



The Role of Digital Audio Tools on Language Proficiency: A Study of Learners Perspectives in Sudan

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Article Info.

Article history:

Received 1 April 2025
Revised 12 April 2025
Accepted 16 May 2025
Published 28 June 2025

Keywords:

Media Communication, English Language, Education, Digital audio Tools.

How to cite:

Abbas Badawi (2025). The Role of Digital Audio Tools on Language Proficiency: A Study of Learners Perspectives in Sudan. Aca. Intl. J. Soc. Sci. H. 3 (1): 28-.35

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.59675/S313>

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Abstract

Traditional language learning techniques have changed as a result of the incorporation of audio and video books into EFL. This study examines the evolving role of these multimedia resources in EFL settings, exploring their advantages, challenges, and pedagogical implications. Some learners prefer audiobooks for passive listening, while others opt for podcasts for active learning. The study investigates which format students pick for learning English and how they perceive the benefits of these audio resources. This research highlights the potential of audiobooks and podcasts to create immersive language learning experiences that bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world language use by combining theoretical concepts with practical examples. The study concludes that Students consider podcasts to be more useful than audiobooks for learning English. Podcasts and audiobooks dramatically increase listening comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Students have a stronger preference for podcasts over audiobooks. Students who are motivated to use podcasts and audiobooks demonstrate improved involvement in English learning.

دور الأدوات الصوتية الرقمية في إتقان اللغة: دراسة لوجهات نظر الدارسين في السودان

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مخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة دور الأدوات الصوتية الرقمية، مثل الكتب الصوتية والبودكاست، في دعم إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية لدى الدارسين في السودان. وقد شهدت أساليب تعلم اللغة تحولاً ملحوظاً بفضل إدماع هذه الوسائط متعددة الأنماط، مما أتاح فرصاً جديدة للتعليم تجمع بين الجوانب النظرية والتطبيقية. تناولت الدراسة تفضيلات الدارسين بين الاستماع السلبي من خلال الكتب الصوتية والتعلم النشط عبر البودكاست، مما استكشفت مدى فعالية هذه الموارد في تحسين المهارات اللغوية، لا سيما الاستماع والمفردات والنطق. أظهرت النتائج أن البودكاست يُعد أكثر فاعلية من الكتب الصوتية من وجهة نظر غالبية الدارسين، وأن استخدام هذه الوسائط يعزز مشاركتهم وتفاعلهم داخل وخارج الفصول الدراسية. توصل البحث إلى أن دمج الموارد الصوتية الرقمية في تعلم اللغة يسهم في خلق بيئة تعلم أكثر تفاعلاً وسلاسة، تربط بين التعلم الرسمي والسينمائي اللغوي الواقعي. ما يعزز من فرص إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية لدى الدارسين في سدافات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بصفتها لغة أجنبية. الكلمات المفتاحية: وسائل التواصل، اللغة الإنجليزية، التعلم، أدوات الصوت الرقمية.

Introduction

According to Badawi and Albadri (2022), technology has become a commonplace feature in many homes worldwide during the last few decades. Every aspect of life has been impacted by it, including teaching English. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of media technology integration in ELT classes and to statistically assess the extent to which it aids students in developing the four language abilities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. When small language schools started using the phonograph, cinema, and tape recorder as teaching aids for English in the 1950s, media technology integration got underway. The introduction of video projectors and slide displays in the 1970s and 1980s enhanced audio and video training.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, language labs became standard in many of the world's most expensive language schools, and over the years, language underwent a variety of modifications at a steady, gradual rate (Albadri & Badawi, 2020). However, by the mid-1990s, many multimedia language applications had been available to teachers via the Internet. In the present period of English language instruction, media technologies such as video, images, animation, and interactive games, CDs or DVDs, the usage of the internet; chat rooms, video conferencing, and Apple's iPad have reduced distance and transformed the world into a global community. It allows learners to converse not just with their local community, but also with the worldwide community.

It has transformed methods of instruction and learning, making them more engaging and effective. Digital learning, according to Balaaco (1996), is "just in time" and on-demand, providing knowledge to employees at the appropriate time and location. On a bigger scale, this "anywhere-anytime" notion is beneficial to students. Nevertheless, a person who is skilled in a language has

acquired a set of rules that definitively assign meaning and sound to an endless variety of possible phrases (Albadri, 2016).

Problem Statement

Few empirical studies have compared the perceived efficacy of audiobooks and podcasts, despite their growing popularity. Some students prefer audiobooks for passive listening, while others choose podcasts for interactive learning. The study looks into which format students choose for learning English and how they view the advantages of these audio resources.

