks by the learners, and it had a mediating effect through working memory capacity.

Al-Zahrani's (2021) study examined the effect of listening strategy instruction on the metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension of Saudi EFL learners. The result showed that listening strategy instruction helped the learners' listening comprehension skills and metacognitive awareness, and there was no significant effect of learners' gender on the effectiveness of the instruction.

Ko and Nam (2019) examined the impact of podcasting on the instruction of listening strategies for Korean English as a foreign language learners. Ko and Nam found that there was significant improvement in listening comprehension as well as in the metacognitive awareness of the learners with the use of a podcasting strategy for instruction. In short, the implementation of the coaching of metacognitive strategies in the study of listening can result in stronger comprehension of what the learners hear.

Likewise, Rahimi and Abednia (2020) investigated the effect of podcasting strategy training on Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and listening skills. They found that significant improvements were obtained in terms of self-efficacy beliefs and listening attitudes, thanks to the podcasting strategy training. Accordingly, it can be seen that podcasting strategy training added to listening lessons for EFL learners can help improve listening performance as well as learners' perceived self-efficacy beliefs.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This study employs a quasi-experimental design. When there is no possibility of random selection of students, instead of abandoning the research, we simply have to limit the domain of our claims. We have to avoid making cause-and-effect statement. In this study, podcasting listening strategy is the independent variable and listening performance and language motivation are the dependent variables.

3.2. Participants

A hundred students participated in this study. The participants were students of two private institutes in Bqdad. The mean age of the students of the study was about 16, ranging from 14 to 17, and all were female, and had the same level of language proficiency as pre-intermediate. Beside this, in order to have a more homogeneous sample, the Oxford Placement Test was administered. This resulted in the selection of 80 students for the study. Participants were divided into an experimental group ($n = 40$), receiving podcasting strategy instruction, and a control group ($n = 40$), following traditional listening instruction.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Oxford Placement Test

The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) of Allan (2004) was used to gauge the language competency of the participants. The OPT has two sections with 100 multiple-choice questions each: listening, and grammar. Fifty questions in the first segment assess students' command of basic vocabulary and grammar. The Oxford Placement Test took 40 minutes to complete.

3.3.2. Listening Test

The IELTS listening test was used in this study to evaluate students' listening skills. There are ten questions in each segment of the test. There is a monologue in the second half and a discussion between two speakers in the first. Situations pertaining to instruction and training are covered in the final two sections. Among the question kinds employed are multiple-choice, matching, labeling plans, maps, and diagrams, form completion, note completion, table completion, flowchart completion, sentence completion, and short-answer questions. Upon hearing the recording once, candidates answer the questions in real time.

3.3.3. Language Motivation Questionnaire

For language motivation, we used Lou and Noels' (2017) language motivation inventory. This scale includes 18 items in a way that nine items measure growth language motivation, and nine items measure fixed language motivation.

3.4. Data Collection

Before instruction began, we secured institute approval and informed consent from learners and parents. In Week 0, all 100 students completed the OPT to ensure a reasonably homogeneous pre-intermediate cohort; 80 eligible learners were then assigned by intact classes to the experimental ($n=40$) or control ($n=40$) group. On the same week, both groups sat the IELTS Listening, Form A (pretest) under standard conditions and completed the Language Motivation Questionnaire. We used anonymous codes instead of names and explained that participation was voluntary and would not affect grades.

Across four weeks (two 45-minute sessions per week), both groups received equal time on listening tasks. The experimental group used graded podcast episodes by Ted Talk ($\approx 6-9$ minutes) and a simple strategy cycle, plan (activate topic knowledge and set a purpose), monitor (listen for gist, then key details; note breakdowns), and evaluate (self-check and short reflection). A one-page checklist and brief homework (one extra podcast plus a 5-minute reflection log per week) supported habits. The control group followed the course book's audio activities and comprehension questions without explicit strategy

coaching or reflection tools. We matched total listening minutes across groups and used a short fidelity checklist to keep delivery consistent. In Week 4, both groups took the IELTS Listening, Form B (posttest) and repeated the motivation questionnaire under the same testing conditions.

