

Using podcasts to support learners` positive attitude to listening comprehension in TEFL

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2020.01.07>

Božena Horváthová*, Katarína Krištofovičová**

*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia; bhorvathova@ukf.sk

**Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia; kkristofovicova@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of the article is to find out how the Internet-based resources (podcasts) affect listening comprehension of learners at a lower secondary school level. First, the concept of listening comprehension, listening strategies, approaches, and possible listening problems in English language learning are tackled. Further on, podcasts, their advantages, disadvantages as well as their appropriate use in English classroom is discussed. Based on relevant theories, application of chosen podcasts in the classroom at a lower secondary level through action research was carried out. The application of the action research showed that podcasts integrated in the classes at all listening stages help develop listening comprehension of learners. By designing suitable lesson plans and introducing challenging activities intensive listening in the classroom can be taught in a meaningful and motivating way.

Key words: TEFL, listening comprehension, intensive and extensive listening, podcasts, bottom-up and top-down strategies, action research

Introduction

Many researchers define listening as an essential, active, complex and even mostly used language skill in communication. One of the important factors for developing listening comprehension is the selection of listening materials and media as listening is a very difficult language skill to be developed in a foreign language. Information and communication technology, and the Internet sources can be the instruments which help to promote listening comprehension of foreign language learners.

One of the Internet-based sources of additional listening materials, which can be implemented in foreign language learning and teaching, and which have become very popular, is podcast. In relation to the phenomenon of podcast, which emerged in 2005, numerous research studies were conducted in the course of years 2007-2019, aimed at examining the podcast application in foreign language teaching and learning with the emphasis on listening skill. The outcomes are summarized in publications by Hasan and Hoon (2012, 2013), Ramli (2018) and Lio & Marafat (2019).

One of the most valuable metaanalyses conducted by Masudul and Hoon (2013) provides a review of twenty research articles to determine the effects of podcast on TEFL students' language skills and attitude levels of the participants. According to the authors, it was found that podcasts greatly support learning not just in speaking and listening, but also in other language skills and areas such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Overall findings of the analyzed studies suggest that learners generally enjoyed using podcasts, and liked to listen to the podcasts at home as well as outside the classroom using desktop computers or mobile devices.

However, the research in the analyzed studies was conducted only with university students as the use of podcasts in TEFL contexts has become popular mostly at tertiary level. The listening comprehension in English through the use of portable or mobile technology such as podcast should be fostered also among the learners at primary and lower secondary level. The learners could gain competences which would increase their academic achievement in English at higher levels of education.

Therefore, a research study needs to be carried out which investigates the use of podcasts at a lower secondary school level.

As a result of the analysis of the reviewed research studies it was also found to be questionable whether the improved listening comprehension and respondents' positive attitudes could be attributed merely to the use of podcasts. Therefore, the application of podcasts in TEFL should be supplemented by examination of appropriate approaches and strategies.

Theoretical background

Listening comprehension in TEFL

Listening comprehension is a complicated process that has been studied by many researchers, and in which listeners play important roles. According to Rost (2002: 42) and Hamouda (2013: 123) listening comprehension is an interactive process where the meaning is created by listeners. Listeners understand the spoken input through following stages: "sound recognition, former knowledge, grammatical structures, stress and intonation". Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) describe schema according to cognitive comprehension theory as abstract text formation that the listener uses to interpret the given text. The listener uses linguistic and actual cues about the new intake to raise schema. If the new information is matched with the schema, then the listener has understood the text.

For listening comprehension of the spoken information following aspects are essential: the previous knowledge, the context and listening strategies. For skillful listeners, it is necessary to involve cognitive strategies if they are to perform affectively and they control their comprehension and deduction of the meaning of new words from the context (Carrasquillo 2013).

Numerous exposures to spoken English result in deeper knowledge of intonation, stress, clusters and connected speech. The other reason for developing listening is to improve speaking skill. Hedge (2000) states also the importance of being part in social protocols, sharing information and emotions.

Approaches to develop listening comprehension in TEFL

There are two approaches necessary to master listening skill. These approaches are intensive and extensive listening.

Intensive listening often requires using taped materials and it is connected to the possibility of more repetitions of listening material. The number of times the listening material can be replayed presents a lasting problem (Harmer 2007). Field (2008) suggests that for learners a lot of listening is more useful than a long pre-listening phase followed by only one or two expositions to listening text. On the contrary, Ur (1997) indicates that in real situations, discourse is usually not repeated; therefore, she suggests that one of the tasks is to motivate learners to get as much information as possible from one listening. In intensive listening it is suggested to use more than one listening which is different from real communication. The main objective of learning foreign language through intensive listening is to teach the vocabulary and new grammar. Intensive listening is often connected to the need of choosing appropriate media to encourage learners to improve their comprehension of the foreign language and to prevent them from being demotivated.

Extensive listening is an approach which helps to create keen listeners outside the classroom. In extensive listening teacher motivates learners to select listening material for their pleasure. The material used in extensive listening can be obtained from sources such as audio books or recording of authentic materials such as songs, short videos, and films (Harmer 2007). Thus learners can learn foreign language outside of the class in the real environment (Chang & Lu 2013). Extensive listening represents the possibility for learners to be exposed to many sources of foreign language in their free time. Extensive listening offers also the opportunity for learners to choose the topic according to their interest. Listeners should rather achieve a general meaning, and be interested in the listening event (Saputra & Fatimah 2019). Ferrato and White (2009) define advantages of extensive listening as creating exposure to spoken

English, developing vocabulary and comprehension, improving pronunciation and increasing listening endurance. On the other hand, extensive listening has some shortcomings. Goh (2002) points out that most respondents miss guidance and concentration in their extensive listening practice, a result of lack of structure and direction in such practice.

