

## **PODCAST: An alternative way to improve EFL students' listening and speaking performance**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article aims to view the impacts of using podcast in improving listening and speaking performance. As there is a trend of using ICT in language teaching growths, the authors intend to discuss about the media that can be used in enhancing students' ability in listening skill and speaking performance. The authors collected the information related to the topic of this article from several sources such as, books, journal articles, and previous studies. From these sources, it can be concluded that podcast can bring many benefits in teaching listening and speaking for EFL learners.

**Keywords:** *podcast; listening comprehension; speaking performance*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In developing countries, such as Indonesia, English is considered as a foreign language (Kachru, 1992), which is a compulsory subject to learn, especially in Indonesian secondary schools. This means that Indonesian students have limited exposure to English as they only have English in formal setting, as English is not normally used outside the classroom. Consequently, the students' English performance is still considered low and needs improvement (Mulyadi, 2011). This is in accordance with the previous study by Sawir (2005) who claims that most

international students from Asia, including Indonesia, had listening and speaking difficulty due to the fact that they were not well-prepared with those skills in their secondary schools. In fact, the students' listening skill should be one of the focus skills to acquire in order to improve their students' speaking skill (Hasan & Hoon, 2012; Weiler, 2012). Thus, the secondary school English teachers should consider employing podcast as one of the possible alternative to overcome this issue as suggested by Rosell-Aguilar (2007). Podcasting (the combination of the word *iPod* and *broadcasting*) is an asynchronous CMC (Computer Mediated Communication), which contains audio/video that are published on the Internet and updated in a regular interval (Stanley, 2006).

The advantages of using podcast in language learning—particularly to assist the students in listening and speaking skill—have been researched, and the results show increase in the students' listening and speaking performance (Stanley, 2006; O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007; Lord, 2008; Knight, 2010; Ashraf, Noroozi & Salami, 2011; Istanto, 2011; Hasan & Hoon, 2012, 2013; Al-Fadda & Al-Qasim, 2013). In addition, some other studies also found that the students' motivation and positive attitude towards language learning increased when podcast was used to support the learning process (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007; Ducate & Lomicka, 2009; Ashraf et al., 2011; Hasan & Hoon 2012; Al-Fadda & Al-Qasim, 2013). Moreover, an experimental study with Iranian EFL students also revealed that the students who used podcast had higher listening comprehension score and higher learning motivation, compared to those who did not (Shiri, 2015). Shiri (2015) further explained the interview result in which the students considered podcast as being an important learning tool to support their listening and speaking performance. These previous research results obviously support the use of podcast in language learning. Therefore, in this article, we firstly elaborated four main reasons of why podcast could help improve Indonesian secondary school students' listening and speaking performance. Additionally, we also discussed some important consideration in employing podcast as a learning tool with TPACK framework. Finally, we highlighted some possible challenges in integrating podcast into language classrooms in Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Using Podcast in Teaching Listening and Speaking*

In this digital era, the influence of ICT in language teaching is undeniable. Teachers can easily obtain the teaching material from various sources. Varied teaching media that can be enabled in language teaching are also developed recently. Podcast is one of the media that is currently discussed today. According to Jordan (2007) as cited in Bustari, Samad & Ahmad (2017, p. 97) *"the term podcast is a combination between the words pod (i.e., from the brand name iPod) and broadcast."* Related to the definition above, podcast can be categorized one of the media that can be implemented in teaching and learning process especially teaching English.

Listening and Speaking are two interrelated skills. Speaking is indeed a vital skill in communication that needs to be taught. However, it is also important to teach listening skills and ensure that they can listen effectively and critically. Listening is considered profound in the development of speaking since it provides input that can promote speaking (Ramli & Kurniawan, 2017). Furthermore in order to get a better comprehension in listening, we also have to consider some components of speaking (Fitch-Hauser, Powers, O'Brien, & Hanson, 2007; Richards, 2008). Usually when teachers want to teach listening to their students, they also include speaking in it. Consequently, they have to find the media which are appropriate to be applied in both skills. Particularly, podcast is one of the media which is considered can deal with both skills.

Specifically speaking, curriculum changes periodically in Indonesia,. Several years ago, the objective of teaching English to the EFL' learners emphasized on receptive skill only, but now it has changed as the new trends of teaching rose in language teaching. To obtain the synergy, the new trends of language teaching tools also need to be utilized; one good tool is the podcast.

