CAPÍTULO 1

Perceptions of Senior High School students about the use of podcasts on enhancing listening comprehension skills

Percepciones de estudiantes de secundaria sobre el uso de podcasts en el incremento de las habilidades de comprensión auditiva

Autores:

Cristian Andres Pacheco Tapia
Universidad Nacional de Loja
cristian.a.pacheco.t@unl.edu.ec
Loja, Ecuador
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2707-327X

Marcia Iliana Criollo Vargas
Universidad Nacional de Loja
marcia.criollo@unl.edu.ec
Loja, Ecuador
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5326-2456

Marcela Ocampo Jaramillo
Universidad Nacional de Loja
marcela.ocampo@unl.edu.ec
Loja,Ecuador
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8661-8124

Andrea Carolina Palacio Serrano
Universidad Nacional de Loja
Andrea.palaciosserrano@gmail.com
Loja, Ecuador
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1555-7222

Correspondencia:
cristian.a.pacheco.t@unl.edu.ec

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is considered to be one of the fundamental skills to acquire when learning English as a foreign language (EFL) since the practice and development of this ability allow learners to interpret and understand spoken messages in order to become better listeners (Tran and Duong, 2020; Barjesteh & Ghaseminia, 2019; Ha and Thuy, 2021; Faramarzi et al., 2019). For that reason, the Ministry of Education of Ecuador (MINEDUC) proposed that all students of high school should acquire a B1.2 level in English proficiency at the time of finishing their high-school stage. Additionally, the same MINEDUC (2016) recommends "the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a means to expose learners to a variety of authentic listening texts" (p. 209).

Unfortunately, the majority of EFL students struggle with listening comprehension, and it appears to be one of the most difficult abilities to master (Diora and Rosa, 2020). This is true in many countries where English is not their mother tongue. In the same vein, listening is one of the main challenges English language learners face, as there are unfamiliar sounds that appear in English but not in their native language, which leads to difficulties in listening comprehension (Yến and Waring, 2022). In that sense, it is essential to find out about the suitable techniques, strategies, and tactics to confront these difficulties presented in the development of listening comprehension skills.

As a result, a strategy that can be used to face this issue is the use of podcasts inside the classroom because podcasts have been proven to be effective and useful as an English teaching tool that students can benefit from by understanding what they are hearing and improving their listening skills. In the same way, other studies concluded that English language skills such as listening and speaking, are improved by podcasts (Fardavoodi et al., 2020; Yuste and de la Peña, 2023; Harahap, 2020). Additionally, the use of podcasts had shown that learners had positive attitudes upon this tool,

since it allow students to increase their motivation and interest, enjoy the class more while listening to podcasts, feel to be exposed to English in real life situations and improve their critical thinking skills as well (Abdulrahman et al, 2018; Rahman et al., 2018; Urbina, 2022, as cited in Al-Jarf, 2023; Guerrero and Villacís, 2023, Yuste & de la Peña, 2023).

Consequently, after giving some facts about the benefits that podcasts had on students listening comprehension skills, it is necessary to mention that this research aims to find out the students' perceptions about the benefits of podcasts to enhance listening comprehension skills among senior high school students at a public institution in Loja city. On the basis of this objective, the following research question was stated: What is the students' perception about the implementation of podcasts to enhance listening skills among senior high school students at a public institution in Loja? This will help to gain a deeper insight into the benefits that podcasts have on listening comprehension and understand the practical usages podcasts have within the field of teaching listening in English as a Foreign Language.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the theoretical foundations of the two main variables found at the time of designing this research which were, podcasts and listening comprehension. The review of the previous studies allows the researcher to provide some definition and characteristics of podcasts as well as the benefits that other researchers found during their studies such as; increase of motivation, interest, enjoyment for the class, exposure to English in real life situations and the improvement of the students critical thinking skills. After that, the definition of what is listening comprehension is given, then the researcher provides with more information about the subskills that conform to listening which were attempted to enhance by using the benefits that podcasts had to offer within the educational field. All of this information

was collected from different researchers, sources, and databases like Google Scholar and ERIC.

