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The Impact of Podcasts on Students' Listening Skills

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate, what kind of impact podcasts had on language learning, what aspects of language students improved using podcasts and whether podcasts helped the Armenian EFL learners to facilitate language learning process or not. To find out the answers of these questions quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used.

For conducting this research two groups were selected in Experimental English Courses (EEC) at American University of Armenia. The level of the two groups was the same, pre-intermediate and the classes were administered with the same books. Both groups took pre- test in the beginning of the course. One of the groups was the experimental group, (Com. 6a) and the other one was the control group (Com. 6c). The experimental group was assigned to listen to podcasts outside of classroom and the podcast episodes were sent to the students' emails. The control group had listening activities only from the course book. The aim of this study was to find out how the students in the experimental group performed in the post test compared with the students in the control group. The results revealed that the group who had podcast assisted language learning courses performed better in the post test than the group who did not use extra listening materials outside of classroom. Besides when interviewed, the students from the experimental group mentioned that they liked the process of listening to podcasts as due to it they started to better understand native speech, improved their pronunciation and enriched their vocabulary.

Keywords: Podcast, proficiency level, quasi-experimental, young learners.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Language learning is becoming more and more important nowadays. To make students learn a foreign language, teachers should use various interesting ways and strategies to motivate them to learn. As the internet is an inseparable part of our lives and as technology is evolving day by day, people think of new methods to make the learning process both useful and interesting at the same time. Podcast is one very good and relatively new way of learning which enhances learners' listening and speaking skills in the aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary and appropriate use of grammar. I also mentioned speaking skills, as from my own experience I can surely say that while one constantly listens to podcast episodes, he/she speaks more fluent making fewer mistakes. For becoming a good listener, one should use podcasts not only in the language learning classroom, but also outside of it. Due to their freely downloadable characteristics, podcasts provide students with authentic listening materials and even give students a chance to use them on the go. As Armenian school-aged students are not able to frequently talk to native speakers for improving their pronunciation and enriching their vocabulary, they can use other methods for working on these aspects of language one of which is listening to podcast episodes choosing any topic they want.

The topic of my thesis is “The impact of podcasts on students' listening skills”. The aim of the paper was to find out the answers of the research questions which were the following:

1. To what extent does the use of podcasts for teaching EFL contribute to the development of students' listening skills?

2. What are the students' preferences and attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom?

For ascertaining the answers of these questions two groups were chosen in the Experimental English Courses (EEC) at American University of Armenia to conduct this research. The groups had the same level (Com. 6a and Com. 6c). Communication 6a was the treatment group and Communication 6c was the control group. In the beginning of the course both groups took pre- test from the listening section to see to what extent they could understand native talks. After taking the pre-test students in the treatment group (Com. 6a) started to listen to podcasts within 2 months period during class sessions and also outside of classroom. The control group started to use only the listening materials from their course book during class sessions. After the course, which lasted 10 weeks both groups took post-test. The results showed that the group (Com. 6a) who used podcasts outside of classroom improved their listening skills greatly compared with the group who used listening materials only during the lessons.

Students in the treatment group were also interviewed after the course to find out whether they liked the process of listening to podcasts and whether they would like their teachers to integrate podcasts in their language learning courses or not. Taking into consideration their answers students were happy to use extra listening materials outside of classroom as they noticed improvement not only in their listening skills but also in their pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before talking about podcasts, it is worth mentioning what podcast actually is.

Podcasting is a term, which consists of two components: *Pod* derives from Apples MP3-Player iPod, and the word *casting*, derives from broadcasting (Chabolla & Leh, 2009; Mocigemba, 2008). Various scholars define it in deferent ways but the concept is still the same. According to Flanagan and Calandra (2005) podcasting is a type of technology, which gives listeners an opportunity to subscribe and listen to audio shows which are digitally recorded. Man (2006) describes it in this way: “Podcasts are audio and video programs on the Web which are usually updated at regular intervals. New episodes can be downloaded on the computer, an MP3 player or iPod for later listening” (p. 116). According to Fox and Mocigemba (2008) Podcasts are audio- and video- shows which can be created privately and people can receive new podcast episodes using MP3 player, cell phone and computer. If people want to subscribe to a podcast, they need a piece of software, which is called a podcatcher. Completing the process of subscription to a podcast, this software automatically checks if new episodes of the podcast are available for downloading.

2.1 Authentic Podcasts

According to Stanely (2005) there are different types of language podcasts. One of them is authentic podcast. Authentic podcasts are designed for high level of students as its content is difficult to understand, and one can encounter a lot of unfamiliar words while listening to it. For high level of students these podcasts can be of great help improving listening skills.

2.2 Radio Podcasts

The second type of podcast is called radio podcast. The radio programs which are turned into podcasts are called radio podcasts, and the example of such radio podcasts are the ones produced by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK).

2.3 Independent Podcasts

The third type of podcast is independent podcast. Podcasts which are produced by organizations and individuals are called independent Podcasts. These types of podcasts have huge potential for ELT as they can be adjusted for the needs of different learners (Man, 2006). Learners themselves can create podcasts easily due to Audacity, which is software for recording and editing sounds; also they can produce podcasts due to MP3 sound file format, iPods, Mp3 players and iPads.

