THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PODCASTS TO IMPROVE THE LISTENING SKILLS OF L2 LEARNERS

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Abstract: *In recent years, podcasts have emerged as an effective digital tool for developing listening skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This paper explores the pedagogical potential of podcast-based learning in enhancing learners' listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall communicative competence. Drawing on contemporary research and classroom practices, the study examines the distinctive features of podcasts, including authenticity, accessibility, and flexibility, which make them particularly suitable for language learning. The findings suggest that when pedagogically scaffolded, podcasts can significantly improve listening proficiency and learner autonomy in both academic and professional settings.*

Keywords: *podcasts, listening skills, ICT, motivation*

In recent years, podcasts have become an increasingly popular tool in education, particularly in the field of language learning. A podcast is an audio or video file distributed on the Internet for playback on a personal computer or mobile device, representing one of the varieties of ICT[1]. At first glance, podcast

[1] O. Davydenko, 'Using BBC learning English podcasts to develop university students' listening skills', E-MENTOR, no. 5, pp. 26–35, 2021,

technology may appear distant from the field of education. In reality, this is not the case: thanks to the imagination and creativity of teachers and students, podcasts can breathe new life into the learning process. Researchers emphasise various advantages of this technology in education, and, most importantly, they advocate its use.

According to D. Schmidt[2], the use of podcasts contributes to students' comprehensive development, the development and improvement of research skills, learner autonomy, and more. This technology can be applied in teaching various academic disciplines, including in distance learning. In addition, podcasts provide opportunities for interdisciplinary connections, since a podcast can be created on any topic and for any subject.I t should be noted that to work with ready-made podcasts, users do not necessarily need any technical equipment (e.g., an iPod, MP3 player, or mobile phone). Such devices are required only to ensure the portability of the listening process. Even without them, a user with Internet access can listen to podcasts on a personal computer. In cases of limited Internet access, the teacher can create a database of podcasts for use in class or for students' autonomous work. The main advantages of such a database are its relevance and the possibility of updating it with authentic materials at any time with minimal cost[3].

Podcasts offer a highly diverse classification, and the criteria for their systematisation are equally varied. They can be classified by recording type and nature of the core information, access type, regional characteristics, target audience, educational level, degree of authenticity, authorship, podcast structure, and so on. The first category of podcasts is distinguished by recording type and the nature of the core information: audio podcasts, video podcasts, and screencasts.

[2] Schmit, D. Kidcast - Some thoughts about Video Podcasting. 2007 // Intelligenic [Electronic resource] / URL:
http://www.intelligenic.com/blog/?p=158 (дата обращения 21.11.2010).
[3] Stanley, G. Podcasting for ELT. 2005 // Teachingenglish.org [Electronic resource] / URL:
http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/podcastingelt (дата обращения 21.11.2010

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Table 2.1. The classification of podcasts by recording type[4].

Audio podcast (audiocast)	An audio podcast is an audio recording of ideas, thoughts, lectures, or interviews in a foreign language, usually in MP3 format, intended for playback on MP3 players or computers. Approximately 48% of podcasts are audio podcasts. Teachers themselves can also record audio podcasts for their students.
Video podcast (vodcast)	A video podcast is a video recording of lectures, interviews, presentations and informal speeches in a foreign language. They are typically produced in formats such as MP4 and AVI using a digital video camera. In videocasts, high quality plays a secondary role as these videocasts are not intended to demonstrate professional filmmaking skills.
Screencast	A screencast is a relatively new type of podcast that simplifies the online learning process. A screencast represents a recording of the author's actions on a computer screen in Flash video format. They are created using a microphone and audio recording systems such as Pinnacle Podcast Factory.

From Table 2.1, it can be seen that audio podcasts enhance auditory listening, while video podcasts promote multimodal comprehension, and screencasts are effective for online learning. Another classification deals with the content of the podcasts, and Sze[5] categorised them into eight types (Fig.3.1):

[4] Малушко Е.Ю., Методика формирования иноязычной профильной аудитивной компетенции магистрантов лингвистики (на основе инфокоммуникационной технологии подкастов, английский язык); Дисс... д. пед. наук. – Волгоград 2013.– 65-66 с

[5] Sze, P. M. Developing students' listening and speaking skills through ELT podcasts.Education journal-Hong Kong-Chinese university of Hong Kong-, 2006. 34(2), 115

