

USING PODCASTS TO IMPROVE LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSES

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Abstract

Listening and Speaking skills have been becoming dominant in terms of necessity among other skills while learning and teaching English as a foreign language. In order to communicate properly every single language learner who is learning a foreign language have to develop these skills. However, while learning and teaching those skills they have been having difficulties. Definitely, podcasts have enough benefits for students to learn a foreign language , but they need to use them with proper methods. This article explained how podcasts can be helpful for students to boost listening and speaking skills. Also, it has recommended to improve listening and speaking skills by the help of podcasts and has shown ways how to use them while learning and teaching a foreign language.

Key words: listening skills, speaking skills, podcasts, the gist of the podcasts, native speakers.

INTRODUCTION

It could not be denied that the importance of not only English , but also any language learning has increased drastically due to the huge demand in all the spheres of both work and study. Without any doubt, listening and speaking skills are inseparable part of language acquisition. Thanks to the advancements of new technologies , language learners could boost their audio comprehension and communication skills quickly and easily. Also, current requirements of teaching foreign language in technology era uphold the use of various technology-based materials based on the learner`s needs. Using podcasts while teaching speaking and listening skills could do a lot for students easy and fast acquisition of any language. By using podcasts effectively and productively in a classroom, not only the time can be saved, but also the authentic improvement of both skills could be seen.

As for the original gist of the podcast, they are audio (sometimes video) recordings that you can listen to on a tablet , smartphone or computer. The term “podcast” was derived from the words “iPod” and “ Broadcast”. Recordings of podcasts are called “episodes” and you may download and listen to them on your

gadgets wherever and whenever you want . To be more precise, they are the digital audio files that are created, shared, and listened.

Initially, the purpose of podcasts was not educating someone: they replaced the “iTunes” or “iPods” to watch a video or listen to a music at any time. Around 2004 and 2005, owing to their easy accessibility, they drew language teachers and educators` attention, and have gained popularity since then. It is easy to create or download a podcast and all the requirements are computer, internet connection and recording device.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study 10 school-leaving age students in Samarkand, located in Uzbekistan, who were preparing for their IELTS exam, were involved and both speaking and listening skills were practised respectively. Three days in a week they trained with a teacher , other days they did self-study at home during a month. Before starting the practice of podcasts, they were given listening mock test and the results were noted, as well as their speaking mocks as the purpose was to compare the difference between the former and the latter practice results of the same students. There was no control group and the aim of this study was to know whether or not there were improvements in their listening and speaking skills after using podcasts. The materials used in this study were authentic audio podcasts of native speakers and their transcripts downloaded from English Podcasts telegram channel (t.me/Podcast_English_listening), pre-test and pro-test listening and speaking mock tests, students used their smartphones and earphones as well during practice and results paper, with tables and graphs, was used to analyse the collected data.

When it comes to the methods, 3 common;

- 1) Listen and understand
- 2) Listen and read
- 3) Listen and repeat

methods were used during the study.

First of all, all students were required to bring their smartphones and earphones to the classroom and teacher shared authentic podcasts created by native speakers which were at least 4 minutes long. But the transcripts were not presented until the students first understand the main topic of the podcast as the first method was Listen and understand. They just listened and understood what the podcast was going about.

As each student had an idea about what the podcast was about, they were presented the transcripts of above given podcasts. In this step, they were required to listen to the podcast and read aloud the transcript along with the audio, simultaneously, without pauses. In order to have more efficiency they were allowed to repeat this method twice as they might have difficulties.

Having been sure that all the students had done well with the second method, they were encouraged to perform the third method. For this, the transcripts were put away and all students were required to put the earphones on and listen to the audio file again, but this time by repeating it aloud along with the audio without transcript. The most essential requirement was not to stop from listening and repeating as this might make them stop till the end of the audio.

All of those three steps were performed throughout one lesson and repeated everyday with variety of podcasts by students.

RESULTS

In order to have intended fluency, pronunciation and quick audio comprehension results all the students practised consistently as the key was consistency.

As it was planned, they were also tested after practising a month on their listening and speaking skills with real exam tests. If we compare the former and the latter results of Listening test, 60% students (students A, D, E, G, H, J) went upward from 6.0 band score to 7.5 band score, and 30% of them (students B, C, I) climbed from 5.5 to 6.5 band score correspondingly whereas only one student (student C) went 6.0 from 5.5 during a month (table 1 and 2).

Table 1:

Study subjects	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E
Pre-test results	6.0	5.5	5.5	6.0	6.0
Pro-test results	7.5	6.5	6.0	7.5	7.5
Differences	1.5	1.0	0.5	1.5	1.5

Table 2:

Study subjects	Student F	Student G	Student H	Student I	Student J
Pre-test results	5.5	6.0	6.0	5.5	6.0
Pro-test results	6.5	7.5	7.5	6.5	7.5
Differences	1.0	1.5	1.5	1.0	1.5

As for the pre-test Speaking results, about 50% of students (students A, D, E, G, H) got 6.0 band score while other 40% of them (students B, F, I, J) had overall 5.5 band score, and the only one remaining (student C) was 5.0 . Having practised during a month with podcasts, the results were 7.0 (students A, D, E, G, H), 6.5 (students B,

F, I, J), and 6.0 (student C) in equal measure with a band score improvement for each of them (table 3 and 4).

Table 3:

Study subjects	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E
Pre-test results	6.0	5.5	5.0	6.0	6.0
Pro-test results	7.0	6.5	6.0	7.0	7.0
Differences	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

Table 4:

Study subjects	Student F	Student G	Student H	Student I	Student J
Pre-test results	5.5	6.0	6.0	5.5	5.5
Pro-test results	6.5	7.0	7.0	6.5	6.5
Differences	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

According to the pre-test and pro-test results, students A, D, E, G, H and J took a great advantage of using podcasts and improved noticeably with the methods the researcher provided, and students B, F, I, and C had also increased their both skills but gradually during one-month period.

DISCUSSION

In the first week of practice they just adapted with the methods and turned them into their daily habit. The more they practised the more they got the experience of understanding speeches of native speakers and speaking like a native. Week by week, the habit of using podcasts daily with above given methods showed considerable changes in their both speaking and listening skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion above, students, more or less, enhanced their both speaking and listening ability. Apparently, if they continue with the same practice with podcasts after a month as well, they may easily achieve their intended scores on the listening and speaking sections (on the categories of fluency, pronunciation and lexical resource as well) of the not only IELTS test, but also any other kind of national and international exams too.

SUGGESTIONS

Although there were improvements in students pre and pro-test attendance, not all of them were in considerable rise which can be concluded that it also depends on students persistency and personal ability to acquire the language. In addition, it is also possible to carry out further studies with the comparison of experimental and control group with different methods. Moreover, podcast-related researches can also be applied to other English language skills: reading, writing.

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