Objectives

1. To assess students' perceptions of podcasts and audiobooks for learning English.
2. To evaluate their effectiveness in improving listening comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
3. To identify students' preferences between podcasts and audiobooks.
4. To determine students' motivation levels in incorporating these tools into their learning routines.

Research Questions

1. How do students perceive the usefulness of podcasts and audiobooks for English learning?
2. Which resource is more effective in enhancing listening comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation?
3. What level of motivation do students have in using podcasts and audiobooks?
4. To what extent do students prefer podcasts over audiobooks?

Hypotheses

1. Students consider podcasts are more useful than audiobooks for learning English.
2. Podcasts and audiobooks dramatically increase listening comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
3. Students have a stronger preference for podcasts over audiobooks.
4. Students who are motivated to use podcasts and audiobooks demonstrate improved involvement in English learning.

Literature Review

Overview of Existing Research

Several studies emphasize the role of podcasts in foreign language education (Abdous et al., 2009; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007), highlighting their effectiveness in improving pronunciation and listening comprehension. Audiobooks have been explored in the context of passive learning, showing benefits in vocabulary acquisition (Cebeci & Tekdal, 2006).

Digital media is essential for improving the effectiveness of English language training, claim Shadiev and Yang (2020). Educational software, applications, and online learning platforms allow students to engage in interactive learning experiences (Darmirah, 2022). Students can actively participate in their education through a range of activities, games, tests, and simulations.

Through the use of digital media, technological advancements have altered the paradigm of education. Both students and teachers gain a great deal from this situation (Guan, Mou, & Jiang,

2020). Learners now have broader and more flexible access to learning resources thanks to digital media, including interactive learning videos, educational apps, online learning platforms, and educational software (Díaz Redondo, Caeiro Rodríguez, López Escobar, & Fernández Vilas, 2021).

Teachers can deliver lessons in a more engaging fashion that accommodates different learning styles, and students' participation in the learning process is further increased by the interactivity provided by digital media (El-Sabagh, 2021). Digital media also makes it easier for students and teachers to collaborate, creating chances for knowledge and ideas to be shared across geographical boundaries (Kamaruddin et al., 2023). Because educators may more readily access a variety of up-to-date educational resources in this digital age, instruction is becoming more flexible and sensitive to the requirements of students (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

In the last few decades, digital media has drastically altered the nature of education (Darmirah, 2022). Our approach to teaching and learning has been profoundly changed by the use of technology in the classroom (Hasanah et al., 2021). Since English is an international language that permeates many facets of life, such as commerce, science, and technology, learning it calls for creative and efficient teaching methods (Sofyan, 2021). Educational establishments like Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Tulang Bawang face both new opportunities and problems as a result of this paradigm change. The use of interactive media in the English language learning process has been made possible by advancements in digital media and information technology. But in addition to hardware and software, this shift also has an impact on how educational actors—especially students—think and perceive the world.

The findings of prior research indicate that there is a positive correlation between students' learning achievement and their use of digital media. Several research journals, including those published by Rasman, 2021, Maknun, 2022, Santosa, 2022, Kusumaningrum et al., 2022, and Rachmijati, 2018, claim that students learning English at different educational levels benefit from using a variety of digital media. It is believed that the findings of this study would help IAI Tulang Bawang create more effective English learning practices. Furthermore, this study can offer further information about how technology is often used in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which asserts that comprehensible input enhances language acquisition, and Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which explains how auditory learning aids memory retention and understanding.

Gaps in Literature

While research supports both formats, direct comparisons of podcasts and audiobooks in English language learning remain limited. This study addresses this gap by evaluating student perspectives on both tools.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative, survey-based study collecting numerical data through a structured questionnaire.

Population and Sample

The study surveyed **93 students** at the English Department, College of Languages, Sudan University of Science and Technology learning English as a foreign language.

Data Collection Methods

Participants answered 8 online questionnaire items measuring their perceptions, preferences, and motivation for using podcasts and audiobooks.

Data Analysis Methods

Responses were converted into percentages for comparison. Tables were used to display findings, supported by descriptive analysis.

Results & Discussion

Table 1: Statement No. 1, Podcasts are useful for learning English

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Important	39	42%
Neither Important nor Unimportant	24	26%
Slightly Important	21	23%
Not Important at All	7	8%

A majority (42%) find podcasts very important, reinforcing their role as a valued learning resource. However, 26% remain neutral, indicating mixed perceptions. The 8% disagreement suggests that podcasts may not suit all learners.