Podcasts emerged during the first half of 2005. On the Web ELT podcasts increased in the second half of 2005. To search for suitable ELT podcasts, teachers can just type terms like “English”, “ELT”, “ESL” or “TESOL” and a list of ELT podcasts with following content types will appear: Comprehensive podcasts, whole lesson podcasts, vocabulary, idioms, conversations with script, jokes, songs, phonetics, pronunciation, stories. Comprehensive podcasts include such content types as interviews, vocabulary and traditional listening comprehension activities. Whole lessons are the type of lessons which can be used by teachers in the classroom in terms of podcasts. Vocabulary, idioms are popular content of podcasts which are easy to produce. During the production of these types of podcasts some vocabulary items are chosen and their usage is explained. Conversations with script: these types of podcasts are the ones which include native

speakers talking to each other and their conversations are followed by scripts which help learners, who are not too proficient in the particular language they learn, to better understand the conversations. The podcasts, which contain jokes, are beneficial for learners as they encourage them to carefully listen to it. As I mentioned above, songs are other type of podcast beneficial for EFL learners. These podcasts include popular songs especially produced for teenagers who can also pay attention to lyrics to completely understand the meaning of the song and enjoy it. Phonetics, pronunciation: these types of podcasts are designed for EFL learners for helping them to solve their problems connected with pronunciation and phonemes in English. Stories are podcasts where students can listen to different stories and answer listening comprehension questions (Man, 2006).

2.4 Teacher Podcasts

Another type of podcast is podcast produced by teachers for their students. These kinds of podcasts allow students to use them outside of the classroom (Rossell-Aguilar, 2007; Stanley, 2005). Students can use teacher podcasts either before lesson or after lesson. It gives pupils a chance to listen to the lecture again, to re-check the notes, pay attention to details and revise the lecture as necessary. Podcasts produced by students are also very useful. This is considered to be a very motivating activity by many teachers (Man, 2006; Rossel-Aguilar, 2007; Stanely, 2005).

2.5 Student Podcasts

Due to the advent of technology students can easily produce their own podcasts. Another benefit of creating podcasts by students is that when they place podcasts on the

Web, anyone around the world can listen to those podcasts and assess them. It is understandable that there is a real audience for students, producing their own podcasts, which can be a huge motivating factor. The usage of podcasts enhances students' speaking skills as well. Before uploading a podcast on the Web, students should rehearse their "show", that is to say they should practice a lot paying attention to their pronunciation accuracy, which will be improved due to practice (Man, 2006). Speaking usually involves face-to-face interaction. Students who are not confident may feel uncomfortable to speak in front of their professors or peers so they'll be willing to produce podcasts on their own.

2.6 Advantages and Disadvantages of Podcasts

The advantage of using podcasts to practice listening in the language learning classroom is that it is simple and can be downloaded easily. Besides, students can also listen to podcasts on the go using mobile phones or MP3 players (Flanagan & Caladra, 2005). In education types of oral information such as verbal interaction, commentary and interviews are best conveyed by audio podcasts (Chabolla & Leh, 2009). Lecture content, which is delivered by the means of audio, has a lot of advantages. It is easy to produce audio, which is a very good medium of delivering lecture content. If lecturers use audio to deliver content effectively, it may give them an opportunity to use the time allocated for classroom instruction for doing other assignments. According to Chabolla & Leh (2009) the professors can have better presentations for students as pre-recording lectures give them opportunity to organize, revise and edit the lectures as necessary.

Though the usage of audio in education proves to be advantageous, there are also disadvantages. The quality of the audio material is one very important issue to be

considered. It depends not only on the senders who create the audio but it also depends on the receivers as it can be arduous for them to decode messages. According to some scholars using podcasts of lectures has some disadvantages: knowing that they can use the materials of the lectures with the help of podcasts, students might miss classes using podcasts as a substitute for attending (Blaisdell, 2006; Menzies, 2005). In spite of this fact, students are eager to listen to podcasts of their lectures anytime, and anywhere paying attention to the difficult parts of the lecture revising as necessary to better perform during exams (Flanagan & Calandra, 2005). Another drawback of using podcasts is that the content of some podcasts may not be suitable for students, so teachers should review the content before letting their students listen to podcasts (Flanagan & Calandra, 2005).

Different kinds of methods are used for facilitating the learning process. Podcast is one type of method which can be used in different ways in education. One way to use podcasts is the distribution of lecture materials, which students can use to review the lectures after the lessons, also these materials can be used by teachers and students, who haven't been able to attend the lectures, to get the information they have missed. Podcasting also gives students a chance to create and publish their own podcasts for a real audience. It is also necessary for students to listen to the audios they created to pay attention to their mistakes and revise them as necessary. After recording podcasts, students can listen to these recordings several times, make changes in their recordings and give feedback on their classmates' podcasts (Ducat & Lomicka, 2009; Harris & Park, 2008; Flanagan & Calandra, 2005).