3.5. Data Analysis

We analyzed data at $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed). After screening for outliers and checking normality (Shapiro–Wilk) and homogeneity (Levene’s), we computed gain scores (post – pre). For listening, our primary test was an independent-samples t-test on gains (Experimental vs. Control), with Hedges’ g and 95% CIs; we also ran a robustness ANCOVA with posttest as the DV, group as the factor, and pretest as the covariate (reporting partial η^2). We separately scored the Growth and Fixed subscales for motivation and tested Group $\times$ Time with a 2×2 mixed ANOVA (or, if the assumptions were met, independent t-tests on gain scores), reporting effect sizes (partial η^2 or Hedges’ g). We reported Cronbach’s α for each motivation subscale at pre and post, handled any minimal missing data with pairwise deletion, and presented full descriptive (M, SD, 95% CI) alongside test statistics.

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analyses

Before beginning the actual analysis of the study, several preliminary analyses were performed. First, the distributional properties of the data were evaluated in order to allow for equal group comparisons prior to intervention. Second, motivation (dependent variable) was assessed for internal consistency. The descriptive statistical results for both groups, including performance on the listening test, can be found in Table 1 below. The mean score of both experimental and control groups was statistically equivalent prior to the experimental intervention, indicating similar levels of listening proficiency. After the intervention, the experimental group improved significantly compared to the control group's minor improvement.

According to the listeners' motivation, both sets of respondents had an equal amount of both forms of motivation before the completion of their respective studies. The descriptive data obtained after both studies indicated an increase in the amount of growth motivation exhibited by the experimental respondents, while there was a slight decrease in fixed motivation exhibited by the experimental respondents, whereas there was no significant change in the motivation scores exhibited by the control respondents throughout the course of both studies.

The assumption tests provided by Shapiro-Wilk, Significance Level and tests of Homogeneity of Variance determined that the data for both studies could be subjected to parametric test analyses. Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that the scores for both the measuring instruments, listening and motivation, followed a consistent pattern through time and between both groups, with all groups showing that their scores of both listening and motivation were normally distributed across both studies ($p > .05$). The tests of Homogeneity of Variance allowed for the assumption to be made that there was no significant difference in variances of the dependent variables between the experimental and control groups prior to, and following, the intervention ($p > .05$).

Reliability was established through the analyses of internal consistency for the Language Motivation Questionnaire for this particular sample. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of .84 for the Growth Motivation subscale and .81 for the Fixed Motivation subscale indicate a good level of consistency and reliability with respect to all inferential statistical analyses to be completed.

The results of the independent t-test of the Listening Pre-test Scores for both the experimental and control groups suggested there was a lack of significant difference between the groups on their Pre-test Scores ($p > .05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that these results were comparable and therefore that it was acceptable to compare the results obtained from the investigation of both the experimental and control groups following their completion of the respective studies.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Listening Performance and Language Motivation

Measure	Group	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)
Listening Performance (IELTS, /40)	Experimental (n = 40)	18.42 (3.11)	25.86 (3.47)
	Control (n = 40)	18.10 (3.26)	20.02 (3.33)
Growth Motivation (1–5)	Experimental (n = 40)	3.12 (0.54)	3.89 (0.51)
	Control (n = 40)	3.09 (0.56)	3.18 (0.55)
Fixed Motivation (1–5)	Experimental (n = 40)	3.41 (0.59)	2.94 (0.57)
	Control (n = 40)	3.38 (0.61)	3.36 (0.60)

4.2 Results for Research Question 1

For the first research question, gain scores (posttest - pretest) in the area of listening were compared to see if there was any difference in listening between learners in the experimental and control groups. Comparisons of descriptive data showed that learners who participated in a podcasting strategy showed much more improvement in listening with the podcasting strategy than learners in traditional listening instruction showed improvement.

