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## СОДРЖИНА / TABLE OF CONTENTS

### 11 ПРЕДГОВОР

Астрид Симоне Хлубик, член на Уредувачкиот одбор на „Палимпсест“

#### FOREWORD

Astrid Simone Hlubik, member of the Editorial Board of “Palimpsest”

### ЈАЗИК / LANGUAGE

### 15 Jan Holeš

QUELQUES OBSERVATIONS SUR LES

NÉOLOGISMES TERMINOLOGIQUES FRANÇAIS CONTENANT *CYBER-*

#### Jan Holeš

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON FRENCH TERMINOLOGICAL NEOLOGISMS  
CONTAINING *CYBER-*

### 27 Nadica Negrievska

UN QUADRO GENERALE DEL VOCABOLARIO CALCISTICO ITALIANO  
E LA SUA APPLICAZIONE NELL’INSEGNAMENTO DELLA LINGUA  
ITALIANA COME LINGUA STRANIERA

#### Nadica Negrievska

AN OVERVIEW OF ITALIAN FOOTBALL LEXICON AND ITS ROLE IN  
TEACHING ITALIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

### 39 Doris Sava

AGITATION GEGEN IMPFUNGEN. METAPHORISCHE KONZEPTUALI-  
SIERUNGEN DER IMPFFEINDLICHKEIT IN BLOG-KOMMENTAREN AUS  
DEM *STANDARD* (2021)

#### Doris Sava

AGITATION AGAINST VACCINATION. METAPHORICAL CONCEPTUALI-  
ZATIONS OF VACCINE HOSTILITY IN BLOG COMMENTS FROM *THE  
STANDARD* (2021)

### 51 Ferdi Güzel

ESKİ TÜRKÇE *ARKA-* “ARAMAK...” FİİLİ VE ANLAM ALANI ÜZERİNE  
NOTLAR

#### Ferdi Güzel

NOTES ON THE OLD TURKISH VERB *ARKA-* “TO SEEK...” AND ITS  
SEMANTIC FIELD

### 61 Виолета Јанушева, Марија Стојаноска

ОБРАЌАЊЕТО И МАКЕДОНСКИОТ РОДОВО ЧУВСТВИТЕЛЕН ЈАЗИК

#### Violeta Janusheva, Marija Stojanoska

ADDRESSING AND MACEDONIAN GENDER SENSITIVE LANGUAGE



- 71 Erëza Rushiti**  
AMERICAN VS. BRITISH ENGLISH: A STUDY OF GRAMMATICAL,  
VOCABULARY, AND SPELLING DIFFERENCES

**КНИЖЕВНОСТ / LITERATURE**

- 83 Марија Ѓорѓиева-Димова**  
НИЗ ШУМИТЕ НА ИСТОРИЈАТА СО ДВОГЛЕДОТ НА ФИКЦИЈАТА  
**Marija Gjorgjieva-Dimova**  
THROUGH THE FORESTS OF HISTORY WITH THE BINOCULARS OF  
FICTION
- 95 Весна Кожинкова**  
ОТСУТНОТО И ТУЃОТО ВО ЗЕМЈАТА НА БЕГАЛЦИТЕ  
**Vesna Kozhinkova**  
THE ABSENT AND THE OTHER IN THE LAND OF THE REFUGEES
- 105 Софија Иванова, Ранко Младеноски**  
СИНОНИМНИТЕ ЛИКОВИ СО АКТАНТНА ФУНКЦИЈА НА  
ПОМОШНИЦИ ВО МАКЕДОНСКАТА ДРАМА ОД ПРВАТА ПОЛОВИНА  
НА 20 ВЕК  
**Sofija Ivanova, Ranko Mladenoski**  
THE SYNONYMOUS CHARACTERS WITH THE ACTING FUNCTION OF  
HELPERS IN THE MACEDONIAN DRAMA FROM THE FIRST HALF OF  
THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY
- 117 Şerife Seher Erol Çalışkan**  
KUZEY MAKEDONYA TÜRKLERİNDE OLAĞANÜSTÜ İNANÇLAR ve  
BUNA BAĞLI OLARAK ORTAYA ÇIKAN UYGULAMALAR  
**Şerife Seher Erol Çalışkan**  
EXTRAORDINARY BELIEFS IN THE TURKS OF NORTH MACEDONIA  
AND THE PRACTICES THAT ARISE RELATED TO THEM
- 127 Müge Bayraktar**  
BARTINEPÇİLER KÖYÜ “SUKIZI” MEMORATININ HALKIN YAŞAYIŞINA  
ETKİSİ  
**Müge Bayraktar**  
BARTIN EPÇİLER VILLAGE “SU KIZI” MEMORAT’S INFLUENCE ON  
THE LOCAL WAY OF LIFE
- 137 Petek Ersoy İnci**  
İZMİR’DE YAŞAYAN MAKEDONYALI GÖÇMENLERDE ÇEYİZ GELENEĞİ  
VE DÖNÜŞÜMÜ  
**Petek Ersoy Inci**  
DOWRY TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION IN MACEDONIAN  
IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN IZMIR