- ○ **What are podcasts?**

Podcasts are an automatic distribution of audio or visual content across a network usually with no cost to the subscriber. Also, podcasts can be frequently distributed online after someone has been subscribed, or even sometimes it is not necessary to be subscribed because some podcasts have free access depending on the website. In addition, some authors said that podcasts are similar to radio or television shows, but the thing that differentiates them from traditional media is that they are distributed online additionally, they have been studied as possible teaching materials when it comes to foreign languages, especially English. (Deda, 2023; Al-Jarf, 2023; Yuste and de la Peña; 2023)

- ○ Importance and benefits of podcasts in education

Podcasts are considered an e-tool capable of changing the class environment for good. As an example, Goldman (2018) claims that "Podcasts provide teachers with the ability to grow students' listening skills, and new classroom activities to improve a student's learning experience" (p. 5). Likewise, some researchers found that "integrating podcasts in the learning process improved academic performance, promoted motivation, and increased learning interest. In addition, it improved not only listening but also different language skills and areas like speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar" (Hasibuan and Male, 2022, p. 303).

From the mentioned above, it is possible to cite a list where it will be easier to find all the benefits of using podcasts. Kay (2012) made the following table by reading a great number of studies about the usage of podcasts in education:

Table 1

Summary about the benefits of using podcasts in education

BENEFIT	N. OF STUDIES	DETAILS
Reason for Learning	23	▪ Review for assessment ▪ Preparing for class, understanding, note taking ▪ Improve face-to-face classes
Control	9	▪ Location, time and pace of learning
Missed classes	9	▪ Students can review missed lectures
ATTITUDES Affective	14	▪ Enjoyable, motivating, interesting, stimulating
Cognitive	15	▪ Useful, helpful, effective, very positive about creating podcasts, easy to use
BEHAVIORS Frequency	7	▪ No. Of downloads, views per week, % of students who viewed, % podcasts viewed
Attendance	4	▪ Viewing podcasts had not impact on attendance, may depend of type of podcast used
Study habits	6	▪ Independence, self-reflection, efficient test preparation, better review, increased contact
LEARNING PERFORMANCE Test scores	7	▪ Higher scores in tests than traditional approaches
Self-report	2	▪ Team and technology skills, teaching skills
Practical tasks	2	▪ Sunscreen use, field techniques

Note. Adapted from Exploring the use of video podcasts in education: A comprehensive review of the literature, by (Kay, 2012, p. 825).

Motivation. The study conducted by Abdulrahman et al. (2018) found "learner's motivation to learn English increased with the use of podcasts because of the features that podcasts had during the classroom activities" (p.29). As a consequence, to make use of this advantage that podcasts had, teachers need to take into account the different preferences that their students have, as it increases motivation and engagement since the podcasts selected will more likely be of interest to the students (Sotlikova and Haerazi, 2023).

Interest. Podcasts are considered an innovative tool for EFL learners since they offer a different and engaging way to improve listening skills. This can be proven by what a participant said in the study carried out by Rahman et al. (2018) where the participant said that podcasts are "very interesting because it was a new thing for us when compared by only doing an exercise on the textbook dictation" (p.6). Additionally, another participant from the same study said "the podcast was very interesting because it is an amazing method, different from what teachers have done in the classroom" (p. 6).

Enjoyment. Listening to interesting and relatable content in the form of stories, interviews, or discussions keeps students engaged and motivated. Besides, podcasts provide a captivating and immersive learning experience because "they serve as a way to enrich the students' communication skills while equipping them with a proper resource for enjoying...learning in a foreign language" (Urbina, 2022, as cited in Al-Jarf, 2023, p.37).

Exposure to English in real life situations. Guerrero and Villacís (2023) stated that "adding authentic material as podcasts to an English class supports positively the language learning process" (p.13). Because podcasts showcase how native speakers naturally use the language in various contexts. With this, learners gain practical insights into how English is used in everyday life, improving their listening comprehension and conversational skills for real-life interactions.

Critical thinking. As students listen to podcasts, they are encouraged to analyze, evaluate, and interpret the information presented. Podcasts can challenge learners to question assumptions, and make connections between new information and their existing knowledge (Yuste & de la Peña, 2023). As a result, it increases the critical thinking skills as well as the listening comprehension skills of EFL learners.

What is listening comprehension?

Listening comprehension can be defined as the skill of understanding spoken language or verbal communication in a foreign language context. It involves the ability to not only grasp the words and phrases being spoken but also to comprehend the intended meaning, context, nuances, and possibly even the emotions conveyed by the speaker (Yến and Waring, 2022; Mulyadi et al., 2021). Effective listening comprehension requires the listener to actively process and interpret the information presented, which often involves a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural knowledge to make sense of what is being said

Importance of listening comprehension

It can also be defined as a basic ability in the language development of an EFL learner, because developing strong listening comprehension helps students move toward other abilities making it easier and practical to acquire them. Thus, the most important skill to learn when learning a new language should be listening, because speaking, reading, and writing is all dependent on understanding spoken words; comprehension should come before reproduction. In addition, he found strong evidence which suggests a connection between language acquisition and listening comprehension. So, in this way it is possible to say that listening skills are a prerequisite for other skills, therefore emphasizing them before oral abilities leads to faster second-language acquisition. (Tran and Duong, 2020).

