



<Studies & Trends>

Podcasts as an Educational Tool for EFL Educators

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//Abstract

Education, and especially the teaching of English as a foreign language, currently faces major challenges essentially because societies are living in a time of change caused by technological development and the impact of virtual and multimedia spaces on students' lives. Therefore, English teachers, educational authorities and students need to explore new strategies for teaching and learning this language. This article presents a technological tool, the Podcast, as a way of making audio or video content accessible regularly via the internet, and as an influential teaching strategy that has not been widely explored by many teachers but offers advantages and opportunities to improve the foreign language teaching-learning process. The article focuses on defining the concept of a Podcast, detailing its qualities and characteristics and the ways this technological option can be implemented in the context of the foreign language class to offer a flexible, innovative and motivating alternative to English teachers.

//Keywords

Podcast; EFL instruction; Educational strategy; Technological tool.

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//Títol

Podcasts com a eina educativa per a professorat d'anglès com a llengua estrangera

//Resum

L'educació, i especialment l'ensenyament de l'anglès com a llengua estrangera, actualment tenen davant grans desafiaments, fonamentalment perquè les societats viuen un moment de canvi pel desenvolupament tecnològic i l'impacte que els espais virtuals i multimèdia han tingut en la vida dels estudiants. Per tant, cal que els educadors d'anglès, les autoritats educatives i els estudiants explorin noves estratègies per ensenyar i aprendre aquest idioma. Aquest assaig presenta l'eina tecnològica Podcast no solament com un mètode per fer accessible el contingut d'àudio i vídeo a través d'Internet, sinó també com una estratègia d'ensenyament influent que molts educadors no han explorat àmpliament i que ofereix una sèrie d'avantatges i oportunitats per a la millora del procés d'ensenyament-aprenentatge de llengües estrangeres. L'assaig se centra a definir el concepte de Podcast, i en detalla les qualitats i característiques. També mostra les diferents formes d'implementar aquesta opció tecnològica en el context de la classe de llengua estrangera per oferir una alternativa mal-leable, innovadora i motivadora als educadors d'anglès.

//Paraules clau

Podcast; Ensenyament-aprenentatge de llengua estrangera; Estratègia educativa; Eina tecnològica.

//Título

Podcasts como una herramienta educativa para profesorado de EFL

//Resumen

La educación y, en especial, la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera enfrentan, en la actualidad, grandes desafíos, fundamentalmente porque las sociedades están viviendo un momento de cambio debido al desarrollo tecnológico y al impacto que los espacios virtuales y multimedia han tenido en la vida de los estudiantes. Por lo tanto, es necesario que los educadores de inglés, las autoridades educativas y los estudiantes exploren nuevas estrategias para enseñar y aprender este idioma. Por consiguiente, este artículo presenta la herramienta tecnológica denominada Podcast no solo como un método para hacer accesible el contenido de audio o video a través de Internet, sino también como una estrategia de enseñanza influyente que muchos educadores no han explorado ampliamente y que ofrece una serie de ventajas y oportunidades para la mejora del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras. El presente artículo se centra en definir el concepto de Podcast, detallando sus cualidades y características, así como las diferentes formas de implementar esta opción tecnológica en el contexto de la clase de lengua extranjera para ofrecer una alternativa maleable, innovadora y motivadora a los educadores de inglés.

//Palabras clave

Podcast; Enseñanza-aprendizaje de lengua extranjera; Estrategia educativa; Herramienta tecnológica.

1. Introduction

Local and global issues affect the education systems of countries worldwide. Instruction based on regional knowledge does not seem to be sufficient. Instead, education must focus on events taking place on all continents. In fact, globalization has been carved so deep in the educational structure that the concept of global perspectives is now vital in education. For instance, many educational institutions have connected with similar schools, colleges or universities in other countries to share their perspectives and experiences. Technological developments are the main catalyst and driving force behind most globalization processes and have facilitated its predominance. As a physical space, the classroom itself is in a process of change and, thanks to the cloud and portable devices, technology will soon be incorporated into all the components of educational institutions (Britland, 2013). Technological equipment, especially audio-visual devices, has transformed the face of education (Kay, 2012). The appearances of new and diverse ways of using technology inside and outside the classroom have dramatically changed the attitudes and academic performance of our students.