There was a statistically significant difference found between learners in experimental and control groups when using an independent samples t-test for gain scores. Learners who participated in the experimental group (podcasting strategy) had significantly greater listening improvement than the control group (traditional instruction), $t(78) = 6.41$, $p < 0.001$. The effect size for this difference was large (Hedges' $g = 1.43$), which indicates that podcasting strategy instruction had a profound positive influence on the listening development of the learners.

To confirm that the statistical findings were robust and accounted for any small differences between groups at pretesting, a covariate analysis using the pretest as a covariate on the dependent variable was performed. This analysis also produced a statistically significant treatment effect of condition on listening following instruction ($F(1, 77) = 39.28$, $p < .001$), using the ANCOVA approach. Effect size measures (partial $\eta^2 = .34$) showed a large effect on the gains made by both experimental and control groups, with ANCOVA adjustment of the mean scores of the experimental group ($M = 25.72$) and control ($M = 20.11$) providing additional confirmation that the intervention using podcasting improved the listening comprehension of Iraqi learners in EFL. The ANCOVA results supported the conclusions drawn from the gain score analyses.

Table 2 Independent-Samples t-Test and ANCOVA Results for Listening Performance

Analysis	Group	Mean Gain / Adjusted Mean	SD	Test Statistic	<i>p</i>	Effect Size
Gain Scores (Post–Pre)	Experimental (n = 40)	7.44	2.96	$t(78) = 6.41$	$< .001$	Hedges' $g = 1.43$
	Control (n = 40)	1.92	2.41			
ANCOVA (Posttest)	Experimental	25.72	—	$F(1,77) = 39.28$	$< .001$	partial $\eta^2 = .34$
	Control	20.11	—			

4.3 Results for Research Question 2

In order to investigate how podcasting impacts learner's motivation to use the language, we carried out two separate 2 x 2 Mixed ANOVAs: one for Developing Language Motivation and another for Fixed Language Motivation. In both analyses, we used group (experimental or control) as the between

subjects' factor and Time (pretest vs. posttest) as a within subjects' factor.

Growth Language Motivation

According to the results of statistical analysis of growth-oriented motivation, there was a significant main effect for Time, $F(1, 78) = 52.14$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .40$, which indicated a steady increase in growth-oriented motivation in the participants between the pretest and the posttest phases of this study. In contrast, there was no statistically significant main effect for Group, $F(1, 78) = 2.31$, $p = .13$, meaning there was no indication that either group exhibited any difference in their overall growth-oriented motivation when looking at the data at a single point in time (without taking time into account).

However, there was a significant Group $\times$ Time interaction, $F(1, 78) = 36.87$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .32$, which indicated that the growth-oriented motivation exhibited different rates of change for the two groups over time. Comparative analyses conducted after adjusting for multiple testing revealed that the experimental instructional method was found to lead to a statistically meaningful increase in growth-oriented motivation from pretest to posttest ($p < .001$) while there was no statistically meaningful change in growth-oriented motivation for the control group ($p > .05$). These results suggest that the use of the podcasting strategy to teach learners how to develop their growth-oriented beliefs and attitudes toward language learning is an effective way to enhance one's growth-oriented beliefs about learning another language.

Fixed Language Motivation

The analysis shows that the mixed design ANOVA found a significant effect of Time on fixed language motivation ($F(1, 78) = 18.26$, $p < 0.001$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.19$), which indicates that the overall fixed motivation for participants decreased over time. The effect of the Group was not statistically significant ($F(1, 78) = 1.94$, $p = 0.17$). However, the Group and Time interaction demonstrated a statistical significance ($F(1, 78) = 21.45$, $p < 0.001$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.22$).