Harmer (2007) indicates that learners can increase their listening skill by using combination of both extensive and intensive listening materials and procedures. Extensive listening can be used to improve fluency and intensive listening to improve accuracy. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) suggest that both listening approaches should be used for developing learners' basic skills and useful listening habits as well as the ability to comprehend the text. Therefore, learners should be encouraged by teachers in class not only to become acquainted with English phonetics, grammar and vocabulary, but also to comprehend the general meaning. On the other hand, in activities outside the class, learners should be involved in extensive listening to achieve more comprehension and general knowledge through TV programs, radio news and the Internet.

Strategies to develop listening comprehension in TEFL

For developing listening comprehension in language teaching and learning two different macro strategies exist: bottom-up strategies (listening for details) and top-down strategies (listening for general understanding).

A *bottom-up strategy* is activated by new information (Gilakjani & Ahmadi 2011). It concentrates on linguistic features and learners need to examine the individual words for their meaning or grammatical structures before gathering the meaning to create statements (Gilakjani & Sabouri 2016). This strategy is activated by sounds, words and phrases which are heard by listeners. Listeners also try to decipher speech and meanings (Richards 2008). According to Wiyanah (2015) listening comprehension is the process of decoding. Learners need large vocabulary and correct knowledge of sentence forms to process listening text bottom-up.

A *top-down strategy* concentrates on the common meaning of phrases and sentences. This strategy enables learners to use real world knowledge and to develop assumption of meaning (Gilakjani & Sabouri 2016). This strategy refers to the use of background knowledge in comprehending the general meaning of the information (Richards 2008). It goes from meaning to language. The background knowledge may be prior knowledge about the subject of the discourse, or also situational and contextual knowledge (Wiyanah 2015).

Interactive strategy, which means combining bottom-up and top-down strategies, is the result of the cooperation between many information sources, which include spoken input, distinctive types of linguistic features, details of the context and common knowledge of the world (Gilakjani & Ahmadi 2011). Learners should be trained to be able to use all three types of the strategies mentioned above while listening.

Listening skill in English curriculum at a lower secondary school level

The contemporary English curriculum of a lower secondary school level is based on the communicative approach. Listening skill is also integrated in its content. The present educational law (Zákon o výchove a vzdelávaní č.245/2009 Z.z) in Slovakia expects that learners should achieve A2 level of the CEFR at the end of a lower secondary school level.

According to CEFR (2001) A2 learners are described as being able to understand sentences and frequently used expressions connected to familiar areas, for example personal and family information, shopping, local geography and the overall meaning of short, simple, clearly spoken messages. In listening comprehension, if a speech is clearly formulated, they are able to understand the general meaning, also the basic points of listening, to identify the topic of listening, to understand the simple instructions, sentences, phrases and words.

TEFL learners - teenagers

Learners of lower secondary school level are learners from 11 to 15 years old and they are known as teenagers. They go through a lot of physical, mental, social, emotional and moral changes. They are sometimes difficult to be managed. This age group is often self-centered and the teenagers concentrate their attention mostly to themselves. They are often known as disobedient and undisciplined (Lewis 2007).

Pokrivčáková (2010: 27) summarizes the basic characteristic of these learners in relation to foreign language teaching and learning. As their ability of abstraction is still developing, they need the suitable and sufficient sensory input (pictures, movies). They have longer attention span, but to keep their attention, it is necessary to use interesting topics, curious stories, and problem-solving activities. They are able to cooperate; consequently, they can work in pairs or groups. They are very sensitive and as a result, they should be treated with respect. For creating positive atmosphere in the classroom, it is required to use the indirect and postponed correction of mistakes.

Scrivener (2005: 94) recommends for this age group the following approaches: „group work, role-play, connection of the topic with learners' lives, present-day topic, technology, music, competition, discipline and also humor and enhancing positive approach“.

Problems in listening comprehension in TEFL

Teachers have to overcome many problems related to listening comprehension of their learners. The most frequent problems are mainly insufficient vocabulary, pronunciation deficiencies and lack of exposure to the authentic foreign language. Shelton (2008) points out the most frequent problems in learning listening skill such as distinguishing sounds. Yagang (2008) adds that other problems in listening comprehension are lack of learners' interest in the listening material, unfamiliarity with sounds, words, and sentences. Ramli (2018) also adds that the problems of the EFL learners are the speed of speech, connected speech, limited vocabulary and contextual knowledge, rigid focusing on listening itself, and wish to understand every word.

In spite of these problems, there are many suggestions that indicate how to improve listening comprehension. Instructions should be understandable for learners, and the material should consist of comprehensible vocabulary (Ramli 2018). Ur (1997) for example, suggests lot of exposure to spoken language and lot of practice in many listening situations to increase learners' listening abilities. According to Selvi and Cardoza (2017) learners should be more exposed to the foreign language through information and communication technology. Development of listening skill cannot be achieved only by listening to teachers' speaking and instructions or listening to CDs with adopted language. As a result, there is need to investigate the influence of Internet-based resources such as podcast on the improvement of listening comprehension within intensive listening.