2.7 Students' Attitudes to the Use of Podcasts

A lot of studies have been done in the field of podcasting to see the benefits and drawbacks of its usage. A very interesting study was done (Ducat & Lomicka, 2009) to explore pronunciation within a contextualized podcasting approach, for which the researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data and analyzed it. Overall 22 students participated in this study. Ten students out of 22 were learning French and the rest 12 students were learning German. All 22 students' first language was American English. The duration of the course was one academic semester and the university that students chose was in the United States. The age of students was between 18 and 22. The level of the language courses that students enrolled was intermediate. The study lasted 16 weeks and the participants were selected based on the convenience sample (Ducat & Lomicka, 2009).

Two different types of techniques were chosen for assessing distinctions between tasks that had scripts and tasks that did not have scripts-that is extemporaneous tasks. During the course students produced eight podcasts. Before recording the podcasts students were given instructions in terms of technical training about the creation and uploading of podcasts in their blogs, which lasted up to 90 minutes. All tasks of podcast recording were connected to the topic of studying abroad. Five scripted pronunciation podcasts were recorded by the students (the first 3 podcasts were pre-scripted) the duration of which was 2 and 3 minutes and the topic of the podcasts was connected to studying abroad. For podcasts one, two and three a text was chosen to prepare the students to do the contextualized podcast tasks which was read by a native speaker. After listening to podcasts, students produced their own recordings, and added them to their personal blogs which they had created for their French and German courses. Students

also produced 3 impromptu (without script) podcasts over the semester. Within the pronunciation podcasts students listened to texts, which were examples for them to be used for each of these podcasts. For (pre-) test Pronunciation Attitude Inventory (PAI) survey 12 Likert-type questions and background information questions, which consisted of 9 items, were used to assess students' attitude towards pronunciation. The (post-) test Pronunciation Attitude Inventory (PAI) survey was designed to assess students' attitude towards the podcast project for which 8 additional Likert-type questions were used with the same 12 Likert-type questions used in pre-test survey, also including 6 open-ended questions. To assess what was useful for the students for improving their pronunciation and their likes and dislikes during the project additional 14 items were used. Students were asked to listen to their peers' extemporaneous podcasts and give feedback to each other paying attention to the content of the podcast after the production of their own recordings. The instructor of each class used a particular rubric for grading students' extemporaneous podcasts paying attention to content, organization, coherency, accuracy, pronunciation, fluency, and effect on listeners. After students recorded their scripted pronunciation podcasts, a native speaker assistant listened to each recording produced by students for assessing the podcasts and giving clear feedback to them and sometimes the native speaker assistant also commented to students' podcasts on their blogs. For doing analysis it was important to download students' recordings and store on CDs. The students' podcasts were analyzed by two raters in each language: one native speaker of French and German and the other non-native speaker of French and German. For assessing the comprehensibility of podcasts a 5-point scale was used 5 being completely comprehensible, 4- mostly comprehensible, 3- fairly, 2- almost not comprehensible and 1- not comprehensible. For assessing the accentedness of podcasts again a 5-point scale

was used 5 being nativelike, 4- almost nativelike, 3-between nativelike and nonnative, 2-more nonnative and 1- nonnative. The results revealed that 50% of German students improved their accent after recording their second scripted task, 44% of German students noticed improvement in their accent after recording second extemporaneous tasks and 80% of German students improved their accent after third scripted and third extemporaneous tasks. Compared with the German students, the French students improved only 10% of their accent between the pre- and post-test. The highest improvement in students' recordings (70%) was between first and second scripted tasks. Collating scripted tasks with the extemporaneous ones students also had improvement in their overall performance which was minimal but noticeable. From the results of the survey rating students' accent, it appeared that students remained mostly the same during the semester. The rating that most of German students received was between native-like and nonnative like, more nonnative or nonnative. During the semester the French students consistently received ratings of being almost not comprehensible or fairly comprehensible, and they showed little improvement between the second and third pronunciation tasks. Thus, it appears from the results that improving pronunciation requires more than eight treatments and sixteen weeks. If students want to improve pronunciation over the academic semester they should not solely listen to podcasts or produce recordings but should also do additional activities for its improvement. Some teachers may think that students can improve their pronunciation with mp3s, CDs and podcasts outside of classroom but during this process students may need the help of native speaker tutors for working on specific sounds they had encountered difficulties while working on them alone.(Ducat & Lomicka, 2009).

Another study was done at the University of Flensburg in Germany, (Fietze, 2009) to describe how students behave using podcasts in general. The number of students, who took part in the survey which was composed of two sessions, was 148. Most of the students who participated in the survey had no experience how to use podcasts. They used mainly notebooks to listen to recorded lectures at home. The main purpose of listening to recorded lectures was for preparing students to succeed in their exams. According to the majority of the respondents recorded lectures should not be a reason for missing classes. The major advantage of lecture podcasts is that students can listen to them after classes paying attention to some details that they have missed during the class, thus absorbing lecture content more effectively. For this research the following questions were formulated:

1. How are the university podcasts used by the students? In what situations do the students use the lecture podcasts?
2. What is the purpose of using lecture podcasts? What can be the impact of lecture podcasts on students who attend their classes?
3. What do the students consider important connected to lecture podcasts?
4. What are the students' excuses for not using podcasts?