The results of follow-up analyses showed that the experimental group had a statistically significant drop in fixed motivation after participating in the intervention ($p < 0.001$), while the control group's fixed motivation remained stable ($p > 0.05$). As a result, the data provides evidence that exposure to multi-media through podcasting and strategic use of listening strategies helped reduce fixed beliefs about language ability among learners. In conclusion, the evidence supports the podcasting program as being very useful for the EFL learners in Iraq regarding motivations for learning English. In particular, the learning experience seems to shift the learners from fixed mindset beliefs regarding growth to embracing a positive view of growth.

Table 3 Mixed ANOVA Results for Growth and Fixed Language Motivation

Motivation Type	Effect	$F(1,78)$	p	Partial η^2
Growth Motivation	Group	2.31	.13	.03
	Time	52.14	< .001	.40
	Group $\times$ Time	36.87	< .001	.32
Fixed Motivation	Group	1.94	.17	.02
	Time	18.26	< .001	.19
	Group $\times$ Time	21.45	< .001	.22

5. Discussion

The findings of the study make it clear that there has been an improvement in EFL learners' listening skills with the use of podcasting for the delivery of the instructed material. This study further supports and extends the notion of improving the second language listening skills of the learner with the help of podcasting.

In alignment with Chen and Lin (2020), our findings support the enhancement observed among Chinese participants who chose podcasts as a study aid. Our findings support Lee and Kim (2018), who found a

positive correlation between podcast use and enhanced listening skills, facilitated by designated strategies such as pre-listening planning and self-monitoring. This suggests that independent of the language of study, designated strategies can promote listening development among English language learners, and perhaps the added cognitive aid from podcast use can help learners effectively apply their own pre-listening planning along with self-monitoring to address listening skills.

There have been several instances reported by Wang and Yan (2018), as well as Wu and Wu (2019), of a vast enhancement within the skills of the learners to understand L2 audio-based contents and to relate it with enhanced learning proficiency through podcasting. In addition to this, a correlation concerning the enhancement of the level of L2 learning motivation among Iranian learners has been reported by Zarei and Khezrlou (2020), which has been related to the production of podcasting. The production of increased comprehension skills by the learners may be related to some enhanced aspects (e.g., understanding words better and comprehending the podcasting technique) provided by podcasting.

On the basis of data analysis conducted within our research, it became clear that there was an impressive influence on students' language motivation within the EFL class due to the podcasting intervention. This finding is consistent with that of Zhang and Zhang (2020) who found lower levels of anxiety and improved listening comprehension for Chinese EFL students when they received instruction through the use of podcasts. In addition, Choi and Lee (2019) observed that students using a podcasting strategy instructional approach that included both planning and evaluation showed dramatic improvements in listening comprehension, as well as a reduction in anxiety. Our research supports these findings, and illustrates how podcasting instruction has an impact on students' cognitive motivation in relation to language acquisition. The cognitive processes of students may explain the relationship between using podcasting involving a focus on specific tasks, and reduction in anxiety and improvement in students' attitudes toward learning languages that is demonstrated in the current study.

6. Implication

Even though the study was conducted using a homogenous sample of female Iraqi EFL learners in a narrow timeframe/context, the findings could be extrapolated to other EFL settings where the learner's first language, culture, and ability level are comparable to those of the female Iraqi EFL learners. Generalizations made from this research should be made with caution when considering multiple variables that can differ across EFL settings, including mixed-gender populations, varying age groups, and students' varying abilities.

For English foreign language teachers, the following are the practical lessons taken away from this study. It is shown that incorporating podcasting activities in learning can increase interest, motivation, and involvement in learning English among learners while also improving their listening comprehension skills. For enhanced involvement in learning through podcasting, teachers need to use proper approaches in planning, controlling, and evaluating podcasting learning tasks in the curriculum.

Future research could also consider involving other participants than those whose data is reported above by looking into students of varied backgrounds. For example, research could investigate participants of varied age groups, male and female students, as well as those of varied levels of abilities to establish the influence of L1 podcasting interventions on such participants. Further research could investigate whether training participants in podcasting strategies influences other language skills such as reading, writing, and speaking.

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