

## Empowering English Language Learning through Podcasting: A Case Study at Nile Valley University

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### ABSTRACT

*This research explored how podcasting influences English language learning for undergraduate students at Nile Valley University, focusing on its effects on listening skills, vocabulary development, and student independence. Using a mixed-methods approach, sixty third-year intermediate learners from the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Education participated in twelve podcast-related tasks over the span of six weeks. Quantitative findings revealed substantial improvements: listening comprehension scores increased from 60.2% to 75.4% ( $t(49) = 8.21, p < .001, d = 1.16$ ), while vocabulary acquisition rose from 54.7% to 71.3% ( $t(49) = 7.45, p < .001, d = 1.05$ ). Motivation also climbed from 3.1 to 4.0 on a 5-point scale ( $t(49) = 6.02, p < .001$ ). Data derived from journals and focus group discussions revealed four prominent themes: genuine participation, heightened learner independence, improved cultural understanding, and increased confidence in addressing practical listening challenges. In general, participants credited their advancements to their experience with a range of subjects and international accents. Educational implications emphasize podcasting's ability to promote learner independence, enhance listening skills, and develop intercultural understanding. Future studies should explore long-term effects in different educational settings*

**KEYWORDS:** Podcasting, Listening comprehension, Vocabulary acquisition, Learner autonomy, Intercultural competence.

### Introduction:

1. The aim of this research was to find out the role that podcasting plays in the advancement of English language learning among undergraduate pupils at Nile Valley University, while focusing on the improvement of understanding, vocabulary enrichment, and, most importantly, the development of learner autonomy. Most studies and research focused on traditional teaching methods have historically emphasized the use of individual exercises that mainly involve listeners and repetitive memorization of numerous words, which ultimately limits pupils' motivation and, most importantly, their autonomy. On the other hand, the use of podcasting to learn English is based on the rich cultural content that educates listeners, hence encouraging more individualistic self-learning. The use of a mixed-methods designs to aid the process of data collection led to a remarkable improvement in the English language skills, including a deeper understanding, with regard to vocabulary. Overall, this shows that the use of podcasting in English language learning is beneficial, and it serves as a guideline to those who are concerned and interested in advancing the teaching and understanding of English language.

## **1.0 Background of the Study:**

With technology continuously redefining education, a researcher at Nile Valley University has focused attention on one of the most promising digital media: podcasting. Considering its potentials to reshape how students learn English, the study explores how curated audio could better engage learners in meaningful ways and in a self-directed manner. Looking at the impacts podcasting can have on undergraduate students' listening skills, growing vocabulary, and learner independence, the researcher makes a strong case for integrating this tool into the language classroom. But his work also explores academic gains concerning podcasting; he also opens up on the cultural and motivational gains that the introduction of real-life voices will bring into the learning space.

Over the last couple of years, the researcher has witnessed how digital tools reshape the classrooms in ways that were not imagined. Among them, podcasting is different-not another gadget, but a bridge to real voices, accents, and stories beyond the textbooks. While scholars worldwide celebrate podcasts for their flexibility and rich content, the researcher has barely managed to scratch the surface here at Nile Valley University. This study invites one to explore how these very audio streams can breathe new life into undergraduate English learning.

### **1.1 Statement of the Study**

Passing through the corridors of the language department, the researcher often hears students struggling with the fragmented nature of the aural exercises, the numerous pages of disconnected vocabulary lists, and the apparent rise of their dependency on the teacher's instruction. The traditional lectures and drills, though valuable, may sometimes not evoke enough student interest or allow them to chart their own way. Might the learner-centric philosophy and thematic diversity of podcasting help unlock the possibility for greater student interest in listening comprehension, retention of new vocabulary, and autonomy.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

In setting out on this Study, the researcher aims to:

- 1.Examine the impact of podcast-based assignments on students' understanding of spoken English.
- 2.Measure the strides learners make in acquiring and using words presented in podcasts.
- 3.Uncover the manner in which the habitual practice of podcast listening contributes to the self-assurance of students to guide their own learning.
- 4.Capture students' reflections on cultural insights and motivational sparks garnered from a wide range of podcast topics and/or voices.