Table 2: Statement No. 2, Audiobooks are useful for learning English

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Important	37	40%
Neither Important nor Unimportant	16	17%
Slightly Important	20	22%
Not Important at All	20	21%

Opinions on audiobooks are more divided than podcasts. 40% consider them highly effective, but 21% see little value in them. This suggests that audiobooks appeal to certain learners but may not be as engaging for others.

Table 3: Statement No. 3: Podcasts improve listening skills

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	35	38%
Slightly Agree	28	30%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	19	20%
Slightly Disagree	9	10%

A combined 68% agreement suggests podcasts contribute significantly to listening skill development. However, 30% hold neutral or negative views, indicating variations in effectiveness depending on the learner’s engagement level.

Table 4: Statement No. 4, Podcasts improve vocabulary

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	50	54%
Slightly Agree	37	40%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4	4%
Slightly Disagree	7	8%

Nearly 95% agree that podcasts improve vocabulary, making them a highly effective learning tool.

Table 5: Statement No. 5, Podcasts improve pronunciation

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	44	47%
Slightly Agree	42	45%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6	6%
Slightly Disagree	4	4%

A consensus (92%) supports podcasts for pronunciation improvement. This aligns with previous research promoting spoken audio formats for pronunciation enhancement.

Table 6: Statement No. 6 & 7, Preference between Podcasts and Audiobooks

Response	Podcasts Preferred (%)	Audiobooks Preferred (%)
Strongly Agree	53%	30%
Slightly Agree	33%	16%
Neutral	11%	21%
Slightly Disagree	3%	25%

Discussion

The data highlights a clear preference for podcasts over audiobooks in English language learning. 53% of respondents strongly agree that they prefer podcasts, compared to only 30% for audiobooks. Additionally, 33% slightly agree with the preference for podcasts, whereas only 16% slightly agree in favor of audiobooks.

Interestingly, the neutral responses show some variability—21% remain undecided about audiobooks, compared to 11% for podcasts, suggesting that some students may find equal value in both formats or have no strong preference.

The negative responses further emphasize the distinction—only 3% slightly disagree with using podcasts over audiobooks, whereas 25% slightly disagree with favoring audiobooks. This suggests that while audiobooks do have their supporters, more students actively prefer podcasts as their primary auditory learning tool.

Interpretation

- Podcasts seem more engaging, possibly due to their dynamic nature, conversational tone, and flexibility in listening.
- Audiobooks may feel more structured and passive, which could explain the split preference.
- The high disagreement rate for audiobooks (25%) suggests that some students find them less useful or less enjoyable.

Implications:

Since podcasts hold stronger appeal and higher engagement, educational institutions could prioritize podcast-based learning materials, while still offering audiobooks for students who prefer narrative-style content. Future research could explore why some learners prefer audiobooks and whether they offer unique advantages over podcasts in different aspects of language learning.

Limitations

Constraints or Weaknesses

While the findings provide valuable insights into students' preferences and perceptions regarding podcasts and audiobooks, some limitations must be acknowledged:

1. Sample Size, the study surveyed 93 students, which may not represent a broader or more diverse population of English learners.
2. Lack of Longitudinal Data Responses capture a moment in time, but they do not measure long-term learning outcomes or retention rates.
3. Self-reported data, since the study relies on student perceptions, actual improvement in listening skills, vocabulary, and pronunciation was not objectively measured.
4. Limited Scope, the study primarily focuses on English learning, while similar research could explore how podcasts and audiobooks impact other language skills like writing and speaking fluency.
5. The study is limited to the students at College of Languages at Sudan university of science and Technology 2023-2024 academic year and this may not be generalized to other students.

Impact on Results

These limitations mean that while trends are visible, the study cannot provide definitive conclusions on the effectiveness of podcasts and audiobooks in comparison to other learning methods. Further experimental research involving controlled listening activities and pre/post assessments would help validate these findings.

Future Research Directions

Building on the insights from this study, future research could focus on:

1. Comparative studies on different auditory learning formats investigating how podcasts, audiobooks, and AI-generated speech tools compare in effectiveness across multiple language skills.
2. Longitudinal studies on learning retention measure how vocabulary and pronunciation retention improve over weeks or months of podcast/audiobook engagement.

3. Impact of Auditory Learning on Speaking Fluency Studying how frequent podcast listening contributes to oral fluency, accent improvement, and conversational skills.
4. Personalized learning approaches analyzing whether different student demographics respond better to podcasts or audiobooks based on age, proficiency level, and learning preferences.
5. Integration of AI-driven audio learning, exploring how AI-generated audiobooks or interactive spoken lessons might improve engagement and customized learning experiences.

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