Podcasts and their use in TEFL

One of the important factors to develop listening comprehension is the selection of listening materials and media. Krashen (1996) points out that the input is comprehensible when learners listen to the listening material for a sufficient period of time, listening is repeated, interesting topic is chosen, and the context is known. According to Peterson (2010) in language teaching, this means that teachers start to apply listening strategies and give listening practice in such situations, which are probable to be faced by learners outside the classroom.

One of the media to fulfil these advantages in foreign language teaching and learning is podcast. Podcasting is a technology for broadcasting audio files and programs on the Internet and was created in 2005 (Selingo 2006). Robinson (2009) defines the term podcast as a connection of two words Pod means

iPod (MP3 player) and cast means *Broadcasting*. Podcast is comparable to radio broadcast. Audio files which include visuals in the form of text, graphics, music or films are known as vodcasts or PodClips (Jitenda et al. 2004). Podcast can be produced on any topic and can be used as effective tool for both listening in the classroom and self-study. There have been developed EFL (English as a Foreign Language) podcast sites for numerous aims such as development of vocabulary, grammar, idioms, business English, news and events, songs, poetry (Peterson 2010). Ramli (2018: 197) states that podcast is „audio and video content on web in the form of the series of episodes with a known topic“. Using podcasts as language teaching tool brings new opportunities in language teaching and learning. Ramli (2018: 197) refers to the podcasts as „an attractive option to offer flexible learning resources for learners“. Giving learners flexibility of using podcasts according to individual needs, learners are more employed in the learning process.

Podcasts can be divided into three main types - *audio*, *audio and still images*, and *video* (Ramli 2018). Sze (2007) divides podcasts for English language teaching and learning into three other types: *authentic podcasts* - they are usually not designed for EFL learners, but can be a possible source for learners, *teacher-created podcasts*, and *student-created podcasts*. Yildirim and Hoffman (2010) divide podcasts into four categories according to their use as *public broadcasting*, *miscellaneous*, *podcasts for English language learners* and *podcasts directories*.

Podcasts are a valuable Internet-based resource of listening materials that can be implemented in teaching and learning foreign language according to the structure of listening practice. The lesson with podcast like any other listening practice should have three stages pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. Learners should know what the goal of each activity is.

Kim and King (2011) investigated using podcasts in EFL context and found out that using podcasts in listening instruction has influenced the listening comprehension. Brown (2006) suggested that podcasts can be used based on the level of learners' proficiency, their interest, age group, grammar or vocabulary to be studied.

Millin (2016) recommends using podcasts to introduce new topic, or using part of it as a dictation. However, learners can listen to podcasts also at home. Patten and Craig (2007) refer to the utilization of podcasts, in which learners learn at a time suitable for them and control their learning and speed of their learning. According to Hasan and Hoon (2011) the integration of podcasts in learning can improve not only vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and speaking, but also increase academic performance, motivation and promote learning. Lio and Marafat (2019) say that podcast can be used in the classroom to motivate learners to choose listening material. Constantine (2007) states that podcast includes different topics and different level of speed of speaking.

Podcasts as a language learning material can be divided into two groups. The first group includes authentic materials created by native speakers usually not intended to teach language. This group consists of topics such as news or sports. The second group includes language courses or content intended for teaching and language learning. This group is divided into materials created for known learners or public podcasts for independent learners (Rosel-Aguilar 2007). Suitable podcasts have to be chosen to be appropriate listening materials for language learners. They should include up-to-date information and should be understandable for the given level of language proficiency and adapted to the curriculum content to prevent learners of demotivation. Ramli (2018) adds that podcasts can be used by young learners as well as adult learners, by beginners and advanced learners.

Advantages and disadvantages of podcasts

Podcasts are connected with many advantages for language learners, for example promotion of their language skills e.g. listening, pre-instructional strategy in word analysis or for examination of previously taught words (Jitenda et al. 2004). Secondly, they can be downloaded to a mobile device and used at any time and learners can be exposed to number of words (Lowman 2014). If transcripts of podcasts are

available, learners can read along and listen (Rallis & Shannon 2006). Podcasts can be provided with lot of instructions. The more diverse the podcasts are, the more different senses of learners can be activated (Ramli 2018). The use of suitable pedagogical methodologies with prepared plan and objectives can make different and positive changes in the EFL classroom (Azmi 2017). Using of podcasts in English language can be useful for both teachers and learners. By using podcast in the classroom learners may change their ways of practicing listening, improve their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Listening to different topics from podcasts, based on learners' interest, leads to storing many ideas that can be used by learners later. Podcast is effectively used when it helps to reach the educational goals and learning activities support these goals (Ramli 2018).

Podcasts, as many other Internet resources have also some disadvantages. Wald (2006) points out that downloaded podcasts can create difficulties, for example to identify an accurate phrase within a podcast. If learners want to find it, the only way to reach it would be repeated listening to the section of the podcast. Technology is not able to ensure interactive verbal communication with others. Commercial sources cannot be suitable for learners at some level of proficiency. Technical problems and lack of knowledge of technology on the side of both, teachers and learners can be a disadvantage.