- 149 Luisa Emanuele**  
 CHRISTIANA DE CALDAS BRITO: TRA *SAUDADE* E *ARTE DEL ROVESCIO*  
**Luisa Emanuele**  
 CHRISTIANA DE CALDAS BRITO: BETWEEN *SAUDADE* AND *REVERSE ART*
- 159 Valbona Kalo**  
 DIALOGUE THROUGH BALLADS: CONSTRUCTING MEANING IN BALKAN ORAL TRADITION
- КУЛТУРА / CULTURE**
- 173 Ekaterina Namicheva-Todorovska, Petar Namichev, Aleksandra Jovanovska Hnida**  
 RETEX AND GUERILLA DESIGN AS PROMOTERS OF SUSTAINABILITY
- МЕТОДИКА НА НАСТАВАТА / TEACHING METHODOLOGY**
- 185 Blagojka Zdravkovska-Adamova, Suada A. Dzogovic, Aleksandra P. Taneska**  
 APPLICATION OF STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENT FOR CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS DURING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
- 197 Branka Grivčevska**  
 GLIASPETTI GRAMMATICALI NEI MANUALI DI ITALIANO LS, LIVELLO B1 IN USO NELLE SCUOLE SUPERIORI NELLA MACEDONIA DEL NORD  
**Branka Grivčevska**  
 GRAMMATICAL ASPECTS IN ITALIAN L2 TEXTBOOKS, LEVEL B1, USED IN HIGH SCHOOLS IN NORTH MACEDONIA
- 209 Afrim Aliti, Brikena Xhaferi**  
 EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE USE OF PODCASTS AS A LANGUAGE LEARNING MEDIUM TO INCREASE LEARNING INTEREST
- 221 Marisa Janku, Livia Xhango**  
 INTERKULTURELLE KOMMUNIKATION IM DAF-UNTERRICHT: EVALUATION UND SELBSTREFLEXION EINER INTERKULTURELLEN UNTERRICHTSSEQUENZ  
**Marisa Janku, Livia Xhango**  
 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN GERMAN LESSON: EVALUATION AND SELF-REFLECTION ON AN INTERCULTURAL TEACHING SEQUENCE
- 233 Admir Nushi, Daniel Leka**  
 INTERKULTURELLE DIDAKTIK MIT FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCAS POESIE: PRAKTISCHE ANWENDUNGEN IM UNTERRICHT

**Admira Nushi, Daniel Leka**

INTERCULTURAL DIDACTICS IN THE POETRY OF FEDERICO GARCÍA  
LORCA: PRACTICAL APPLICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