The news industry has been transformed by the appearance of various alternative, internet-based methods for sending and receiving information, with the result that “websites, blogs, instant messaging systems, e-mail, social networking sites and other Internet-based communication systems have made it much easier for people with common interests to connect, exchange information, and collaborate with each other” (Levin Institute, State University of New York, 2016, par. 7). These methods have also been adapted and applied for educational purposes in recent years. This essay discusses the increasing interest in podcasts in recent years and their use as an educational strategy. Additionally, it focuses on the importance of podcasts to improve the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

2. What is a podcast?

The word podcast has become popular in digital media over the last decade. Meng (2005, p. 1) described podcasting as “the process of capturing an audio event, song, speech, or mix of sounds and then posting that digital sound object to a Web site or ‘blog’ in a data structure called an RSS 2.0 envelope”. Rosell-Aguilar (2007) defined the word ‘podcast’ as a combination of the words ‘iPod’ and ‘broadcast’, but an iPod is not needed to subscribe to or listen to podcasts. All that is needed is a computer with speakers or a device that can play the downloaded digital audio files. In a more concise definition, Collier-Reed, Case, and Stott (2013) describe podcasts as the internet-based broadcasting of audio and video content.

Other podcast characteristics have been defined over the years. For instance, Brooks (2018) described podcasts as an on demand radio show broadcasted on internet, which can be listened to selectively, when, where and how the audience wants. Hence, podcasts have a distinctive advantage over traditional media. Podcasts were originally created for personal entertainment, but today there are podcasts about every imaginable topic. Unlike traditional radio, they do not have a schedule: once a podcast has been downloaded the user decides when and how to listen to it. The audience benefits from the flexibility, control, and portability. Another advantage is that new podcast episodes are released once or twice or even three times a week, so that their continuance is guaranteed. This is one of the essential characteristics of podcast production as well as having and maintaining a specific format for the show.



With the advent of the podcast, a new occupation was born: the podcaster. Indiana University's podcast portal described this figure as "the host, author and/or producer of a podcast" (Podcast Portal, Indiana University, 2014, par. 4). Today, professionals, celebrities and independent enthusiasts discussing topics of their choice are considered podcasters. There is a wide range of podcasters, all of whom have access to large online audiences.

In the last decade, podcasts have become extremely popular. Lopez (2018) affirmed that Apple Podcasts contains over 500,000 active podcasts, including audio in more than 100 languages. Technological and social factors have contributed to the popularity of podcasts. The first factor is the universality of the internet. Every day, an increasing number of people have access to an internet connection and smart technology. People no longer depend on personal computers to have permanent access to the internet, so mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets have played a major role in the expansion of podcasts.

The rapid expansion of broadband is another factor that paved the road for the fast development of podcasts. Since the early 2000s, this technology has evolved to give internet users faster connection speeds. Moreover, the availability of podcasts was greatly enhanced by the appearance of the RSS (Rich Site Summary), which the Indiana University portal defines as "an online content information stream that, in the context of podcasts, can be used to automatically download new podcasts when they become available" (University Information Technology Services, Indiana University, 2014). Another decisive factor in the popularity of podcasts is the increasing availability of free software and tools to create podcasts and distribute them online (Edirisingha, Rizzi, Nie & Rothwell, 2007).

Podcasts have become popular because they are a medium that connects other multimedia resources, for example, blogs, websites, social networks, emails, and digital marketing. Podcasts are now another bastion for marketing and advertising. Local companies and large corporations promote their products and services in this format to reach consumers, and they sponsor numerous podcasts.

3. How are podcasts used?

Van Nuys (2014) stated that podcasts emerged as an opportunity to hear ordinary individuals speaking plainly and without restrictions or censorship, which also provided relief from the tedious, repetitive, boring traditional radio. Podcasters do not depend on major media corporations to express themselves and reach thousand or maybe millions of people with their opinions or information. Consequently, podcasts are used as a response to the media corporations and they allow the listener to see and hear points of view that are not necessarily those generated by the "official" media (newspapers, television and radio).

Moreover, listeners can find podcasts on a wide variety of topics. Websites such as podcastone.com, castroller.com or nerdist.com offer podcasts about politics, sports, music, games and hobbies, health and medicine, family, society and culture, television and films, arts, paranormal events, news, technology and education, among many other topics. Podcasts are not just talk shows that discuss numerous topics; they have also been used for specific purposes in many different areas. For instance, police departments use podcasts to inform residents about potential hazards and recent activities (Policeone, 2017). Similarly, libraries have incorporated podcasts to help students and visitors to locate materials and to understand administrative procedures (Salam, 2014). Mathieu (2009) affirms that many medical journals offer articles

as well as additional content via podcasts, which could contain an interview with a patient or a specialist's thoughts on a certain topic.

Podcasts have had a considerable influence in the field of education. Some universities have created their own version called profcasts, which contain recorded classroom lectures or speeches. Hence, instruction is reinforced by specially produced podcasts that differ from typical learning sessions or other e-learning methods (Edirisingha, Salmon, & Fothergill (2007). For instance, Georgia College (University System of Georgia, US) has been introducing podcasting in some courses to include audio material. Similarly, in 2004, Duke University (North Carolina, US) distributed MP3 players preloaded with orientation information to its 1650 first-year students. Furthermore, Duke's Office of Information provides administrative and academic materials in digital format via iTunesU (Fernandez, Simo & Sallan, 2009).