One of the skills in English that is considered difficult to be learnt for EFL learners in Indonesia is listening since it needs listeners' focus and concentration. Ahmed (2016) in her study found that implementing podcasts in language teaching

can assist learners to have a good understanding about the content and to develop their ability in listening comprehension. Further, speaking is one of the productive skills that is widely learnt in Indonesia. Someone is considered to be able to speak in English when she/he is able to communicate fluently in English (Richards, 2008). Henceforth, teachers have to implement various methods in teaching speaking in order to make students able to speak English well. Besides providing suitable methods, teaching media also play an important role in teaching and learning process (Smaldino, Lowther, Russell, & Mims, 2008). Particularly in this article, the use of podcast is pondered to be useful in both listening and speaking as it can also provide ample classroom activities (Sze, 2006). In short, related to the explanation above, podcast is considered as the appropriate media that can be used in teaching speaking.

A number of previous studies have been conducted on this topic. Edisitingha (2007) as cited from Fitria, Vianty & Petrus (2015) found that Podcasts can ease students to practice listening. Besides, it also helps them to enhance their speaking performance. Then Baehaqi (2014) claims that using podcast in language teaching classroom can engage learners' motivation to be involved in the activities provided. Furthermore, Ramli and Kurniawan (2017) proved that podcast can bring many interesting topics that pose a lot of language inputs to students.

## DISCUSSION

There are some rationales why podcast can be used in order to improve the students' English listening and speaking performance. The first reason of why podcast could help Indonesian students enhance their listening and speaking skill is the fact that podcast enables students to be exposed to authentic language use of English. This is, particularly, because the materials in podcast cover a wide range of topics with real life speech and are generally prepared by native speakers (Thorne & Payne, 2005; Stanley, 2005; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007; Hasan & Hoon, 2013). For example, from the authentic podcast materials, the students can listen to everyday conversations in the real life situation, familiarise themselves with English pronunciation and practice their listening as well as speaking skill. The exposure to

the authentic materials is unquestionably important to provide a meaningful language learning experience (Brown, 2007), especially in Indonesia, where the students have limited experience in real life communication outside the classroom (Hapsari & Ratri, 2014). This meaningful learning experience will further increase their engagement and motivation to learn English and improve their listening and speaking performance, as explained by O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007). Then, Fata and Ismail (2017) conform to the fact that media exposure such as internet, webpages, English songs, English movies, and English TV shows has numerous contribution in language learning process for Indonesian students. This is also in line with Hasan and Hoon (2012) who claimed that 87% students enjoyed using podcast as it was an interesting way to learn English and the students also admitted the role of podcast in improving their listening skill.

The second underlying reason is that podcast could encourage self-regulated learning outside classroom. The facts that, first, there are a large number of students at Indonesian secondary schools (around 35 students per class) (OECD, 2012); and second, that there is a limited time allocated to learn English in class, contribute to the students' poor listening and speaking performance. Therefore, the English teachers should motivate students to be able to learn English independently by using podcasts, particularly outside the classroom (McCarty, 2005; Thorne & Payne, 2005; O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007). The convenience that podcast offers, such as 24/7 accessibility, automaticity, simplicity and portability, allows students to listen to English language repeatedly at almost anytime and anywhere (Lee & Chan, 2006, 2007; Jowitt, 2008; Abdous, Camarena & Facer, 2009; Ashraf et al., 2011; Hasan & Hoon, 2013). For example, students can practice their listening through podcast materials that have been downloaded to their personal computer, mp3 players, or iPods in their spare time at home. This self-regulated listening activity will likely result in English improvement, particularly because the students are responsible and have control over their own learning in terms of choosing what, when, and where to listen from the podcasts (Lee & Chan, 2007; Istanto, 2011). Since students can choose which content they want to listen, the students' motivation can also incline as they can integrate their interests into the learning process (Dornyei, 2001).

This self-regulated learning is also essential to develop students' autonomy, which will further improve their language learning performance ((Brown, 2007; Al-Fadda & Al-Qasim, 2013).

The third reason is that podcasts could help increase students' confidence in listening and speaking skill. The fact that Indonesian students have lack of confidence in listening and speaking skill is also confirmed by Juhana's (2012) study about psychological factors. She clarified that low confidence impede Indonesian students from speaking English. Using available podcast material independently and producing podcast talk through collaborative learning are two possible podcast activities that can enhance students' confidence in listening and speaking skill (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). For instance, when listening to podcast independently, students can comfortably learn English without being afraid to be judged by their teacher or peers, as clarified by Knight (2010). In addition, the activity of creating podcast in a small group work could also help less confident students to feel more prepared and supported, as they will collaboratively work together to rehearse the talk before they publish it (Chan & Lee, 2005; Lee & Chan, 2006, 2007; Sze, 2006; Lord, 2008; Knight, 2010). This activity will further result in the increase in students' motivation as well as the improvement in students' speaking skill, particularly for less confident students.