## **ПРИКАЗИ / BOOK REVIEWS**

**247 Марија Гркова-Беадер**

ВОКАБУЛАРОТ – НАЈВАЖНАТА И НАЈТЕШКАТА ЗАДАЧА ПРИ  
УСВОЈУВАЊЕ НА СТРАНСКИОТ ЈАЗИК

**Marija Grkova-Beadar**

VOCABULARY – THE MOST IMPORTANT AND MOST DIFFICULT TASK  
IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

**255 Kalina Maleska**

ECOCRITICISM: EXPLORING THE NON-HUMAN WORLD IN  
AVRAMOVSKA'S NOVEL *ВОДНИ ТЕЛА*

## **ДОДАТОК / APPENDIX**

**265 ПОВИК ЗА ОБЈАВУВАЊЕ ТРУДОВИ**

ВО МЕЃУНАРОДНОТО НАУЧНО СПИСАНИЕ „ПАЛИМПСЕСТ“

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## **EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE USE OF PODCASTS AS A LANGUAGE LEARNING MEDIUM TO INCREASE LEARNING INTEREST**

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**Abstract:** Podcasts offer a free and entertaining way of acquiring content that cuts across every discipline, including language acquisition. Thus, they can be used in classrooms worldwide to foster student engagement and increase access to target languages. This study evaluated the potential of podcasts to elicit interest in learning among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The authors employed a mixed-methods approach to provide a holistic view of students' podcast use, perceived usefulness, and challenges faced. Data were collected by administering a structured questionnaire to 42 EFL students representing various educational backgrounds. The descriptive data collected demographic information, current podcast usage, perceptions about podcasts always, and estimated impact on learning interest. Attitudes toward podcasts with different demographic variables were compared with independent t-tests. Results suggest that students positively perceive the use of podcasts for learning. Moreover, there is a significant positive relationship between the use of podcasting media and its perceived impact on learning.

**Keywords:** *EFL; podcast; language; learning attitudes; learning interest.*

### **1. Introduction**

In the early 2000s, podcasts emerged as a new media content delivery model that enabled users to download episodes and listen to them at their leisure, changing the way people consume audio materials. At first, podcasts were largely popular with tech-savvy audiences and content consumers; then, they migrated to all types of listeners. Today, they exist in spheres from education and journalism to entertainment and more because they are convenient, approachable, and offer highly specific content to listeners.

The use of podcasts to learn a language has gained great popularity due to the ability of its form to improve different aspects of any language. Podcasts also provide learners with access to authentic language input, which is essential for

developing listening and comprehension skills (Bustari et al., 2017). As Rahimi and Katal (2012) explain, “Podcasts feature authentic language use, which can guide learners to grasp the situational practice of different languages” (p. 1156). This exposure to natural language improves learners’ listening skills and grasp of pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, etc. Podcasts also frequently include native speakers modeling proper language use (Rahimi & Katal, 2012).

Podcasts are also useful because they are available on the go, anywhere and anytime, so learners can incorporate language learning into their life. O’Bannon et al. (2011) suggest that “the portability and accessibility of podcasts enable MLLs (Multiple Language Learners) to take up language content material at the time, spot and mode of their picking” (p. 1886). This flexibility enriches learners’ motivation and engagement, improving language acquisition (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Moreover, podcasts can be curated per interests and learning styles, leading to a more customized style of learning. Born et al. (2011) note that “the richness of genres and topics in podcasts makes it possible for learners to enjoy learning experiences based on their interests” (p. 205). Such personalization may increase learners’ intrinsic language learning motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

While podcasts provide these advantages, there are also some difficulties when using them as a tool in EFL education. For example, students struggle to choose podcast content that fits their proficiency abilities. As Sangkala et al. (2015) note, “Locating podcasts at an appropriate level of language proficiency for learners can be difficult because the vast majority are designed to native speaker standards” (p. 28). Unfortunately, this mismatch leads to frustration and lack of motivation.