Research

Research aims and research questions

The aims of the research are:

- to find out how podcasts affect listening comprehension within intensive listening at the lower secondary school level;
- to find out whether podcasts can influence listening skills of learners using bottom-up and top-down strategies.

Our research is aimed at finding out answers to these research questions:

- How do podcasts affect listening comprehension within intensive listening at the lower secondary school level?
- How can the use of podcasts influence the listening comprehension at lower secondary school level within top-down and bottom-up processing?

Methodology

Need for the study

We observed weak listening comprehension among the learners based on the results of previous listening tests and a non-standardized listening pre-test, which was carried out to test their listening comprehension, using a song and a story with follow-up activities "filling in missing words" and "comprehension questions". The test results in the form of a mean score achieved 14 out of 80.

It was also observed that the learners had problems with listening comprehension and they were less motivated to join the teaching and learning process with listening activities by using a recording on CD. The learners were not able to understand what they listened to in English and they did not understand the details or main ideas of the text, which resulted in their reluctance to participate actively in listening activities.

Possible solutions to these problems may be exposing learners to more English language by giving them more opportunities to listen to authentic English, using Internet-based resources with intensive approach and applying bottom-up and top-down listening strategies.

Research method and data collection instruments

The design of the study is an action research, which is the most appropriate method to be applied as it allows the researcher to re-evaluate and adapt the methodology at several points throughout the research process. It consists of four stages: planning, implementing, observing and reflecting the actions.

Within the presented action research, the planning stage consisted of preparing research instruments, lesson plans, and selecting a series of suitable podcasts. The implementation stage was conducted in two cycles in May and June 2019 and lasted six lessons per each cycle. Each cycle consisted of three phases: pre-test, intervention and post-test. In the end of the action research, a questionnaire with closed questions was administered and completed by the participants as a part of the reflection stage.

The pre-test, post-test and the questionnaire served as supporting instruments within the action research. A *non-standardized listening pre-test* was created to test the current level of the listening comprehension of learners. After the implementation, a *non-standardized listening post-test* was conducted using the same tasks as the pre-test. Worksheets were evaluated and results of pre- and post-tests were compared and analyzed. *The questionnaire* (see Table 3) included ten questions, which focused on investigating learners' opinions about using the podcasts and their effect on learners' listening comprehension. The questionnaire contained closed questions with three options a) yes, b) no, c) I do not know.

Participants

Nineteen learners of the eight grade at a lower secondary school level aged 14 participated in the action research. The English language proficiency of the learners corresponded to A2 level according to the CEFR. All of them participated in completing the pre- and post-test, worksheets and answering the questionnaire. The research started by receiving permission from the principal of the school to carry out the action research. The learners were informed that the research would be used for investigation only.

Intervention (cycle 1)

Pre-test: First, learners listened to an English song and completed the lyrics of the song with missing words. A lyrics of the song named „Thinking out loud“ by Ed Sheeren downloaded from the website isl-collective.com was administered to learners and they had to complete it while listening to the song. Then, the teacher read a short story named „The clever fox“ from the website English-for-student.com. The learners were supposed to fill in missing words and to answer comprehension questions. Then the tests were collected and analyzed. The pre-test score of the first cycle was 14.

Materials: For the action research podcasts and available worksheets, were used in order to develop learners' listening skills. Also the content of their textbook Motivate 3 (Howarth & Reilly 2013) which consists of topics such as free-time activities, environmental topic, special places and world of music, was considered. Podcast from website learnenglish.britishcouncil.com for pre-intermediate A2 level were used. The podcasts are designed for learning everyday English and are followed by interactive exercises, thus being appropriate for intensive listening. This website offers four series of podcasts, each series containing ten episodes. Each episode has an available transcript, interactive exercises and additional materials - worksheets. These materials are ready-made for teachers to be used. The worksheets consist of multiple choice questions, short answers, gap filling activities, vocabulary exercises, true or false sentences, matching exercises and listening comprehension questions based on the stories. These exercises encourage learners to listen for both general meaning (top-down processing) and for details (bottom-up processing). For the intervention six episodes were selected: „Talk about pets and weather“, „The January sales“, „The most emblematic forms of transport in London“, „How would you describe the British character“, „Tess and Ravi talk about typical English drink“, „Tess and Ravi talk about pop music“.

Planning: After the pre-test, the first cycle of intervention was carried out. First, podcasts were introduced to the learners and it was explained what a podcast is. The following lesson structure was suggested for all topics:

Warm-up activity: Teacher introduced the podcasts and the website learnenglish.britishcouncil.com.

Pre-listening stage: The teacher presented vocabulary related to the content of the podcast. The teacher showed a picture from podcasts and asked learners to make predictions about the content of the podcast. Learners' background knowledge about the listening text was activated by questions and answers. Then, learners were instructed that they would listen to the podcast and they read the worksheet activities.

While-listening stage: The teacher administered the worksheets. The learners first read the exercises and then listened to the podcast. While listening, the learners completed the worksheets individually and filled in the missing words. Then they listened to the podcast once again and they decided whether the sentences were true or false. They listened all over again and they put the words in right order and matched the words with their description. After listening, teacher checked the answers with the whole class.

Post-listening stage: The teacher asked the learners questions related to the podcast topic that were given at the end of the worksheet. The learners exchanged their opinions and ideas and found solutions to the given problem. After the discussion, the learners made a list of questions they would like to ask. They took roles such as in the podcast and asked and answered the questions. Finally, the teacher provided the transcript of the podcast to the learners and they could read it.