The University of Flensburg decided to widen the scope of lecture podcasts, after the students and lecturers gave feedback and estimation on the produced podcasts. During the summer of 2007, overall seven lectures and within the winter of 2008 eight lectures were recorded, all of them relating to lectures (Fietze, 2009).

The findings showed that the students who took part in the survey had only a very little experience in the field of podcasting regarding their general podcast usage behavior.

Table 2.7.1

The Findings of Students' Lecture Podcast Usage Behavior.

Students who used lecture podcasts at the University of Flensburg for the first time.	Students who had used podcasts before the lecture podcast were available.	Students who had used podcasts about six month and learned of podcasts suggested by the University of Flensburg.	Students who already had large experience.	Students who did not use podcasts at all.
72.1%	27.9%	59.9%	21.7%	18.2%

Table 2.7.2

The Findings of Students' Lecture Podcast Usage Behavior.

Students who already used the recordings of their lectures.	Students who intended to use lecture podcasts.	Students who did not want to use lecture podcasts.	Students who used recorded lectures did nothing parallel, concentrated only on the material.	Students who used lecture recordings on the go.	Students who thought that having lecture recordings does not mean not to attend classes.
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72.8%	19%	8.2%	77.8%	14.8%	51.1%
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When the students were evaluating lecture podcasts another advantage for them, was that those podcasts were free of charge. Lecture podcasts enabled students to listen to the lecture once again. Another advantage was that they could use it any time and anywhere listening to the same lecture as much as they want for better absorbing the content. For finding out how useful the usage of lecture podcasts were for students and how the recorded lectures impacted on their learning behavior in general, students were asked to do evaluation in the last part of the questionnaire.

Table 2.7.3

The Results of Students' Lecture Podcast Usage Behavior

Students who answered that it was easy for them to assimilate lecture content with the help of lecture recordings.	Students who claimed that lecture podcasts were considered to be very important or more important.	Students who considered lecture recordings to be less important or unimportant.	Students who answered that they didn't like when the learning process was implemented with the help of computers.
71.1%	83.7%	11.8%	91.7%

Overall students who took part in the interview, stated that the lecture podcasts were very useful for their learning and helped them deeply understand particular details of the lecture that students had missed during the lesson (Fietze, 2009, and Harris and Park, 2008).

Another very interesting study was conducted (Atkinson, Chester, Buntine, & Hammond, 2011) at an Australian university. The aim of that study was to assess students' contentment with podcasts, to compare the academic behavior and academic self-efficiency of podcast users and non-users, to examine what kind of modes students prefer using podcasts and to evaluate reasons of using and not using podcasts. The participants of that study were 273 undergraduate students from Australian university who were enrolled in six different courses. Two surveys were used for this study. The first questionnaire was composed of 26 scale response and open-ended questions that were about attending lectures, academic staff contact, usage of lecture recordings, reasons for not using lecture recordings and type of questions about how, how often and where recordings were accessed. The second questionnaire included 20 questions, which focused on the use of lecture recordings for revising exam questions. The survey was administered in hard copies and online for those students who did not attend the lecture that day. The results of the study suggested that satisfaction with lecture recordings varied across courses. Older students (age 26) who formed 90% of respondents were significantly more likely to report using podcasts than younger students. Also it was revealed that 50% of students preferred face-to-face interaction rather than listening to podcasts and not attend lectures. Only small number of the students who used the lecture podcasts missed the classes. From this study it was revealed that lecture recordings that

were available online via podcasts were proved to be very effective and appreciated by students.

Another study was conducted (Nathan & Chan, 2007) to measure the students' beliefs connected with the educational podcasts, and the technology students used for listening to these podcasts. Twenty one students out of 23 in the class participated in the exercise. The subject was Business Strategy and the topics were various. A student and the expert had discussions based on podcasts which were created in the form of discussions over six week period. The topics were chosen taking into consideration its complexity or the fact that students might face some anxiety connected to that topic. Students were recommended to use different techniques for downloading these podcasts one of which was Real Simple Syndication (RSS), an automated feed which was linked to the podcast server of the university to enable students get the new podcast episodes whenever a new file was ready. The students were advised to use iTunes because it is free of charge. Due to its characteristics it was easy to download the latest podcasts. Students were also asked to complete a questionnaire in the end of the session, which was designed to define what kind of role podcasting had in education and students' experience with the podcasts. To assess the students' opinions about the effectiveness of educational podcasts, the way students listened to those podcasts and the technology that they used, 16 questions were designed, including a 7-point Likert Scale that measured the extent to which the students agreed or disagreed. The participants were to listen to specific podcasts on the subject Business Strategy. According to this study it turned out that the majority of participants had positive attitudes towards the educational value of podcasts, they agreed that educational podcasts were indeed useful for their learning process and participants also mentioned that they would like to continue using this

learning tool in their learning process and would recommend it to others. Ninety one percent of the students participated in this survey. Only two students did not return the survey. In brief the study mainly showed the Australian students' view of educational value of using podcasts in their learning process.