Another drawback is the possibility of passive listening and learners being nonpareil in their participation. As Jones and Issroff (2007) explain: Listening strategies are significant; “without proper guidance and active listening strategies” (p. 405), learners may passively listen to podcasts without engaging constructively or internally processing the language input. Therefore, educators are challenged to provide a means of structured activity and tasks that invite podcast listeners to respond to what they heard (O’Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007).

All in all, Podcasts provide a flexible and authentic language content resource that is an important mastery tool for improving listening skills, pronunciation, and extraordinary competencies in a target language. Therefore, this research examines how EFL learners perceive utilizing podcasts as a tool for language learning and the effect of their perceptions on interest and motivation. It also examines the spectrum of attitudes between high school and undergraduate students to explore differences in how both groups perceive the potential utility of podcasts. Finally, it seeks to use the findings to recommend how podcasts can be used by educators and curriculum developers to enhance language learning.

## **2. Literature Review**

A number of studies explore podcasts’ impact on EFL learners’ language skills. The results of these studies emphasize that podcasts are an effective resource



for improving listening comprehension and pronunciation skills. Researchers have observed that podcasts, especially those designed for language learners offer a range of accents, speech rates, and authentic language use. Repeated exposure to native speakers' speech through podcasts can significantly enhance learners' ability to understand spoken language in real-world contexts.

O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007) report that "students who used podcasts for language courses to supplement traditional coursework did better on listening comprehension" (p. 169). Similarly, Rahimi and Katal (2012) report that "learners who regularly listened to English podcasts demonstrated better pronunciation and vocabulary retention compared to those who did not" (p. 1158). Ducate and Lomicka (2009) found that using podcasts for speaking practice allowed learners to speak up in a non-threatening environment, increasing confidence and fluency.

A study by Abdulrahman et al. (2021) focused on EFL learners in Saudi Arabia and found that students who listened to podcasts regularly over a semester showed substantial improvement in their listening comprehension and pronunciation. The study emphasized that podcasts' repetitive and varied speech patterns contributed to these gains. The questionnaire results showed that students had a positive attitude towards using podcasts in listening classes. They found podcasts to offer authentic materials, engaging activities like listening exercises, and meaningful tasks, which increased their motivation to learn English. The study suggested that teachers consider incorporating podcasts into listening lessons, given their effectiveness as a technology-based learning tool. In addition, Amiri et al. (2023) aimed to investigate the impact of using podcasts as instructional tools on EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge and their satisfaction with podcasts. Results showed that the podcast group significantly outperformed the control group in vocabulary learning. Additionally, thematic analysis revealed four key themes: vocabulary achievement, learning through listening, learner choice and flexibility, and the usefulness of podcasts as instructional tools. The study concluded that podcasts enhance vocabulary learning and offer pedagogical benefits for EFL instruction, with implications for curriculum development.

Similarly, Vasquez and Navarro (2023) explored how podcasts contribute to vocabulary acquisition in Spanish language learners. Their research revealed that learners who used podcasts focused on current events or specific topics (like history or science) developed richer vocabularies, especially when paired with pre- and post-listening exercises. While, in a study conducted by Turan and Erkan (2022), Turkish university students used podcasts for supplementary language practice. The research concluded that learners appreciated the flexibility podcasts offered, particularly the ability to self-pace their learning and choose topics of interest. These factors positively impacted learner motivation and engagement. Nonetheless, the study conducted by Brown and Richards (2022) discussed the difficulties teachers face when incorporating podcasts into the curriculum. They emphasized that while podcasts are beneficial, teachers need to provide students with clear guidance on how to use them for maximum learning benefit. Additionally, some learners may struggle with accents or dialects in podcasts, which can hinder comprehension.