Observation: After first hesitations, the learners showed positive attitude towards application of podcasts and follow-up activities. The learners were active while completing the listening activities and their ability to concentrate on completing the listening tasks increased. Observing the learners' increased curiosity, the teacher recommended some web sites providing podcasts, for example VOA or BBC, so that the learners could download them individually according to their interest. The learners were encouraged to listen to more podcasts from this series at home to enhance extensive listening. One more observation was made by the teacher related to the attention span of the learners and the need to listen to the podcasts for several times. Therefore, a decision was made to apply podcasts from a different website in the second cycle of the action research.

Reflection: After applying the podcasts in the first cycle, a post-test was administered. It was evaluated and the progress of learners was analyzed in comparison with the pre-test. Even though there was some improvement evident in post-test score 44 compared to the initial result 14, the results were not sufficient and learners' listening comprehension was still not satisfactory. There was a need to conduct the second cycle of the action research to achieve better results.

Intervention (cycle 2)

Pre-test: In the second cycle lyrics of the song named „Your song“ by Elton John from the Isl-collective.com and a story „The foolish fish“ from the website English-for-students.com were used as a pre-test. The learners were supposed to fill in missing words and to answer comprehension questions. Then the tests were collected and analyzed. The pre-test score of the second cycle was 24.

Materials: For the second cycle of the action research, podcasts from the website podcastinenglish.com for level 1, pre-intermediate A2 were chosen. At this website free podcasts are provided, however the worksheets, vocabulary tasks and transcripts for learning and teaching English are available only to registered members. The website recommends their podcasts as listening activities for learners at all levels to improve their skills. Furthermore, they are valuable resource of English language lessons for teachers. These podcasts contain variety of up-to-date, entertaining and enjoyable topics. They are considered by the authors of this website to be a comprehensive way of improving learners' listening skills. The related worksheets contain exercises such as answer the questions, tick the mentioned topics, choose the correct answer (true or false, complete the sentence; match the words with description, multiple choice). Six podcasts were selected: „Who is Greta“, „New animals“, „Local beauty spots“, „Summer jobs“, „Nice holiday“ and „Fall“. These podcasts were used with the intention to improve the learners listening comprehension and develop their vocabulary.

Compared to the podcasts from the website British council used in the first cycle, the podcasts' episodes are much shorter, less than five minutes, so they are suitable for more frequent listening activities in the classroom.

Planning: The second cycle lasted six lessons and the learners were exposed to six podcasts. The following lesson structure was suggested for all topics:

Warm-up activity: Teacher introduced the podcasts and the websites podcastinenglish.com

Pre-listening stage: Teacher administered the worksheets. The learners looked at the picture in the podcast. The teacher asked the learners to predict what the speakers might talk about in the podcast. The learners first read the exercises, the teacher presented new vocabulary items related to the content of the podcast. Before listening, the learners answered the questions and compared the answers with their classmates.

While-listening stage: First the learners listened to the podcasts for general understanding, using top-down strategy and completed the worksheets with related questions. Then they listened again for more details and completed exercises which required detailed information using bottom-up strategy.

Post-listening stage: In post-listening activities, the learners did extra vocabulary worksheets and discussed the podcast topic. The teacher asked the learners questions related to the podcast topic that were given at the end of the worksheet and asked them to write about the topic discussed in the podcast. The learners exchanged their opinions and ideas with their classmates.

Observation: Related to the change of the length of the podcast episodes, the learners were provided with more opportunities to re-listen and to focus more on tasks and listening activities (listening for details). The teacher recommended more websites for listening to podcasts at home to broaden the possibilities of the learners to develop their listening competence through extensive listening. The extensive listening to podcasts at home was supposed to facilitate self-paced learning and provide even slower learners a platform for remediation. By applying the combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies within the intensive in-class listening, the learners were equipped with skills that grant them more control on their competence and possession of their listening. It was observed that learners paid more attention during podcasts lessons than during the traditional listening lessons.

Reflection: In the end of the application of the podcasts, the post-test was administered to the learners. It was evaluated and the progress of learners was analyzed in comparison with the pre-test. The learners' post-test results showed a significant improvement with mean score 68. Finally, a questionnaire aimed at exploring learners' views and attitudes to listening comprehension classes using podcasts was administered.

Findings and discussion

1. Pre-tests and post-tests

Within the action research two tests (pre-test and post-test) in two cycles were conducted and one questionnaire was administered. The listening pre-test and post-test consisted of two parts. The first part was constituted by song lyrics and a gap filling activity. This part represented listening for details; therefore, the learners had to use bottom-up strategy. The second part of the listening tests contained a story with comprehension questions focused on general understanding; therefore, the learners had to use the top-down strategy and activate their background knowledge.