Listening comprehension sub-skills

This important skill is derived into other different sub-skills that are essential for the facilitation of the learners listening comprehension process, as they can be adapted depending on the student's level and the type of listening activity. Effective listening comprehension involves the integration of the sub-skills that will be mentioned, allowing individuals to understand spoken language more comprehensively and accurately. Developing and boosting these sub-skills is essential for becoming a proficient listener in EFL (Paredes and Pilco, 2022; Martínez and Judith, 2019).

Listening for the gist. Just as Siegel (2018) said, listening for gist refers to clearly understanding the main idea of the audio material putting aside the rest of the specific details is a crucial ability. Fundamentally, this kind of listening permits individual choices based on motivation, curiosity, and focused attention. Once the primary idea of a text is understood, the listener has a variety of options: quit listening, continue reading at a gist level, or carefully pay attention for further information. Consequently, listening at the gist level causes subsequent cognitive processes.

Likewise, another benefit of listening for the gist is that this sub-skill is possible to use previous knowledge at the time of hearing a podcast or any other audio material because apart from using linguistic skills, a person also relies on context and their prior knowledge to understand the overall meaning of audio material while listening for the main idea (Camacás and Orlando, 2021).

Listening for specific information. The listening for specific information sub-skill refers to listeners who will focus on a specific item that captures their interest. Learners can use this ability to locate the particular item they are seeking (Lopez and Saldarriaga, 2022). Also, listening for specific information is a great sub-skill for the students to recognize specific words, phrases, sounds, and even sentences, making it a sub-skill focused on

specific details and specific questions where students need to pay more attention to get what is asked by the teacher (Aguilera et al., 2016).

Inferring. This sub-skill can be defined as the cognitive process where a listener draws conclusions or makes reasonable assumptions about the intended meaning of spoken language, based on their understanding of the context, the speaker's tone and emphasis, and their own prior knowledge. This is supported by the definition that the British Council (w/d) gave us, "Inference is the technique of finding answers from clues and from prior knowledge rather than directly".

This sub-skill is very important for the fact that it helps learners with: identifying implied meanings, understanding non-literal language, engaging with the speaker, and improving their critical thinking skills, just as Melissa (2020) said in his video, "good listeners infer by using what they already know, prior knowledge, along with clues in the audios, audio evidence, to form an idea".

Predicting. In listening comprehension, predicting is the process of forming coherent guesses or hypotheses about the content or direction of a given audio based on the speaker's emphasis, and other indicators as well as the listener's own experience.

It is crucial to keep in mind that one's previous knowledge of the world and the language, as well as how much one knows about the speaker and what they are attempting to communicate, all have a significant impact on one's capacity for prediction. The initial point for developing the predictive skill should place a strong emphasis on getting students to become aware of their own prior knowledge in order to get them to recognize and use it as the basis for their predictions and (Jiang, 2009).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was based on the mixed method approach in which the researcher gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the sub-question detailed in the introduction, this approach was chosen because "the uses of both quantitative and qualitative data, in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem" (Creswell, 2012, p. 535).

As a result, the selection of participants for this study was made by using the "convenience sample technique," which Creswell (2012) describes as when the researcher opts for individuals who are willing and available to participate. In this instance, the researcher cannot confidently assert that these individuals truly represent the broader population. Therefore, the students who took part in this study were students attending the first year of "Bachillerato General Unificado" (BGU), specifically the group "C" during the academic year 2022-2023, at a public institution of Loja. This group consisted of 30 students, comprising 17 females and 13 males, and their ages ranged from approximately 14 to 15 years old.

The data for this study was collected by using the survey technique (Creswell, 2012) where the researcher designed a questionnaire that was implemented in order to obtain the students' perceptions on the benefits of podcasts to enhance their listening comprehension skills. This questionnaire consisted of seven multiple choice questions with an addition of a "Why?" under each question in order for them to give their reasons for their responses. This let the students indicate their level of agreement or disagreement as well as their thoughts and reasons for their responses about the questions made. Also, in order to prove the veracity of the data collected from the questionnaire the researcher made detailed field notes that according to the Association for Qualitative Research (AQR) (2023) these are "notes made by the researcher in the course of qualitative fieldwork, often observations of participants, locations or events" which were

valuable sources of information about what exactly happened in each class during the intervention proposals.