A common conclusion drawn from the abovementioned studies is that podcasts serve as an effective tool for enhancing language learning, particularly in developing listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and learner autonomy. The research consistently demonstrates that podcasts provide authentic, engaging, and flexible learning experiences, motivating students and promoting more personalized language practice. Furthermore, podcasts are seen as valuable supplementary resources in both traditional and blended learning environments, with clear pedagogical benefits for EFL instruction. However, the successful integration of podcasts into curricula requires careful selection and guidance to maximize their educational potential. Educators need to ensure that the podcasts chosen to align with the specific learning objectives of the course. This means selecting podcasts that not only fit the language proficiency levels of the students but also cover topics that are relevant to the curriculum. For language learning it is crucial to offer a range of podcast types, including narratives, interviews, and discussions, to cater to different learning styles and keep students engaged.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study's systematic approach focused on both the practical use of podcasts and ELF learners' perceptions of them. To evaluate the impact of podcasts on EFL students, a comprehensive database (Student Podcast Usage) was utilized to gather both quantitative and qualitative data.

#### **3.2 Research Questions**

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of EFL students toward using podcasts as an L2 learning medium?
2. Does the frequency of podcast use increase students' motivation and engagement in English language classes?
3. To what extent do attitudes towards the use of podcasts differ between undergraduate and high school EFL students?

#### **3.3 Participants**

The primary data collection tool was a student survey, which was administered to a sample of 42 EFL students from the same learning background. Twelve of the students (aged 18; 8 females and 4 males) were from the Municipal High School Gymnasium "Sami Frasheri" in Kumanovo, North Macedonia. Since ICT is mandatory at secondary schools in North Macedonia, EFL students are digital natives and have been exposed to different mediums throughout the education process. The other 30 participants were undergraduates between 18-24 years old from different departments excluding the English Language and Literature department at Tetovo University, Tetovo- North Macedonia. Seventeen females and 13 males in the upper intermediate level of English volunteered to participate as EFL learners in the study via an online Google form.

3.4 Instrument and Data Collection

The student survey included five sections: demographic information, current use of podcasts, attitudes toward podcasts in language learning, perceived impact on learning attention, and open-ended questions. Podcast usage frequency was evaluated with a Likert scale ranging from “Never” to “Very often,” while the types of podcasts were indicated by a checklist containing multiple answer options. The last section contained two questions in an open-ended format and listed students’ experiences listening to podcasts for learning purposes.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data gathered were quantitatively analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical methods to determine students’ perception and usage of podcasts as a language acquisition aid. The quantitative demographic data, frequency of using podcasts, and perceived learning impact were presented in basic statistical measures of mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage.

4. Research Results

4.1 Current Use of Podcasts

The findings reveal that the usage of podcasts among these learners is high.

Table 1. Frequency of using podcasts

Response	N	%
Never	1	2.4
Rarely	9	21.4
Occassionally	19	45.2
Often	9	21.4
Very often	4	9.5

Table 2. Types of podcasts

Responses	%
Educational podcasts	26.7
Entertainment podcasts	33.3
Language learning podcasts	25.3
News podcasts	9.3
Other	5.5

ANOVAs and independent samples t-test found no statistically significant difference in the use of podcasts based on the participants’ gender, age group, education level, and length of time studying English (Table 3).

**Table 3.** *Use of Podcasts by Demographic Characteristics*

	M	SD	<i>p-value</i>
Gender			0.694
Male	68.38	25.05	
Female	68.50	24.24	
Age Group			0.988
< 18	63.54	33.05	
18-24	69.44	17.27	
25-34	71.88	24.50	
Current Level of Education			0.433
High School	65.48	27.36	
Undergraduate	71.43	20.97	
Length of Time Studying English			0.751
< 1	70.83	14.43	
2-5 yrs	73.61	9.77	
> 5 yrs	66.67	27.92	

#### **4.2 Attitudes towards Podcasts in Language Learning**

This section provides results on participants' attitude towards the podcasts.