In the first cycle, pre-test results reached mean scores 14 out of 80 and the learners achieved worse results in the first part of pre-tests, listening for details in comparison with the second part, listening for general meaning. All learners made mistakes in two numbers which were the missing words in the song, *twenty-three* and *thousand*. As for other missing words, the most learners did not fill in gaps with correct words, or they missed and did not catch these words while listening to the song and therefore left these gaps blank. Sixteen learners made mistakes in words *evergreen* and *stirring*. The missing words were very often spelled in a wrong way (for example the word *mysterious* with *i*). The most

mistakes could be observed in three words - *crowds*, *beating* and *sweep* and they were found in tests of 18 learners. The reason can be that the most learners were not familiar with these words. The mistakes in comprehension questions were made because the learners did not catch the gist of the story. The gathered data from the first cycle were analyzed by using the mean scores of pre-test and post-test. Our criterion for the success of the podcasts application was that the learners had to achieve a mean test score higher than 55. The results are presented in the Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Cycle 1: Pre-test and post-test score.

	Mean of pre-test	Mean of post-test
Listening comprehension	14	44

Table 1 shows that in the first cycle the mean post-test score in listening comprehension increased from 14 to 44. The most mistakes were still in three words - *crowds*, *beating* and *sweep*. In spite of these mistakes, the overall results of the learners improved after the implementation of the podcasts. The most learners reached better post-test results in both parts of the test - in listening for details and listening for general meaning.

In the worksheets from the first series of podcasts, the most learners' mistakes were observed in the part of true or false sentences and in the gap filling activity. They made mistakes in listening for detail as well as in listening for comprehension. The multiple choice exercises and word order exercises were completed correctly in the most of the worksheets.

Table 2: Cycle 2: Pre-test and post-test score.

	Mean of pre-test	Mean of post-test
Listening comprehension	24	68

The second cycle of the action research was carried out to achieve better results. Table 2 shows that in the second cycle the mean post-test score in listening comprehension increased from 24 to 68. It can be seen that the performance of the learners improved considerably after the application of the podcasts in the second cycle. The learners made only few mistakes in the part listening for details. These mistakes were mainly related to the wrong spelling of words. It can be due to the lack of vocabulary knowledge. The mistakes in comprehension questions were rare.

In the worksheets from the second series of podcasts mistakes in listening for details were observed; on the other hand, learners completed answers to the questions for general understanding of podcasts correctly.

2. Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire was administered to investigate the influence of using podcasts on the learners' views and attitudes to listening comprehension classes. The results are presented in the following table.

Table 3: Results of the questionnaire survey.

Questions	Yes	No	I do not know/ I've heard before, but never use it
1. Is this the first time you are using podcasts?	19	0	0
2. Do you think these podcasts influenced your listening skills positively?	19	0	0
3. Do you think it will be good for your listening to listen to these podcasts repeatedly?	19	0	0
4. Do you think that the podcasts helped you to get exposed to correct pronunciation of English words?	16	3	0
5. Do you think the podcasts helped you to learn some new vocabulary?	17	2	0
6. Do you find the pronunciation of the podcasts comprehensible?	16	3	0
7. Do you think that the podcasts have made the content interesting?	19	0	0
8. Do you think that the podcasts are the main reason for making the classes different from traditional class?	19	0	0
9. Do you think that you can learn about pronunciation and vocabulary of English through podcasts?	19	0	0
10. While listening to the podcasts was it a problem for you to go with the speaker's pace and fluency?	10	9	0

The obtained data showed that all learners experienced the podcast for the first time and were not familiar with this format so far. All learners agreed that the podcasts influenced their listening skills positively and that it would be beneficial for their listening comprehension to listen to the podcasts repeatedly. We can consider this as a very encouraging attitude of the learners to the podcasts application in the classroom. Sixteen learners agreed that the podcasts helped them to get exposed to correct English pronunciation and seventeen learners confirmed that they acquired new vocabulary items. Sixteen learners agreed that the pronunciation of the podcasts was comprehensible. All learners agreed that the podcasts made the listening content interesting. All learners confirmed podcasts to be the reason for making the classes different to traditional ones. All learners agreed that they improved their pronunciation and enriched their vocabulary through podcasts. This can be a confirmation for podcasts being a useful tool not only for listening comprehension, but also for acquiring new vocabulary and improving the pronunciation. However, more than half of the learners (N=10) had a problem to go with the speaker's pace and fluency. This is the most noticeable negative result, which means that the learners still did not get used to the authentic English language. This outcome corresponds to Ramli's (2018) comment on problems of the EFL learners such as the speed of speech and connected speech. Based on this finding one more cycle, aimed at more intensive and focused listening training, would be advisable for the future.

Conclusion

The series of podcasts in teaching listening comprehension was applied and possibilities of using podcasts in the classroom at a lower secondary school level were investigated. The findings of the action research are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Based on the initial listening pre-test, we realized that the listening comprehension of the learners was very low - mean score equaled 14. The reason might be that even though the learners listened in their classes to adapted texts on CD and completed the course book listening exercises, they rarely listened to authentic texts and were not exposed to English spoken by native speakers. Further, they were not familiar with the vocabulary.

Then series of podcasts within intensive listening approach were applied in two cycles. The lessons focused on bottom-up and top-down processing of listening including pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities. The pre-listening stage prepared learners for processing the information using activities that stimulate previous knowledge, make predictions and review basic vocabulary. The while-listening stage concentrated on comprehension exercises requiring the listening for gist or sequencing. The post-listening stage included responding to comprehension questions and expressing attitudes about the topic.

Based on the obtained results from listening post-tests and the comparison with pre-test results, it was found out that learners' listening comprehension skills improved and developed after application of podcasts. There was a relevant improvement in the mean scores of the pre-and post-tests from 14 to 44 after the first cycle. The mean score increased even more significantly after the second cycle from 24 to 68. It was proved that podcasts helped to improve listening skills of learners within intensive approach.