The research design of the study was based on practical action research since as a teacher took the role of researcher and applied an action plan to help senior high school students to improve their English listening comprehension skills with the use of podcasts. The action research cycle's steps followed were suggested by Efron and Ravid (2019) which helped to effectively address the issues found in the participants' learning of the listening comprehension skills.

The study began determining a problem in the listening comprehension skills of the students in most of the institutions of the city. This problem was perceived for the researcher during all his pre-professional practicum as well as his personal experience as a student. After defining the problem, a tool was proposed in order to enhance the listening comprehension skills of the English language learners. As a result, podcasts were chosen to be used in the classroom as a means to expose learners to authentic audio material. Thus, in order to know more about this proposed tool, how to implement it in classes and how to use it to improve students' listening comprehension skills, it was necessary to review enough literature to find out strategies and types of podcasts that were the most suitable for the students.

After that, the design of the intervention plans was based on Brown (2006) who stated that in a common lesson, it is possible to find "pre" activities, "while" activities, and "post" activities which can be adapted to teach listening comprehension. First, in the pre-listening stage the students were taught all what they needed to know in order to understand the topic. In the next step, the while-listening stage the students were exposed to different types of podcasts related to the topic. The final step was the post-listening stage where students compared and shared their answers with other

students or the teacher used to provide them with feedback in order to reinforce the content learned.

Consequently, during the data collection phase, the researcher implemented the intervention plan using different types of podcasts and developing worksheets based on those podcasts. After that, the implementation of the questionnaire was made at the end of the intervention in order to collect data about what were the students' perceptions about the benefits of podcasts in the enhancement of their listening comprehension skill. This stage was developed for one month.

Then it was necessary to analyze and interpret the data in order to give an answer to the research question made at the beginning of this study. The data obtained from the questionnaire involved examining the students' responses to the questionnaire questions, about their explanations and reasoning behind their answers; this was done by using descriptive statistics and visually shown by different graphs (Creswell, 2012).

Finally, the results and findings obtained during the research process were shared with the educational community. It was done with the purpose of carrying out further research that eventually will help teachers or any other members of the educational community that would like to improve the listening comprehension skills of their students with the use of podcasts.

4. RESULTS

This section shows the results and findings that the researcher obtained about the perceptions of high school students on the benefits that podcasts had on improving their listening comprehension skills. The results will be presented in a table and a bar graph with their corresponding interpretation and analysis.

4.1. Questionnaire results

Table 2

Students' perceptions about the benefits of podcasts

STATEMENTS	SA		A		N		D		SD		T	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
PODCASTS MOTIVATED MY ENGLISH LEARNING PROCESS.	21	70	7	23	1	3	1	3	0	0	30	100
PODCASTS STIMULATED MY INTEREST IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION.	13	43	15	50	2	7	0	0	0	0	30	100
PODCASTS ALLOWED ME TO ENJOY THE CLASS MORE.	15	52	9	31	5	17	1	3	0	0	30	100
PODCASTS EXPOSED ME TO ENGLISH IN REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS.	13	43	8	27	8	27	1	3	0	0	30	100
PODCASTS INCREASED MY CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS.	13	43	12	40	3	10	2	7	0	0	30	100
I LIKED THE USAGE OF PODCASTS.	21	70	8	27	1	3	0	0	0	0	30	100

Note. SA = Strongly agree, A = Agree, N = Neither agree nor disagree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly disagree, T = Total.

As shown in Table 2, 70% of the students strongly agreed that the use of podcasts motivated them during the English learning process, because it was new for them and they consider it innovative. In addition, 23% of the students also agreed that podcasts motivated them during the English process. In fact, one of the students supported her answer by writing "Si porque así entendí a como pronunciar las palabras en inglés" [Yes, because that way I understood how to pronounce words in English] (S-03). This is also supported by the researcher's field notes, where it was possible to see that when it came time to apply podcasts most of the students were motivated and predisposed to do the activities. On the opposite, 3% of them had a neutral stand, for them it was the same if podcasts were used or not. Last but not least, 3% of the students disagreed with this statement since they did not feel motivated at the time of listening to a podcast.