**Table 4.** *Attitudes towards Language Learning Podcasts*

	Negative Attitude	Neutral Attitude	Positive Attitude
Useful Tool for Language Learning	0.0%	7.1%	92.9%
Language Learning Podcasts are Engaging	2.4%	26.2%	71.4%
Podcasts Improve English Listening Skills	0.0%	4.8%	95.3%
Podcasts Improve English Speaking Skills	0.0%	9.5%	90.5%
Podcasts Improve Interest in Learning	0.0%	21.4%	78.5%

The participants favored the use of podcasts for language learning, with a mean score of 77.98 (SD = 10.77). This suggests that the majority of learners view podcasts as a valuable and effective tool in their language acquisition. Table 4 illustrates positive attitudes across all measured domains, indicating broad approval of podcasts in all aspects of language learning.

**Table 5.** *Attitudes by Demographic Characteristics*

	M	SD	<i>p-value</i>
Gender			0.255
Male	80.29	8.00	
Female	76.40	12.21	
Age Group			0.933
< 18	77.92	10.10	
18-24	78.61	12.58	
25-34	77.08	9.16	

Current Level of Education			0.016
High School	74.05	10.20	
Undergraduate	81.90	10.06	
Length of Time Studying English			0.445
< 1	78.33	5.77	
2-5 yrs	73.89	11.67	
> 5 yrs	79.17	10.83	

As shown in Table 5, ANOVAs and independent sample t-tests were run to determine if there was a difference in participants' attitudes based on gender, age group, education level, and length of time studying English. There were no statistically significant differences (Table 4). Undergraduate students had more positive attitudes ( $M = 81.90$ ,  $SD = 10.06$ ) than high school students ( $M = 74.05$ ,  $SD = 10.20$ ), with a statistically significant difference of  $t(40) = -2.513$ ,  $p = .016$ .

#### 4.3 Perceived Impact on Learning Interest

Another important point in the survey was perceived learner interest. The results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** *Perceived Impact by Demographic Characteristics*

	M	SD	<i>p-value</i>
Gender			0.880
Male	77.08	19.09	
Female	74.31	14.52	
Age Group	76.04	11.25	
< 18			0.569
18-24	77.21	15.46	
25-34	74.50	14.65	
Current Level of Education			0.198
High School	72.62	16.11	
Undergraduate	78.57	13.19	
Length of Time Studying English			0.912
< 1	79.17	19.09	
2-5 yrs	75.00	8.84	
> 5 yrs	75.42	16.24	

As Table 6 shows, the perceived impact of podcasts on language learning was positive, with a mean score of 75.60 ( $SD = 14.86$ ). The majority, 83.4%, indicated that they will continue using podcasts in the future, and 83.3% said their interest in learning English increased. ANOVAs and independent sample t-tests were run to determine if there was a difference in the perceived impact on learning interest by the participants' gender, age group, education level, and length of time studying English. There were no statistically significant differences (Table 6).



4.4 Podcast Benefits and Challenges

The last survey section contained questions about the participants’ perceived benefits and challenges regarding the use of podcasts. Figure 1 illustrates the key benefits of podcasts as identified by participants in the study.

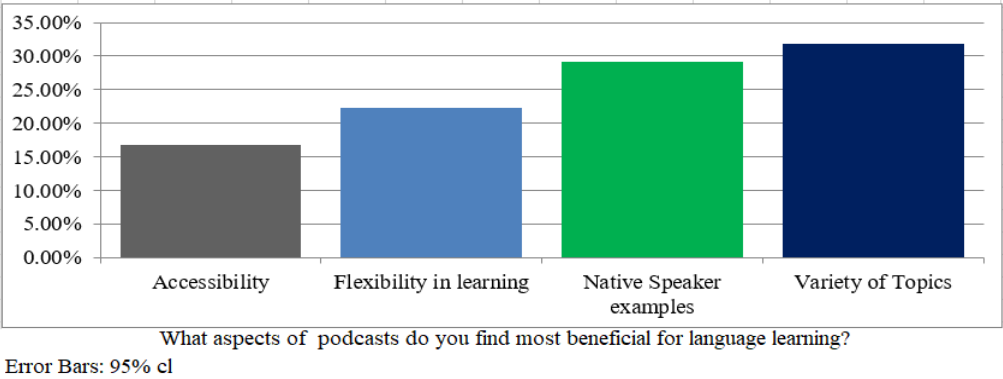


Figure 1. Podcast Benefits for Language Learning

Figure 2 present the main challenges faced by the learners during the use of podcasts in the class.