Podcasting has found its way into a broad range of disciplines, including literature, bioscience, business, engineering, geography, languages, law, library science, nursing and psychology. Kay (2012) classified the types of podcast that have been developed in education. The first is *lecture-based* podcasts that consist of the recording of an entire lecture. The second is *enhanced video* podcasts that consist of video footage of power-point slides supported by an audio explanation. The third is *supplementary video* podcasts, which includes additional material to deepen student understanding.

Regarding student understanding, Kay (2012) observes that podcasts are gaining considerable interest for the development of listening skills. Podcasts can be used as supplementary teaching material to improve listening skills mainly because of the range of content, which typically includes greetings, culture material, content overviews and summaries.

In recent years, educational institutions have been implementing new ways to access careers and professional development. In this process, podcasts have proved to be an outstanding tool to facilitate distance learning (Copley, 2007). Through podcasts, distance students enhance their personal study and feel closer to teachers, as podcasting increases the feeling of permanent contact between students and teachers (Copley, 2007).

Podcasts have been associated with the application of multiple intelligences theory. According to Ralph and Olsen (2013), podcasts provide better support for auditory learners. Additionally, the number of learners interested in podcasts greatly increases when podcasts are enhanced through audio and video, which also supports visual intelligence.

4. Using Podcasts for EFL instruction

Li (2010) affirmed that the characteristics of multimedia, websites, and applications, their potential and interactive features have made them attractive methods for various instructional processes. In this setting, podcasts are not the exception; they have been employed in many forms to improve the quality of education.

These technologies have created new opportunities for language acquisition. Some characteristics of podcasts enhance the experience of learning a foreign language. For instance, learners can listen to podcast material repeatedly, control the speed of the feedback, and listen anywhere at any time. Hence,

Educatorstechnology (2012) noted that podcasts are excellent options for delivering content or lessons to students requiring remedial or prolonged support. Furthermore, podcasts give learners the opportunity to understand difficult notions and study content more effectively (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007).

Another characteristic of podcasts is their immediacy. According to Hancock and McMurtry (2017), podcasts are easy for listeners to access, and they can be played and replayed at any time and for as long as they want. For this reason, students can understand course content faster when they listen to podcasts than when they read the content of a speech (Rajic, 2013).

Similarly, Rahim and Katal (2012) affirmed the use of podcasts in the EFL classroom fosters learners' motivation and engagement mainly because activities based on podcasts require students to experiment more actively with the language and produce their own speeches. As mentioned above, lectures can be recorded, and students can access them anywhere at any time. As a result, podcasts can be employed regularly in the classroom by teachers. Podcasts provide our students with a wide range of authentic material and real language. Students learn with real-world examples through storytelling, interviews, and reviews of different subjects, among other formats.

Teachers can implement podcasts within and outside of the classroom, to complement textbooks and expand on topics discussed in class. Many podcasts produced today last for an hour or more, which would make it difficult for teachers to use them in class. However, teachers and especially English teachers could explore and employ podcasts created exclusively for educational purposes that last a few minutes and are presented in regular series. Teachers can draw material from websites such as <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/es/learnenglish-podcasts> that include podcasts about everyday topics for pre-intermediate learners of English as a foreign language. Moreover, Cambridge University presents the website http://www.cambridge.org/elt/resources/skills/pron_podcasts.htm that focuses on English pronunciation and the development of listening skills and subskills. The BBC has produced a podcast called 6 Minute English (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/6-minute-english>), a series that focuses on the discussion of a range of topics and learning new vocabulary. These podcast options can make an additional contribution to the teaching process because they are accompanied by transcripts, downloadable exercises, and online tasks. Additionally, teachers and students can use them to provide constant analysis and discussion about current events worldwide and their connection with course content.

English teachers face many challenges in the context of each classroom; one of these challenges is related to adapting materials for students with special needs. In special needs education, podcasts could be an interesting technological tool to provide better learning opportunities for students with visual disabilities. Experiences, strategies and ideas about managing special needs in the classroom can be obtained from podcasts such as the Special Needs Radio (<http://www.bamradionetwork.com/special-education/>) or the Inclusive Class Podcast (<http://www.theinclusiveclass.com/search/label/Listen%20to%20Our%20Podcast>).