According to the literature review podcasts are largely used in educational settings. Some research studies (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009; Fietze, 2009; Nathan & Chan, 2007) were conducted to find out students' attitudes towards using podcasts for improving language skills. Based on those studies it appeared that most of the students liked to use podcasts for educational purposes and improved their language skills greatly.

Taking into consideration all the studies discussed above, this study is needed to find out to what extent the use of podcasts for teaching EFL contribute to the development of students' listening skills and to reveal students' preferences and attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom.

This study was carried out because there was a lack of empirical data about the use of podcasts among Armenian students. The aim of the study was to do a contribution in the field of education and to help Armenian EFL learners improve their listening skills with the help of podcasts which is relatively new and interesting way of language learning.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The research questions of this study were the following:

1. To what extent does the use of podcasts for teaching EFL contribute to the development of students' listening skills?
2. What are the students' preferences and attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom?

3.1 Research Design

The aim of this study was to investigate what kind of impact podcasts had on students' listening skills, to what extent the use of podcasts for teaching EFL contributed to the development of students' listening skills. The aim of this study was also to find out the students' preferences and attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom. In order to find out the answers of these questions mixed method was used that included qualitative and quasi-experimental design of data collection.

3.2 Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The difference between quantitative and qualitative data is that qualitative data deals with meanings whereas quantitative data deals with numbers (Dey, 1993). In this research qualitative data collection was administered with the help of semi-structured interview. The quantitative data of this study included the results of pre- and post- tests, which were conducted in the beginning and at the end of the course.

Quantitative research can be either descriptive when subjects are measured once or experimental when subjects are measured twice: before and after the treatment (Hopkins, 2000). In a descriptive study the researcher does not make an attempt to change

conditions or behavior the things are measured as they are. In an experimental study the researcher measures subjects before and after the treatment. Thus the quantitative experimental method was used to find out to what extent students improved their listening skills using podcasts outside of classroom.

The main goal of the survey was to help the students at Experimental English Classes (EEC) to improve their listening skills using new and interesting method of language learning.

3.3 Settings and Participants

The research was conducted in Experimental English Classes (EEC), at American University of Armenia. It lasted for 10 weeks. The level of the two groups was the same pre-intermediate level (Communication. 6a and Communication 6c). The total number of students in both groups was 27 (13 students in Com. 6a and 14 students in Com. 6c). The age of the students ranged from 12-15. There were 8 boys and 5 girls in the experimental group. In the control group there were 6 boys and 8 girls. The teacher of both groups was also the researcher. EEC students met twice a week in one-hour sessions of English class.

3.4 Treatment

The learning process was implemented using the same book (English in Mind 2) and the same methods. Communication 6c was the control group; hence the students did not use any additional listening materials in this group, besides the materials from their course book. In the other group (experimental group) which was communication 6a the classes were implemented using podcasts outside of classroom. The teacher assigned students to listen to podcasts, sending the materials to their e-mails. The duration of each

podcast episode was more than 10 minutes. Students listened to the podcasts and got prepared for discussions which were administered during the class. The teacher also explained students how to use this technology on their own afterwards, telling them about iTunes store and asking them to download this technology in their computers. To teacher's great surprise besides the materials that she sent to them, and which were compulsory to listen to, students also listened to podcasts episodes choosing any topic they liked. In the end of the course besides the post test that students were given, they were also interviewed to find out whether they liked the process of listening to podcasts or not and what their attitude was like during listening to podcasts.

3.5 Instrumentation

In order to get the results of the research and to understand to what extent the students in the experimental and control groups improved their listening skills pre and post-tests (see Appendix A) were used in the beginning and at the end of the course and also semi-structured interview (see Appendix B) was carried out at the end of the course to find out the students preferences and attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom.

3.5.1 Pre- and post- tests

Pre-test (see Appendix A) included 13 open-ended items. Students were supposed to listen to the podcast and fill in the chart. Each correct answer was 1.5 point, only one of the items was worth 2 points, and for all the correct answers students got 20 points. The pre-test involved 13 items asking about details from the listening passage.

Post-test was similar to the pre-test including 13 open-ended items. Students were supposed to listen to the podcast and fill in the chart. Each correct answer was 1.5 point. For each wrong answer students lost 1.5 points, again one of the items was worth 2 points. The post-test involved 13 questions asking about details from the podcast episode.

To find out whether the pre- and post-tests were parallel or not measurements were done with another group of students. The group was composed of 14 students. The students took pre-test and after 15 minutes they took the post-test. The results of their performance showed that the pre- and post-tests were parallel. Pre-test ($M = 9.89$, $SD = 2.75$), post-test ($M = 10.28$, $SD = 3.60$).

3.5.2 Semi-structured interview

For this study, a semi-structured interview was used (see Appendix B) as it allowed students to talk about a particular topic in depth. Many researchers like semi-structured interviews as its questions can be prepared ahead of time. The questions in semi-structured interviews are flexible and the researcher can ask participants questions which are not included in the questionnaire depending on the participants' answers. The semi-structured interview for this research included 7 open-ended questions which were compiled in advance. The interview was conducted at the end of the course and was implemented face-to-face. The purpose of the interview was to find out students' preferences about podcasts.