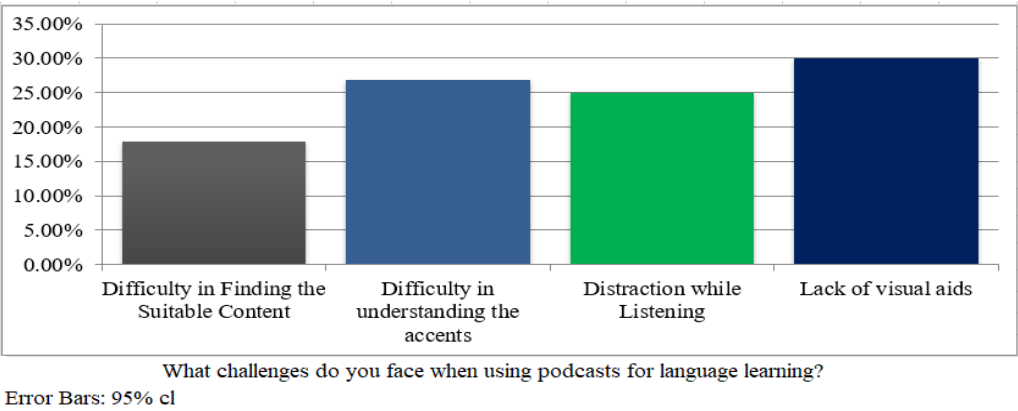


Figure 2. Podcast Challenges for Language Learning

Table 7. Student Experiences

Themes	Subthemes	Example Quotes
Improving Skills	Vocabulary; Learning Skills; Exposure to Native Speakers	"I have learned new words" "improve your vocabulary" "introduce new vocabulary in context"
Convenience	Adaptable Methods; Easy to Squeeze in	"offer an appealingly adaptable and efficient method" "download episodes for offline mode" "flexible learning opportunities"

Motivation	Interesting and Motivating; Variety; Fun	“interesting and motivating” “engaging experience” “motivational”
Good Experience for Learning	Positive; Effective; Satisfying Results	“Great experience” “Pretty helpful” “very useful”
Challenges	Concentration	“I couldn’t concentrate on the fast talking” “need hours and hours of practice to parse out the words”

Based on Table 7 results, the quotes show that they have learned new words and podcasts are appealing and motivating for them, but challenges include difficulty concentrating.

**Table 8.** *Student Suggestions*

Themes	Subthemes	Example Suggestions
Appropriateness	Variety and Relevance; Align with education	“Selecting podcasts that cater to different interests and proficiency levels” “Align podcasts with lesson objectives”
Supportive Materials	Transcripts; Vocabulary Lists	“Providing transcripts and vocabulary lists,” “Taking notes, pausing to repeat phrases, and summarizing content”
Practical Usage	Daily Use; Exposure to Various Topics	“Incorporating podcasts into daily routines” “Exposure to a wide range of topics for understanding vocabulary in different contexts”
Relevance	Making Content Entertaining and Relevant	“Making content more entertaining and relevant to listeners; interests.”

Finally, the participants provided some useful suggestions, including theme appropriateness, where the podcasts should align with lesson objectives. They should serve as supporting material, should be incorporated into daily teaching routines, and should be chosen based on relevance for learning.

**5. Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that EFL students generally hold a favorable attitude toward using podcasts as a language learning resource. This positive outlook is reflected in the significant direct relationship identified between podcast usage and perceived learning impact, suggesting that students believe engaging with podcasts enhances their language acquisition. The results are similar to those found by Abdulrahman et al. (2021) with learners in Saudi

Arabia. The questionnaire results showed that students had a positive attitude towards using podcasts in listening classes. They found podcasts to offer authentic materials, engaging activities like listening exercises, and meaningful tasks, which increased their motivation to learn English. The study suggested that teachers consider incorporating podcasts into listening lessons, given their effectiveness as a technology-based learning tool.