Throughout both cycles of the action research the teacher applied consequently the interactive strategy, which means combining bottom-up and top-down strategies. Therefore, the tests focused on assessing listening for general meaning (gist) as well as listening for detail information. Based on the results of the listening podcasts' worksheets and post-tests, we found out that learners' listening skills have improved in both listening for gist with using top-down strategy and listening for detailed information with the using bottom-up strategy.

Even though the action research was conducted within intensive in-class teaching and learning, strategies for enhancing successful extensive listening outside of class were promoted by the teacher as well. Within the intensive listening the learners listened in the classroom to texts several times for more details, whereas within extensive listening they were exposed to various recommended listening sources to comprehend the general meaning. The podcasts have proved to be a helpful medium for combining the objectives of *intensive listening approach* (to understand the meaning of every word and sentence) and the objectives of *extensive listening approach* (to understand the content of the passage in order to improve complete listening ability).

In agreement with the outcomes of the presented action research we found out that podcasts used in English lessons represent a support to developing listening skills of learners in English and help improve listening comprehension when applied with intensive approach. It is important to mention that to develop or improve listening skills, the podcasts have to be used within the framework of a comprehensive lesson plan and supported by suitable activities and tasks. These research results can stimulate the consideration of the application of podcasts in listening materials in the English classroom as using this new type of media created a positive atmosphere among learners.

Considering the teacher's perspective while conducting the action research, several observations can be reported. It was a new and interesting experience to use podcasts in TEFL, and it enhanced teacher's creativity. Podcast application challenged the teacher's traditional teaching methods. Thus, for using podcasts in English language lessons, the teacher had to define appropriate teaching and learning aims,

approaches, techniques, activities and strategies. Moreover, using podcasts as supporting materials along with the course materials is quite time-consuming and demanding. It was necessary for the teacher to prepare more than for usual listening lessons. The teacher had to find websites with appropriate podcasts, expand the technical possibilities of the English class, and make sure everything worked correctly.

Important decisions had to be made by the teacher, who had a choice between two groups of podcasts: authentic podcasts, which can be a useful starting point, and podcasts containing ready-made listening lesson plans with prepared exercises and transcripts. When using the first group, there was a need for more work for teacher's preparation by creating lesson plans and appropriate listening comprehension exercises. When applying the second group, the teacher had to do very profound search for appropriate websites and consider the proficiency level of learners, their age, personal characteristics and possible interests.

One of the shortcomings of the present action research is the reliability of the reported data considering the number of participants (19) and the validity of the non-standardized listening comprehension tests. The questionnaire survey of learners' opinions on using podcasts for English learning in the classroom might not be generalized. The research should be understood as a pilot research which asks for more in-depth investigation and use of further qualitative research methods such as focus group or observation. In spite of these shortcomings, we can state that podcasts represent a valuable tool in foreign language teaching as they help to improve listening comprehension and raise the interest and motivation of learners. They also encourage the expansion of listening comprehension providing authentic and interesting materials and prepare the learners for real-life listening situations.

References

- Azmi, N. (2017). The Benefits of using ICT in the EFL classroom: from perceived utility to practical challenges. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 7 (7), 111-118.
- Brown, S. (2006). *Teaching listening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Carrasquillo, A. L. (2013). *Teaching English as a second language: A resource guide. Source Books on Education*. Routledge.
- Chang, P. & Lu, C. (2013). EFL listening instruction. *English Education Resource Center*. Taiwan. Retrieved from <http://www.english.tyhs.edu.tw/xoops/html/tyhs/teach-source101/01-2plan.pdf> (13 February 2020).
- Constantine, P. (2007). Podcasts: another source for listening input. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 13 (1). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Constantine-PodcastListening.html> (13 February 2020).
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of References for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge University Press. Strasbourg: Language Policy Unit, 2001.
- Ferrato, T. & White, M. (2009). Ring the bell-it is time for EL! *ETJ Journal*, 5 (2), 20-21. Retrieved from <http://ltpprofessionals.com/journalpdfs/vol5no2/sections/fall2004listening.pdf> (13 February 2020).
- Field, J. (2008). Revising segmentation hypothesis in first and second language Listening. system. In: *An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, 36/1, pp. 45-51.
- Gilakjani, A. P. & Ahmadi, M. R. (2011). A study of factors affecting EFL learners' English Listening comprehension and the strategies for improvement. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2 (5), 977-982.
- Gilakjani, A. P. & Sabouri, N. B. (2016). The signification of listening comprehension in English language teaching. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6 (8), 1670-1677.
- Goh, S. C. (2002). Managing effective knowledge transfer: an integrative framework and some practical implications. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 6 (1), 23-30. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/1367-3270.htm> (13 February 2020).

