

TEACHING LISTENING IN THE ERA OF PODCASTS AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Rahmatullaeva Muxlisa Mehriddin qizi¹

¹ Student, "Philology and Foreign Languages," Diplomat University in Tashkent

¹ Tel.: +998 95 072 22 37; E-mail: rakhmuxlisa@gmail.com

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Abstract. This article examines the growing role of podcasts and digital media in developing listening comprehension skills among language learners. In the context of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), authentic audio resources such as podcasts provide learners with genuine spoken language input, exposing them to natural speech rates, varied accents, and real-world discourse. At the same time, integrating digital media into listening instruction raises pedagogical challenges that require structured and thoughtful classroom design. This article investigates how podcasts and other digital tools can be applied within CLT-based instruction to strengthen listening competence and support learner autonomy.

Keywords: *Listening comprehension; Podcasts; Digital media; Language teaching; Authentic materials; CLT.*

Introduction

In contemporary language education, listening has become one of the most critical yet often overlooked skills in the curriculum. Traditional approaches to listening instruction have long relied on scripted textbook recordings that fail to capture the natural pace, hesitations, and diversity of real spoken language (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). With the rapid growth of digital technologies, however, teachers now have access to a wide range of authentic audio resources, including podcasts, online radio, and video platforms, which offer meaningful alternatives to conventional classroom materials (Hasan & Akhand, 2020). Podcasts, in particular, have gained considerable attention as a pedagogical tool in language teaching. They expose learners to genuine discourse, varied accents, and everyday vocabulary, all of which are essential for developing real-world listening competence (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). At the same time, integrating digital media into listening instruction presents practical challenges that require thoughtful pedagogical design (Field, 2008). This article will examine how podcasts and digital media can be effectively used within a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework to strengthen listening skills and promote learner autonomy.

Main Body

Authentic Listening Materials and Digital Media

Communicative Language Teaching has consistently highlighted the importance of exposing learners to authentic input -that is, language produced for genuine communicative purposes rather than for instructional ones (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Podcasts represent a natural source of such input. They feature real discourse, spontaneous speech, and a wide range of speaker voices, which together expose learners to the kind of language they are likely to encounter in everyday life. Research confirms that consistent engagement with authentic listening materials strengthens learners' listening strategies and their ability to cope with ambiguity in natural speech (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Key features of podcasts as authentic listening material:

- Natural speech rate, hesitation, and rhythm
- Diverse topics and registers
- Variety of accents and speaker backgrounds
- Freely and easily accessible via digital devices

Challenges of Using Digital Media in Listening Instruction

Despite their clear advantages, digital listening materials also introduce a range of pedagogical challenges. The most significant of these is the fast speech rate typical of authentic spoken language, which - combined with reduced forms, linking, and elision - can make comprehension genuinely difficult for lower-level learners (Field, 2008). Unfamiliar accents and variable audio quality present further obstacles, particularly in podcast formats recorded in informal settings. In addition, the sheer volume of available digital content makes it challenging for teachers to identify materials that are both linguistically appropriate and aligned with curriculum objective

Common challenges when using podcasts in the language classroom:

- Fast speech rate and reduced phonological forms
- Unfamiliar regional or non-native accents
- Background noise and inconsistent audio quality
- Difficulty identifying level-appropriate content

Pedagogical Strategies for Integration

Effective integration of podcasts and digital media into listening instruction requires a structured, process-oriented approach that supports learners at each stage of the listening activity. Prior to listening, pre-listening tasks - such as activating background knowledge, previewing key vocabulary, and establishing a clear listening purpose - reduce cognitive load and build learner confidence. During listening, focused tasks including note-taking, gap-fill activities, or identifying the speaker's attitude encourage active engagement with the text. Following the listening activity, post-listening tasks such as discussion, written summary, or language focus work extend learners' engagement and promote the integration of listening with other language skills (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

A three-phase framework for podcast-based listening lessons:

- Pre-listening: activate schema, introduce vocabulary, set listening purpose
- While-listening: note-taking, true/false tasks, gap-fill activities
- Post-listening: discussion, written summary, language analysis

Promoting Learner Autonomy through Extensive Listening

One of the most significant benefits of digital media as a listening resource lies in its potential to support extensive listening beyond the classroom. Just as extensive reading programmes encourage learners to engage with large volumes of self-selected texts, extensive listening invites regular, voluntary engagement with audio content chosen according to personal interest (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Research shows that extensive listening contributes meaningfully to vocabulary growth, listening fluency, and overall proficiency development. Teachers can support this practice by helping learners identify suitable podcast content and by setting simple reflection tasks - such as a brief listening log - to encourage regularity without imposing excessive demands.

Conclusion

The integration of podcasts and digital media into language instruction significantly enhances the development of listening competence and communicative skills. Digital listening tools provide authentic input, immediate exposure to real-world discourse, and flexible learning opportunities that support both in-class and independent practice (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Renandya & Farrell, 2011). By combining traditional listening pedagogy with digital resources,

language education can become more individualized, engaging, and effective - helping learners develop the listening skills necessary for successful communication in real-world contexts (Field, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Podcasts and digital media can serve as powerful tools in fostering meaningful listening competence for all learners.

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