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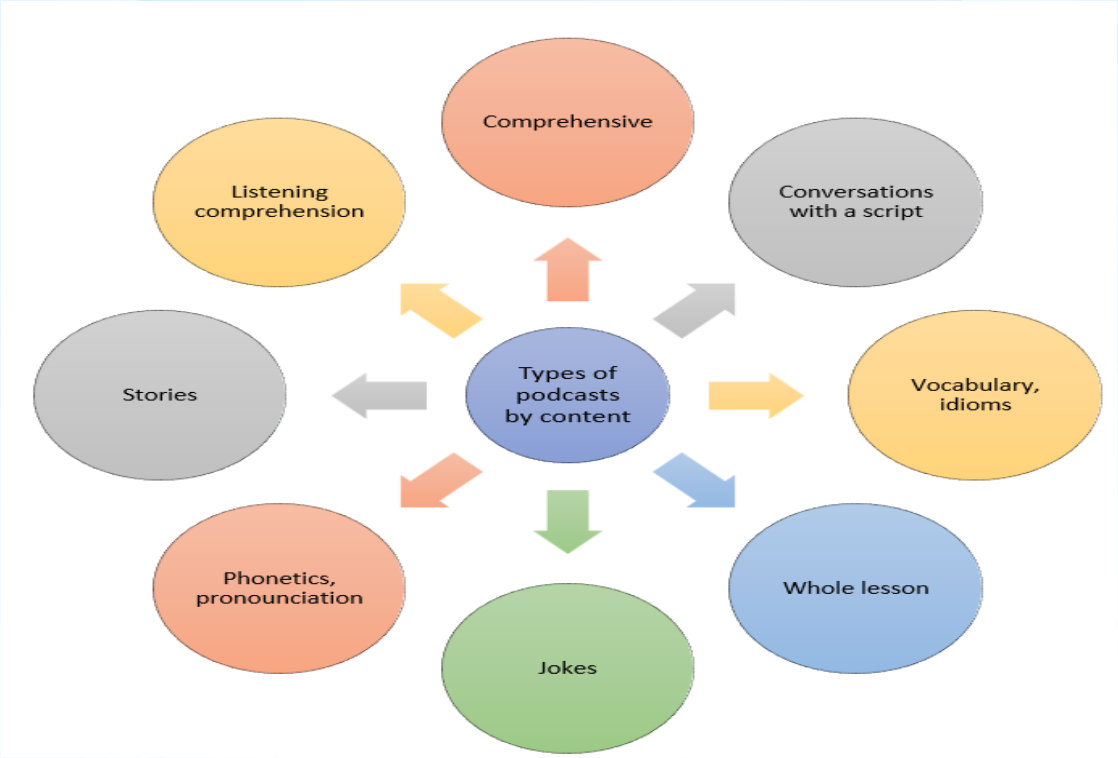


Fig.2.1.Types of podcasts according to the classification of Szi

Comprehensive podcasts cover listening comprehension activities, interviews, and vocabulary, while conversation-with-a-script podcasts feature interviews with native speakers. Stories are podcasts in the form of a story read by the host. Another type focuses on teaching vocabulary and idioms and their usage in context. Podcasts, characterized by their accessibility and portability, offer a wide range of pedagogical and methodological advantages[6]:

1. *Expansion of learning environment*- podcasts significantly expand the learning environment both in the classroom and in out-of-class settings. They allow students to practice listening skills at their own pace and according to their individual needs. Students can write transcripts, summarize and interpret podcast content, or create their own podcasts. As a result, podcasts contribute not only to the development of listening skills but also to the formation of independent learning skills.

[6] Аникина Ж.С., Развитие умений учебной автономии у студентов вуза при обучении иностранному языку с использованием подкастов; Дисс... д. пед. наук. – Томск 2013.– 81-82 с

2. *Promotion of intercultural communication*- podcasts enable learners with opportunities to participate in intercultural communication through authentic speech produced by native speakers from different cultural backgrounds. Whenever students listen to podcasts and share them on online platforms, they become part of a global community.

3. *Provision of additional language practice* – as discussed above, podcasts offer students opportunities for additional practice, particularly when they want to develop listening skills. Regular practice with podcasts improves students' ability to recognize pronunciation patterns, intonation, rhythm and connected speech. Moreover, podcasts support vocabulary expansion and the development of grammatical structures in meaningful contexts.

4. *Access to authentic learning materials*- authentic podcasts provide real-life language input and expose students to natural speech patterns, conversational structures and vocabulary.

5. *Enhancement of learner motivation*- podcasts often present interesting and real-life topics, which increase students' motivation to learn a foreign language. The use of modern digital tools makes learning more meaningful and engaging.

6. *Improvement of digital literacy skills* – the use of podcasts contributes significantly to the development of digital literacy that is an essential skill in modern education. Students learn how to search for various podcasts, select, download, create and use video and audio materials effectively. Additionally, students gain experience using online platforms and mobile applications for educational purposes.

Critically, podcasts align well with principles of second language acquisition. They provide rich input in the target language, often featuring natural spoken discourse with varying accents, speaking styles, and cultural references. Unlike scripted classroom audio, many podcasts offer *"real-life listening"* conditions. This authenticity is valuable because it trains learners to

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understand unscripted, spontaneous speech as it occurs in authentic contexts. Moreover, the vast range of podcast topics means learners can find content that genuinely interests them – from news and science to stories and interviews – which can increase engagement and motivation to listen actively.

Using podcasts in teaching foreign languages to philology students enhances their communicative and listening skills. These resources help students complete the tasks assigned by their instructors. By presenting relevant, current content from native speakers, students can improve their comprehension and pronunciation. Furthermore, authentic podcasts offer a variety of accents, speech rates, and contexts, allowing learners to adapt to different communicative situations.In summary, podcasts offer a dynamic, flexible, and immersive way for philology students to develop their listening skills by providing authentic language exposure, diverse content, and opportunities for active learning.

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4. Аникина Ж.С., Развитие умений учебной автономии у студентов вуза при обучении иностранному языку с использованием подкастов; Дисс... д. пед. наук. – Томск 2013.– 81-82 с

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