- Hamouda, A. (2013). An investigation of listening comprehension problems encountered by Saudi students in the EL listening classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 2 (2), 113-155.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching*. Harlow: Longman.
- Hasan, M. & Hoon, T. B. (2011). Podcast applications in language learning: Review of recent studies. *English Language Teaching*, 6 (2).
- Hasan, M. and Hoon, T. B. (2012). ESL learners' perception and attitude towards the use of podcast in developing listening skills. In: The English Teacher [online]. 2012, 5/2. [cit.2019-20-11]. Retrieved from <https://www.journals.melta.org.my/tet/article/view/252>
- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Howarth, P. & Reilly, P. (2013). *Motivate! 3. Student's Book*. London Macmillan: Macmillan Publishers limited.
- Jitenda, A., Edwards, L., Sacks, G. & Jacobson, L. (2004). What research says about vocabulary instruction for students with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 70, 299-322.
- Kim, D. & King, K. (2011). Implementing podcasts with ESOL teacher candidates' preparation: Interpretation and implication. *International Forum of Teaching and Studies*, 7 (2), 5-19.
- Krashen, S. D. (1996). The case for narrow listening, U.S.A.: *School of Education, University of Southern California*, 24 (1), 97-100.
- Lewis, J. (2007). The physiological and psychological development of the adolescent. *Yale New Haven Teachers Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1991/5/91.05.07.x.html#c> (13 February 2020).
- Lio, A. & Marafat, L. O. S. (2019). The role of audio podcast for teaching listening comprehension. *Journal of Language Education and Educational Technology*, 4 (1).
- Lowman, J. (2014). Exploring the use of podcasts and vodcasts: Multimedia tools for word learning. *Computer Sciences*, 31 (3), 251-270.
- Millin, S. (2016). *Using podcasts to develop listening skills*. London: The British Council. Retrieved from: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/using-podcasts-to-develop-listening-skills> (20 March 2020).
- Masudul, H. & Hoon, T. B. (2013). Podcast Applications in Language Learning: A Review of Recent Studies. *English Language Teaching*, 6 (2), 128-135.
- Patten, K., B. E. and Craig, D. V. (2007). iPODS and English-language learners: a great combination. *Teacher Librarian*, 34 (5), 40-44. Retrieved from <https://www.tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SchoolProgramsK12/Documents/iPods%20and%20English%20Language%20Learners.pdf> (2 August 2020).
- Peterson, E. (2010). Internet-based resources for developing listening. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 1 (2), 139- 155.
- Pokrivčáková, S. (2010). *Modern Teacher of English*. Nitra: ASPA.
- Rallis, H. M. & Shannon, T. (2006). So many tools so little time presentation to classroom of the future: critical reflection on technology. *Education Department, University of Minnesota*. Retrieved from http://www.d.umn.edu/~hrallis/professional/presentations/cttsp06/indiv_tools/podcasting.html (20 January 2020).
- Ramli, I. (2018). The use of podcast to improve students' listening and speaking skills for EFL learners. *Journal of Language Linguistics and Language Research*, 5 (2).
- Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robinson, S. & Ritzko, S. (2009). Podcasts in education: What, why and how? *Proceedings of the Allied Academies International Conference*, Academy of international leadership, Cullowhee, 14 (1), 38-43. Retrieved from: <https://www.abacademies.org/Public/Proceedings/Proceedings24/AEL%20Proceedings.pdf#page=43> (13 February 2020).

- Rosel-Aguilar, F. (2007). Top of the pods- in search of a podcasting pedagogy for language learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 20 (5), 471-472.
- Rost, M. (2002). *Teaching and researching listening*. London, UK: Longman.
- Scrivener, J. (2005). *Learning Teaching*. Oxford UK: MacMillan.
- Saputra, Y. & Fatimah, A. S. (2019). The use of TED and YOUTUBE in extensive listening course: exploring possibilities of autonomy learning. *Indonesian Journal of Language teaching*, 13 (1), 73-84.
- Selingo, J. (2006). Students and teachers from K to 12, hit the podcasts. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/25/technology/techspecial2/25podcast.html?_r=2&oref=slogin (13 November 2019).
- Selvi, B. & Cardoza, J. (2017). Fostering listening skill in English among the students of class VIII through information and communication technology. An Action Research. *International Journal of Advanced Educational Research*, 2 (5), 285-290.
- Shelton, S. (2008). *Teaching listening in advanced learners: problems and solutions*. Retrieved from <http://www.developingteachers.com> (13 February 2020).
- Sze, P., M.-M. (2007). Developing students' listening and speaking skills through ELT podcasts. *Educational Journal*, 34 (2), 115-141.
- Ur, P. (1997). *A course in language teaching. Practice and theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wald, M. (2006). Exploration of the potential of automatic speech recognition assist and enable receptive communication in higher education. In: *ALT-Journal, Research in Learning Technology* [online]. 2006, 14/1, p. 9-12.
- Wiyannah, S. (2015). *Improving listening skill using podcast for English department students of UPY*. Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta.
- Yagang, F. (2008). *Listening problems and solutions*. Retrieved from <http://www.Englishteachingforum.htm> (1 January 2020).
- Yildirim, A., H. & Hoffman, E. (2010). The power of podcasts: A tool to improve listening skills and empower learners. In: N. Ashcraft and A. Tran (Eds.). *Teaching Listening: Voices from the Field* (TESOL Classroom Practice), TESOL Publication, 225 p.
- Zákon o výchove a vzdelávaní č.245/2009. Ministerstvo školstva, vedy výskumu a športu lovenskej republiky. Retrieved from <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2008/245/> (13 February 2020).

Acknowledgements

The paper includes research results gained as a part of the project 002UKF-4/2020 Positive Psychology in Teaching English.