Notably, undergraduate students demonstrated a more enthusiastic attitude toward podcasts than their high school counterparts, which may be attributed to their development of greater autonomy and self-directed learning skills. This trend suggests that as students progress in their educational journey, they may become more receptive to innovative learning tools like podcasts, recognizing their potential utility for enhancing language skills.

Despite the positive perceptions, the study also identified several barriers that hinder the effective use of podcasts in language learning. A primary challenge faced by students is the difficulty in finding podcast content that aligns with their language proficiency levels and specific learning goals. This highlights the need for educators to curate appropriate podcast offerings that cater to diverse learner needs. Moreover, educators must assist students in developing focused listening strategies to enhance their engagement and comprehension during audio-based instruction. These results to some extent are aligned with those of Brown and Richards (2022) who discussed the difficulties teachers face when incorporating podcasts into the curriculum. They emphasized that while podcasts are beneficial, teachers need to provide students with clear guidance on how to use them for maximum learning benefit.

The results also suggest that the use of podcasts can lead to more effective learning experiences, echoing previous research by Abdous et al. (2009), which found that students engaged in podcast-based speaking activities showed improvements in both speaking fluency and accuracy. This positive association between podcast usage and perceived learning benefits emphasizes their potential as valuable tools in language instruction. By addressing the identified barriers and leveraging positive attitudes toward podcasts, educators can create enriching learning environments that harness the benefits of this medium, ultimately enhancing students' language skills and confidence.

## **6. Conclusion**

Regarding the first research question, the students' overall perception of podcasts was generally energetic, characterized by an ability to enhance their skills, flexibility, and engagement. The use of podcasts aided in the acquisition of new vocabulary and enabled the students to listen to native speakers, which improved their pronunciation and listening skills. They found the ability to easily fit podcasts into their schedule and the number of topics featured inspirational and exciting. Occasional issues like fast speech and inability to focus were noted as challenges.

With respect to the second question, students gave various suggestions for the use of podcasts to improve the teaching and learning of languages.

Recommendations included using features such as quizzes, discussion prompts, and live chats to boost attentiveness and enhance comprehension. Setting daily goals was recommended for learners to monitor their progress and remain engaged throughout the day. Also, students suggested choosing only those podcasts that are within their ability level and interest areas. They also pointed out the importance of additional aids, like transcripts, to enhance understanding and revision. All of these recommendations contribute to the effective use of podcasts in education.

For the third question, the evidence provided in the study shows that podcasts may bring a great improvement in the studying process. The findings on the direct relationship between the use of podcasts and perceived learning benefits are in line with prior studies, such as Abdous et al. (2009) who noted enhancement of speaking accuracy and fluency of students during podcast activities. This suggests that podcasts can be incorporated into language teaching and learning as a useful component in enhancing the learning process. Nonetheless, it is important to note that it is possible to add new solutions to the list of improvements in order to optimize podcast usage for educational purposes and overcome the challenges listed above.

In summary, this study suggests that podcasts can serve as an important means to assist in language learning, providing learners with flexibility and exposure to authentic language input that may further facilitate interest in the course material and level up their motivation! Thus, the positive relationship between podcast uses and perceived learning effect suggests that students who frequently choose to learn languages through podcasts consider them beneficial in fostering language skills and engagement.

This study has several limitations that might affect the generalizability and reproducibility of its results. Nevertheless, these are not large samples and may somewhat reflect the characteristics of EFL students as a field with differences; consequently, generalizing this to broader populations will limit the external validity of the results. Although the study was localized within one region in our country, it may not reveal cultural and educational differences among other regions that are likely to affect students' acceptance of podcasts.

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ГОД. IX  
БР. 18

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VOL. IX  
NO 18