3.6 Procedures

In the beginning of the course the students were introduced to the information about podcasts and about its benefits on language learning. The students were told that the

assignments connected to the podcasts were part of EEC curriculum. Besides the homework assignments from the students' workbook, they were also assigned to listen to podcasts episodes that were sent to the students' e-mails. The duration of each episode was at least ten minutes. During the class the teacher and the students had discussions about the episode that was assigned to them. Students listened to podcasts two times a week and got prepared for the discussions. In the beginning of the course students took pre-test for finding out to what extent they understood native speech and to help them improve their listening skills due to podcasts. During the course students were asked whether they had difficulty remembering the listening material or whether they had difficulty understanding the content of the listening passage respectively. They were given support and encouragement to use dictionaries, take notes and listen to the same podcast episode more than once. After ten weeks of their English course, students took post-test to see to what extent they improved their listening skills. Below it is shown the procedure for the experimental and control groups (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 3.6.1

The Procedure for the Experimental Group

Week	Podcasts	Data collection
Week 2 Monday/Wednesday	Summer holidays (duration 9 min.) Back to school (duration 10 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 3 Monday/Wednesday	Rock band contest (duration 8 min.) continuation of the same podcast (9 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions

Week 4 Monday/Wednesday	Roommates (duration 12 min.) continuation of the same podcast (duration 9 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 5 Monday/Wednesday	Friends going to picnic (duration 10 min.) Incident in the café (duration 8 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 6 Monday/Wednesday	The American Patient (duration 10 min.) The commitment (duration 11 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 7 Monday/Wednesday	"So you want to be a rock star" (duration 10 min.) Band on the Run (duration 13 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 8 Monday/Wednesday	A perfect day (duration 9 min.) A picture of health (duration 8 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 9 Monday/Wednesday	Not working out (duration 10 min.) A brief encounter (duration 9 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 10 Monday/Wednesday	At the cinema (duration 11 min.) The newcomer (duration 8 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions

Table 3.6.2

Procedure for the Control Group

Week	Listening activities based on the students' course book.	Data collection
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Week 1 Tuesday/Thursday	Jack's diary entry (duration 2 min.) Incident in the restaurant (duration 2 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 2 Tuesday/Thursday	Friends' going to play Volleyball together (duration 1 min. 25 sec.) What's William is going to do next week (duration 1 min. 50 sec.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 3 Tuesday/Thursday	Inventions (duration 3 min. 35 sec.) Olivia's story (4 min. 47 sec.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 4 Tuesday/Thursday	History of music (duration 3 min. 10 sec.) Olympic games (duration 2 min.) Paralympic athletes (duration 2 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 5 Tuesday/Thursday	A marathon (duration 2 min.). Bicycle revolution (duration 3 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 6 Tuesday/Thursday	Seven facts about water (3 min.) Interview with an expert (duration 2 min. 35 sec.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 7 Tuesday/Thursday	Song "Paradise" (duration 2 min. 32 sec.). Information about Canada (duration 4 min.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 8 Tuesday/Thursday	Conversation between Dan and Maggie (2 min. 30	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's

	sec.) Crocodile man (3 min.)	comprehension questions.
Week 9 Tuesday/Thursday	Dialogue between Andy and Meg. (2 min 30 sec.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions
Week 10 Tuesday/Thursday	Quiz (Listen and check your answers) (duration 3. 40 sec.)	Discussions during the class, answering teacher's comprehension questions

At the end of the study semi-structured face-to-face interviews were carried out with all the students. The interview consisted of 7 questions and all the questions were open-ended. By conducting the interview the researcher wanted to find out the students preferences and attitude towards using podcasts outside of classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

As it was already mentioned the current study aimed to investigate what kind of impact podcasts had on students' listening skills, to what extent the use of podcasts for teaching EFL contributed to the development of students' listening skills and what the students' preferences and attitudes were towards using podcasts outside of classroom. It was also carried out to find out the students' attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom. For this study both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used. The quantitative data were collected through pre-test and post-test. Qualitative data were collected with the help of semi-structured interview in which students expressed their opinions about the use of podcasts outside of classroom and their attitude towards it. Thus in this section it is introduced the discussion and the results analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

The results acquired through quantitative and qualitative data collection aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the use of podcasts for teaching EFL contribute to the development of students' listening skills?
2. What are the students' preferences and attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom?

4.1 Analysis of the Quantitative Data

As it was mentioned above the quantitative data collection was administered through pre- and post-tests. The results of pre- and post- tests were analyzed quantitatively implementing the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). For the pre- and post-tests' analysis Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon tests were applied to compare the scores

obtained from the performance of the experimental and control groups, which are non-parametric significance tests and is the non-parametric equivalent of the t-test for independent samples.