Also, the data reflected that 50% of the students agreed that podcasts stimulated their interest in the listening comprehension process. Besides, 43% of the students strongly agreed that podcasts stimulated their interest in the listening comprehension process, this was supported by one of the students who said "Porque al momento de escuchar aprendemos más y también me motivó a querer escuchar más audios" [Because at the time of listening we learn more and it also motivated me to listen to more audios] (S-06). However, 7% of the students neither agree nor disagree, since podcasts for them did not cause interest or tended to feel tired. In fact, one of the students supported her answer by saying "Elegí esa respuesta porque me gusta escuchar pero por otra parte no porque es un poco cansado pero interesante" [I chose that answer because I like to listen but on the other hand not because it is a bit tiring but interesting] (S-03).

Likewise, in response to statement 3, 52% of the students strongly agreed and 31% of them agreed that the activities developed with podcasts allowed them to enjoy the class more and improve their listening comprehension. This data is supports by a student that said "Si porque las actividades se hacían un poco más fácil y también se hacía más divertida la clase" [Yes because the activities became a little easier and the class was more fun] (S-06). On the contrary, 17% of the students selected neither agree nor disagree because for them the podcasts were complex and hard to understand making it that they did not enjoy doing the activities proposed. Additionally, 3% of the students disagreed with this statement.

In relation to statement four, 43% of the students strongly agreed and 27% of the same agreed that the podcasts used in class exposed them to English in real-life situations, this means that a large proportion of the participants thought that, the podcasts used during the intervention really exposed them to "real" English as well as different accents and dialects. This is supported by a student response who said "Si porque los audios los decía un verdadero hablante del inglés" [Yes because the audios were spoken by

a real English speaker] (S-06). However, 27% of the students responded neither agree nor disagree and in addition, 3% "disagree" with this question this suggests that some students may not consider that podcasts really exposed them to "real" English, and some of them support their ideas, for example one student said "No ya que no serían relacionado con la vida cotidiana" [No since they would not be related to daily life] (S-21).

Moreover, 43% strongly agreed and 40% of the learners agreed that with the application of podcasts they felt that their critical thinking increased and that podcasts engaged them more in the class for the reason that with the use of podcasts they needed to think more and analyze what they were hearing. In fact, some students gave some reasons for their responses such as "Si porque al momento de escuchar los audios ponemos más atención para entender todo" [Yes because when we listened to the audios we paid more attention to understand everything] (S-28). Nevertheless, 10% responded neither agree nor disagree and 7% disagreed with this statement, since they considered that by applying podcasts their critical thinking skills did not increase.

Overall, 70% of the participants strongly agreed and 27% of the whole class agreed that they liked the use of podcasts to practice and their listening comprehension skills. This is supported by the reasons they gave which are "Si porque me ayudó a mejorar en mi capacidad auditiva y a entender mejor las palabras en inglés" [Yes because it helped me to improve my listening skills and to understand English words better] (S-16). In the same line, another student said that "Porque es algo para salir de la rutina y hace que aprender inglés sea más divertido" [Because it is something to get out of the routine and make learning English more fun] (S-8). Nonetheless, 3% of the students responded neither agree nor disagree, since they did not like too much to use podcasts for practicing their listening comprehension abilities.

In conclusion, Table 2 reveals that most students responded positively to podcast incorporation into their English learning process. They found podcasts motivating, interesting, stimulating their listening comprehension and improving their critical thinking skills. Students appreciated the authentic nature of audio materials, contributing to learning in real-life contexts.

Despite the overall positive response, some students expressed their disapproval, particularly regarding motivation and real-life relevance. These findings suggest that while podcasts can be a valuable resource for language learning, researchers should consider individual differences and learning preferences when integrating such materials into the curriculum. As a result of the positive outcomes observed, podcasts can be seen as a beneficial and innovative approach to enhancing language learning. This is particularly true in the context of listening comprehension skills.