Several schools have implemented projects to encourage their students to create their own podcasts and share information that they consider meaningful and relevant. This is a valuable opportunity for pupils to learn content and be involved in the process of creating a multimedia product. In the specific case of EFL, creating podcasts allows students to develop essential skills like writing, speaking effectively, solving problems, managing time, gaining attention, and improving vocabulary (Educatorstechnology, 2012). Teachers and students need to know that creating a podcast is not as difficult as they may think. According

to Richardson (2010), all that is required to start a basic podcast is a digital audio recorder to create an MP3file, a virtual space to host the audio file, a blog, and ideas to be shared with the intended audience. Clearly, the creativity and imagination of the podcaster are essential factors when it comes to engaging the audience with audio. Smart (2008) affirmed that teachers across the United States are helping their students by generating a remarkable array of downloadable educational material. Online directories such as the Education Podcast Network and iTunes U K-12 are currently working to organize this outstanding material. Similarly, the Instructional Technology Center of Middle Tennessee State University (Tennessee, US) suggests that students can work cooperatively to create their own podcasts and these podcasts could be their final project. The staff at the Center (2010) recommend that educational podcasts created by students could be used to post student-created material, for example musical compositions or even recitals and the recorded performances of written works. Students can use podcasts to develop peer assessment techniques and critique the work of their peers. Additionally, students can record various formats of podcast programmes, such as oral stories. History can become more interesting if students interview relatives about their lives, and then combine the audio interview with family photos in their own versions of podcasts.

Similarly, McMinn (2011) affirmed that podcasting may encourage students to practise English outside the classroom, especially when they can create their own podcasts. Students feel more motivated because they can reach a global audience, for this reason they write, proofread and edit their scripts to ensure that the content is comprehensible and accurate. Additionally, students rehearse their podcast shows before recording, which fosters their intrinsic motivation.

Professional development for teachers is another area where podcasts have considerable influence. Teachers can use podcasts to learn from experts and other teachers who share their knowledge and experiences about countless education-related topics. Since one of the characteristics of podcasts is the regularity of audio editions, teachers can engage in continuous training processes. The website Player FM (2018) has compiled an interesting collection of podcasts that could be of great interest for teachers and practitioners:

- 1) *IELTS Energy English Podcast*. <https://player.fm/series/ielts-energy-english-podcast-ielts-english-speaking-practice-7-ielts-test-strategy-ielts-english-writing-tips>
- 2) *Merriam-Webster's Word of the Day*. <https://player.fm/series/series-1319408>
- 3) *Business English Pod, Learn Business English Online*. <https://player.fm/series/business-english-pod-learn-business-english-online>
- 4) *Effortless English Podcast | Learn English with AJ Hoge*. <https://player.fm/series/effortless-english-podcast>
- 5) *Learning English Broadcast - Voice of America*. <https://player.fm/series/learning-english-broadcast-voice-of-america-1450909>
- 6) *Luke's ENGLISH Podcast*. <https://player.fm/series/luke-english-podcast-learn-british-english-with-luke-thompson-1429207>
- 7) *The English we Speak*. <https://player.fm/series/the-english-we-speak-1301611>

W. Yugsán-Gómez, P. G. Mejía-Gavilánez, K. Hidalgo-Montesinos, A. Rosero-Morales. *Podcasts as an Educational Tool for EFL Educators*

- 8) *All Ears English Podcast, Real English Vocabulary, Conversation and American Culture.* <https://player.fm/series/all-ears-english-podcast-real-english-vocabulary-conversation-american-culture>
- 9) *Learn English, EnglishClass101.com* <https://player.fm/series/learn-english-englishclass101com-1357124>
- 10) *Daily Easy English Expression Podcast* <https://player.fm/series/daily-easy-english-expression-podcast>

5. Conclusions

Beyond any doubt, podcasts have become a fantastic tool to improve a range of education processes. Additionally, the use of podcasts can be beneficial in various areas of EFL instruction. The first area that could be improved is professional development for EFL teachers. For years, EFL teachers have discussed the importance of continuous processes of professional improvement. Educators are aware of the need for lifelong learning, and podcasts could be an essential component of a distance learning programme for EFL educators to improve their comprehension of the English language or their English teaching skills. These two main topics could be discussed every week through two or three podcasts created by interdisciplinary teams of psychologists and teachers. Moreover, these podcasts could provide a great opportunity to share the experiences of EFL teachers. Their accomplishments or setbacks could be beneficial and thought-provoking for teachers from all corners of the world.

The other area which could benefit considerably from the use of podcasts is direct work with students inside and outside the classroom. In this area, teachers and students could make more use of podcasts and their connection with other internet-based digital tools, such as social media and blogs. As stated above, with the guidance of their EFL teachers our students could also create their own podcasts.

Ultimately, technology is simply a tool; teachers must make the decision to apply this tool in the context of their classrooms and change, once and for all, the way content is presented to students. Podcasts can revolutionize the traditional English language classroom and motivate learners to discover innovative ways to acquire the language.

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