4.1.1 Analysis of the pre- and post-test results

To expose whether the students had progress after the treatment both the control group and the experimental group took pre- test before the treatment and post- test after the treatment. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon tests were implemented between and within group comparison of the two sets of scores. To compare the pre-test and post-test results for both groups the Mann-Whitney U test also called the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test was used which is a non-parametric statistical test to assess whether two independent samples had equally large values. It is one of the most well-known non-parametric significance tests and is the non-parametric equivalent of the t-test for independent samples.

Table 4.1
Mean Ranks of the groups who took pre- and post-tests

	Group	n	M	SD	Mdn
Pre-test	Comparison	14	11.96	2.20	12.25
	Experimental	13	14.38	1.00	14.00
	Total	27			
Post-test	Comparison	14	13.89	1.25	13.75
	Experimental	13	18.30	.970	18.50
	Total	27			

To answer the research question asking to what extent the use of podcasts for teaching EFL contributed to the development of students' listening skills several comparisons were made.

Comparison 1 This comparison was asking whether the experimental and control groups were similar at the beginning of the study. That is, whether there was any significant difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups on the pre-test, before the experiment. To answer this question the Mann Whitney U test was applied to compare students' scores. The results showed that the z value was 3.002 with a significant level of $p = .003$. The probability value was less than 0.05. This means that there was significant difference between pre-test results. Thus, it is obvious that regarding listening skills, the two groups were not very similar at the beginning of the study.

The Wilcoxon Signed ranks test was applied for comparing the results of pre-test and post-test of both groups. This is a non-parametric statistical hypothesis test which is used to compare two sets of scores that come from the same participants to assess whether their population means differed.

Comparison 2 This comparison was asking whether the control group students significantly improved their listening skills.

To answer this question, the Wilcoxon Signed ranks test was applied to compare the pre-test and post-test results of the control group. For the control group, the z value was -3.266 with a significance level of $p = .001$. The probability value was less than 0.05, which means that there was a significant difference between pre- and post-test results in favor of the post-test. Thus the control group students improved their listening skills.

Comparison 3 This comparison was asking whether the experimental group students significantly improved their listening skills.

According to the results, z value was -3.306 with a significance level of $p = .001$, which was less than 0.05. From this, it is obvious that there was a significant difference between the experimental group students' pre-and post-test results in favor of the post-test.

The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test showed that both the experimental and the control groups improved their listening skills separately. However, in order to see whether the usage of podcast, the main variable in this study, had any influence on the listening skills of the experimental group and whether there was a significant difference between the control and experimental groups, the Mann Whitney U test was applied on the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-test results to compare the average ranks of the students' scores. Thus, the last analysis aimed to answer the following question:

Comparison 4 This comparison was asking whether the experimental and control group students were similar at the end of the study. That is, whether there was a significant difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups after the experiment.

For the control group of the post-test results, the z value was -4.325 with a significant level of $p = .000$. The probability value was less than 0.05. This means that there was a significant difference between post-test results of the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group.

Table 4.2
Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Pre- and Post-Tests between Control and Experimental Groups

	U	p	r
Pre-test	32.000	.003	0.57
Post-test	2.500	.000	0.83

The following table (see Table 4.2) displays pre-and post-tests' results between experimental and control groups. According to the results it is obvious that experimental group students improved their listening skills greater compared with the control group.

Table 4.3
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for the Control and Experimental Groups.

	z	p	r
Control group	-3.266	.001	0.57
Experimental group	-3.306	.001	0.83

The table (see Table 4.3) shows that experimental and control group students improved their listening skills during the course. However experimental group students showed more effective results after the treatment on the post-test.

4.2 Analysis of the Qualitative Data

For qualitative data analysis a semi-structured face-to-face interview was conducted. It was conducted among thirteen students of the experimental group after the

treatment. The interview included seven open-ended questions which were prepared in advance and the students expressed their opinions about the usage of podcasts outside of classroom.

The first question in the interview was asking whether students liked the process of listening to podcast episodes and all the students answered that they liked to listen to podcasts as it was something new for them and interesting at the same time.

The second and the third questions were asking what kind of improvement students noticed in their language, and whether the usage of podcasts was helpful for language learning and the students answered that they improved not only their listening skills being able to better understand native speech but also they enriched their vocabulary, and improved their pronunciation, besides students mentioned that as the themes were very interesting they listened to podcasts with pleasure. Question number four was asking about the integration of podcasts in students' English language courses and here again all the answers were positive only some of the students mentioned that they would like their teacher to send the podcasts to their emails as they didn't want to waste time on choosing topics considering it to be a boring process, two of the students answered that they would also like to listen to podcasts during the lesson. Question number five was asking whether students took notes while listening to podcasts and the answers for this question were various. Some of the students responded that it was difficult for them to listen to the podcast at the same time taking notes as they missed part of the listening passage while doing that. Other students answered that it was helpful to take notes as they could remember the content of the podcast easily. The next question was asking whether students used dictionaries while listening to the podcast episode whenever they encountered any unknown word and the answers for this question were again diverse.