The final reason is the fact that podcast could encourage active learning. This is in accordance with Stanley (2006) who believes that when the podcast content is successfully chosen (by the teacher/students), the active class discussion can be encouraged. Besides, Rosell-Aguilar (2007) recommends producing podcast as an effective group work activity, particularly because it will engage students in practicing their speaking skill. The most engaging part of activity in creating podcast materials is the community building (Lord, 2008; Al-Fadda & Al-Qasim, 2013); not only when the students work collaboratively in group to produce the podcast, but also when the podcast is published, in which the students will have real audience around the world, listening to their talks (Stanley, 2006). Stanley (2006) further suggests English teacher to get involved in an inter-school podcast project that allow to exchange the podcast talk as well as comment and respond to each other (as

asynchronous activity). Additionally, the combination of podcast and Skype will serve as another possible follow-up synchronous activity that the teacher could employ. In this manner, the students could have a face-to-face (online) language interaction through Skype (Stanley, 2006). The active learning activities will finally increase the students' motivation and English performance, particularly in listening and speaking skill.

Even though integrating podcasts in language learning has been claimed to benefit the students in improving their English skill (Abdous et al., 2009; Kim & King, 2011; Hasan & Hoon, 2013), it is important to remember that in order to integrate podcast into the process of teaching and learning listening and speaking skill effectively, the teacher should apply TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) as the teaching framework, as suggested by Koehler & Mishra (2009). This teaching framework has covered necessary knowledge that the teachers should have before conducting the process of teaching and learning with technology. In terms of pedagogical and content knowledge, the English teachers should consider the appropriateness of materials and classroom tasks, including the follow-up activity to actively engage the students in the learning process and successfully achieve the set learning goals. This is in line with Rosell-Aguilar (2007) who urges teachers to use their creativity in selecting the podcasts materials to meet the purpose of learning in order to help students develop their listening and speaking skill effectively. For example, in integrating the use of podcast into the language learning process, it is important to remember that Indonesian students have different level of English proficiency, so that task differentiation is needed. Therefore, English teachers could assign more advanced students to listen to podcast materials that are more authentic (a normal speech conversation with more informal language use/everyday vocabulary); while low level students could listen to a specifically designed podcast materials with a slower speech to help them get used to English pronunciation and learn the listening and speaking skill (Sze, 2006; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007; Chan, Chi, Chin, & Lin, 2011). In addition to the pedagogical and content knowledge, Shiri (2015) also highlights the importance of technological knowledge, particularly on how to access (subscribe and download) the podcast materials and how to make the

effective use of the tool. To have this technological knowledge, the teacher can learn from relevant teacher training (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) or from their peers. The teacher should then ensure that students are also aware on how to access podcasts before having the students to learn with it (Hasan & Hoon, 2012, Abdous et al., 2009). This technological knowledge is important for both teacher and students to receive maximum benefits of podcast in supporting language-learning process, as highlighted by Istanto (2011).

Nevertheless, there are several possible challenges, including the Internet problem (Hur & Suh, 2012) and insufficient technological devices, which might obstruct the use of podcast in Indonesian teaching and learning context. In terms of Internet connection problem, the teachers could either download the podcast content into *CDs/mp3* players to be presented as teaching and learning resources in the classroom, as recommended by Stanley (2006) or suggest the school to provide better Internet connection. Meanwhile, for the lack of technological devices problem, the teachers should manage to allow all students to get access to podcasts equally by having the students to use the device interchangeably or by encouraging the schools to provide borrowed portable device, such as *iPods* to assist the process of teaching and learning foreign language (McCarty, 2005). The later solution, of course, will take time. However, we believe that it is possible to do, particularly with the support of all stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, podcast is an effective teaching tool to enhance the Indonesian students' speaking and listening skill since it can provide access to authentic materials, support self-regulated learning, increase language confidence as well as create active learning. However, in order to integrate the use of podcast effectively into the language classroom, the teacher should consider TPACK framework and should be aware of the possible obstacles. More studies, particularly in Indonesian context, are required to find out more about the effective use of podcast in the process of teaching and learning English, particularly the listening

and speaking skill. Additionally, it is also important to bear in mind that podcast is only a medium to support, but not to replace the teaching and learning process.

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