Figure 1

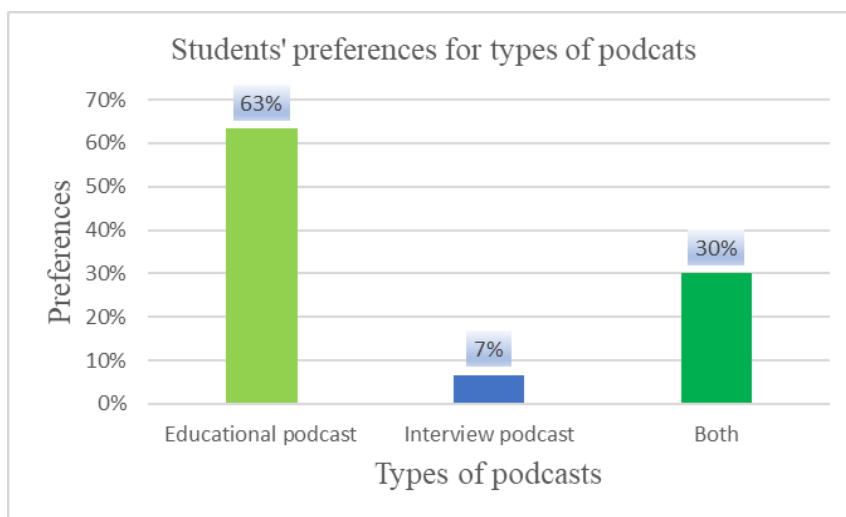*Students' preferences about the types of podcasts*

Figure 1 shows that 63% of the students just selected educational podcasts, because this type of podcast was the easiest to understand and interpret for the learners at the time of listening. In fact, one student

supported his preference by saying "Porque este sirve para interpretar mejor lo que se escuchó" [Because this is useful to have a better interpretation of what we heard] (S-22). On the other hand, 30% of the learners selected both options, because both types of podcasts presented are useful and have their own advantages in the process of increasing listening. This is supported by one of the students who said "Porque ambos son muy interesantes y ambos nos ayudan a mejorar nuestra capacidad de escucha en el inglés" [Because both are very interesting and both help us to improve our English listening skill] (S-28). However, 7% of the students just selected interview podcasts, one of them supported her preference by saying "Me llama más la atención" [It calls more my attention] (S-06). This due to interview podcasts are more natural and for that reason it can catch more the attention of some listeners.

Overall, Figure 1 indicates that students' podcast preferences in listening comprehension vary significantly. The majority of students favored educational podcasts, appreciating the clear and structured content that facilitates better interpretation and understanding. Another substantial group of learners valued both educational and interview podcasts because they recognized the advantages of each type in improving their listening skills and finding them interesting in their own ways. Finally, a small proportion of students exclusively preferred interview podcasts, attracted to the natural and engaging elements present in such content

5. DISCUSSION

What is the students' perception about the implementation of podcasts to enhance listening skills among students of Senior high school at a public institution in Loja?

Results showed that the majority of the participants had a positive attitude towards the use of podcasts inside the classroom since a large proportion of the learners agreed that by using podcasts in class students'

interest and motivation significantly increased allowing them to enjoy the class more due to the activities developed with the podcasts used. Additionally, most of the participants also agreed that by being exposed to podcasts they felt the experience of listening to English in real life situations. Lastly, a great number of students also agreed with the fact that listening to podcasts increased their critical thinking skills. Finally, in general terms, the majority of the participants agreed that they liked the use of podcasts inside the classroom because it was an innovative way for them to practice listening comprehension.

All the previous findings mentioned can be corroborated by Hasibuan and Male (2022) who mentions that the usage of podcasts inside the classrooms provides students with a wide range of benefits that facilitates the teaching-learning process making it more enjoyable, interesting, and motivating. At the same time, a significant quantity of participants agreed that podcasts exposed them to English in real-life situations. This is consistent with the ideas of Abdulrahman et al., (2018) who found out that "students perceived that podcast provided authentic materials, interesting activities including listening exercises and meaningful tasks for them so they felt more motivated to learn English" (p. 23). Finally, a considerable amount of the learners agreed that, in general, they liked the usage of podcasts. In accordance with the previous findings, studies carried out by Harahap (2020) demonstrated that the majority of the learners agreed that they like the usage of podcasts because this was a useful tool that helped them in learning English.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results obtained about the perceptions that students' have about the podcast's benefits it is possible to say that 1) By using podcasts in the class the majority of students agreed with the notion that podcasts increased the students' interest, motivation and enjoyment as most of them

considered podcasts as a fun and innovative tool to practice and develop their listening comprehension skills. 2) The learners agreed that they were improving their critical thinking skills at the same time they were being exposed to real-life English because podcasts provided them with an authentic and engaging listening comprehension learning experience. 3) With the application of podcasts, most of the participants liked and enjoyed the use of it because of the benefits podcasts have to offer to increase the listening comprehension skills. As a result, it is highly recommended to further research that examines the impact of podcasts on other language abilities, in larger samples, over longer time periods, and at different levels of education.

7. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

CP: Introduction and literature review

MC: Methodology, results, and guidance of the research work

MO: Discussion and revision of the chapter

AP: Conclusions and final revision of the paper

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