Some of the students answered that they used dictionaries and wrote down each unfamiliar word with its translation which made them remember the word easily. Others responded that they didn't use dictionaries as they could have wasted a lot of time on a single podcast episode. Question number seven was asking students how many times they listened to the same podcast episode and here students had different options. Some of the students listened to the same episode more than twice, others listened more than once and 5 of the students answered that they listened only once.

According to the results of the interview students seemed to like the process of listening to podcasts and claimed that they improved their listening skills during those 10 weeks period and mentioned that they would like to listen to podcasts during their following courses.

The purpose of this study was to introduce students another way of improving listening skills which is relatively new, interesting and beneficial method of improving language skills.

The results of the pre- and post-test analysis showed that the two groups were a little bit different at the beginning of the experiment, regarding language ability, especially listening skills because they showed more or less similar results on the pre-test. For both groups there was a significant difference between pre- and post-tests. The experimental and control group students improved their listening skills during the course. However experimental group students showed more effective results after the treatment on the post-test.

This study also aimed to find out the students' attitudes and preferences towards using podcasts for improving listening skills. Accordingly, the second research question guiding this study was "What are the students' attitudes towards using podcasts outside

of classroom? To answer this research question, the data was obtained by means of a semi-structured interview. The results showed that the students of the experimental group liked the process of listening to podcast episodes and noticed improvements in their listening skills, pronunciation and vocabulary enrichment.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to introduce the students another way of improving listening skills. The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent the Armenian EFL learners improved their listening skills with the help of podcasts. The participants of this study were two groups of EEC students. One was the experimental group and the other one was the control group (com.6a and com.6c). The level of the students was pre-intermediate. The course lasted 10 weeks. Both groups took pre-test and post-test in the beginning and at the end of the course. Students were also interviewed at the end of the course to find out their preferences and attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom. For this study quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

The results of quantitative and qualitative data aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the use of podcasts for teaching EFL contribute to the development of students' listening skills?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards using podcasts outside of classroom?

Besides data that was gained from pre- and post-tests, interview was also carried out to find out students' attitudes and opinions about the usage of podcasts.

Due to the results of the current research study, it may be pointed out that podcast is another useful way for improving listening skills. According to the students' pre- and post- test results it was obvious that there was a significant difference between the experimental group students' pre-and post-test results in favor of the post-test. And according to the students' interview results, students showed positive attitude towards using podcasts outside of classroom and found it new and interesting way to improve listening skills. Students also mentioned that they would like to have podcast assisted

language learning during their following courses if the teacher monitored them and sent the podcast episodes to their e-mails so that they did not waste time on searching appropriate types of podcasts on the internet. Besides students also mentioned that it was good that the episodes weren't too long, and they were very interesting for them to listen to even several times. Some of the students mentioned that they would be happy to use this technology on their own via iTunes store which they downloaded in their computers during the course.

According to the results, it is obvious that this study was beneficial for the English language learners in Experimental English Classes (EEC) at American University of Armenia as those learners were introduced to relatively new and interesting method of language learning, which helped them to improve their listening skills.

5.1 Limitations and Delimitations

The limitation in this study was the time, as if the time was longer, the results would have been much more informative and valid. Besides it would be better to have much time for giving students instructions and support to use podcasts on their own. Other limitations were the age of the students, students' proficiency level, and also the fact that this study was conducted only among EEC students.

5.2. Suggestions for Further Research

Taking into consideration the above mentioned limitations it will be better to carry out further research in a long term. As this study was applied between two groups who had the same proficiency level (pre-intermediate, com.6) and only among EEC students,

further studies can be implemented between students of higher proficiency levels at public schools to find out the extent of improvements of their listening skills.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Listening Pre-test: Listen to the passage and fill in the Chart

1. The photo was taken in	
2. Richard went there to	
3. In the picture Richard was sitting next to	
4. In the picture Richard was wearing	
5. Sara was from	
6. In the picture the guy who was sitting next to Carlos was	
7. the girl sitting in front of Richard and drinking coke in the picture was	
8. Melanie was from	
9. Jackie was teaching there of about	
10. The guy wearing the sandals in the picture was	
11. Richard's best friend was	
12. Maria Rita was from	
13. Rob and Maria Rita met in	

Listening Post-Test: Listen to the passage and fill in the Chart

1. Richard likes to study at	
2. For the woman while studying it is pleasant to be	
3. For Richard the most important thing for studying is	
4. While working the woman) uses her computer	
5. Richard thinks that while studying you need to have computer for	
6. The woman likes to pick up her books and spread them	
7. While studying the woman likes to drink	
8. Richard likes to drink	
9. Sometimes while studying Richard likes to	
10. The woman thinks listening to music while studying is	
11. Richard thinks that to eat something while studying is	
12. For Richard studying with friends is	
13. The woman thinks that studying with friends is	

APPENDIX B

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Do you like to listen to podcasts?
2. What kinds of improvements do you notice in your language learning?
3. Do you think that the usage of pocasts is helpful for language learning?
4. Would you like to integrate podcasts in your English language learning course?
5. Do you make notes while listening to podcasts?
6. Do you use dictionaries while listening to podcasts?
7. How many times do you listen to the same podcast episode?