### **1.3 Questions of the Study**

This research aims to find answers for the following questions:

- 1.In what ways does podcasting change or influence listening comprehension of our English language learners?
2. By how much does it aid the vocabulary of intermediate students?

3.What are the pertinent aspects of learner autonomy which are uncovered when one adopts podcasts as a study tool?

4.How do learners describe the cultural and motivational value they derive from podcast-based activities?

### **1.4 Hypotheses of the Study**

1. Podcasting improves listening comprehension skills of English learners, helping them get used to natural speech, diverse accent varieties, and real-life situations.

2. Podcasts play a major function in helping intermediate students to broaden their vocabulary. Podcasts present students with new vocabulary that is useful.

3. When students choose podcasts as a learning tool, they develop an increased sense of autonomy by being able to listen to them, choose their favourite topics, and reflect independently.

4. Learners have reported that various activities related to podcasts have contributed to cultural understanding and have helped to increase learner motivations because podcasts allow learners to link knowledge of language to the global scene.

### **1.5 Significances of the Study**

Rather than simply plotting the data points, this investigation aims to demonstrate the impact of podcasting in our locale and extend an opportunity to other educators, curriculum developers, and imagine a classroom where worldwide perspectives are vibrant, where your classroom goes with you. This research gives power to policymakers to see the potential of the digital media not merely as an afterthought, but as a means to close the learning gap in the country of Sudan. This inquiry joins an ongoing discussion in which the developing forms of audio media can bring people together, allow horizons to expand, and foster lifelong learning beyond the boundaries of our university.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The dynamic nature of the medium has transformed it from a relatively marginal platform to a genuinely transformative educational practice, particularly with reference to the learning of language. Several researchers have focused on the pedagogical potential of the medium as discussed by various authors such as Cebrián & Junyent (2015) and Rosell-Aguilar (2007); on the other hand, other authors have discussed the motivational benefits of podcasting learning. The medium is based on the sociocultural perspective propounded by Vygotsky (1978). Additionally, it is rooted in various innovative methodological frameworks such as reflexive thematic analysis as discussed by Braun & Clarke (2022). podcasting offers a dynamic avenue for enhancing listening skills, promoting self-directed learning, and extending language exposure beyond the classroom.

### **2.1 Podcasting in Education and Language Learning**

Podcasting has been recognized as a flexible means to make learning experiences more engaging, and it has found strong applications in language learning settings. Cebrián & Junyent (2015) found that the concept of educational podcasting can be understood as a promising approach in

educational contexts, listing its ease and potential. Wu (2014), meanwhile, developed this concept further, discussing its advantages and disadvantages, such as learner engagement potential.

In Rosell-Aguilar (2007), the author discusses the “podagogy” concept, emphasizing its effectiveness in language acquisition by providing authentic aural materials. Evans & Cummings (2013) illustrate how podcasting can grow from a pilot to a flipped learning approach, engaging students in their learning. In another study, Guo & Agichtein (2008) evaluate podcasting’s usability in ESL contexts, noting its efficacy for vocabulary and aural comprehension.

Knight and Knewstubb (2016) explain that promoting blogs and podcasts facilitates learner autonomy, an essential feature associated with self-directed learning. This notion is supported further by Vandergrift (2007), who shows us how learners can use mobile-based listening to supplement their language learning outside the classroom.

## **2.2 Learner Autonomy and Motivation**

In that respect, learner autonomy and motivation are central to effective language learning. Reinders and Benson (2017), based on their review of the concept of autonomy, highlighted two key aspects: self-regulation and personalization. Knight and Knewstubb (2016) underpin this further by indicating how electronic tools, such as podcasts and blogs, can enable learners to take responsibility for their learning process.

According to Dörnyei (2001), motivation is sustained through strategic classroom practices. His framework of 35 motivational strategies offers the teacher a host of tools with which to maintain learner engagement. In support, Nation (2022) places vocabulary acquisition as the lynchpin of language proficiency, going on to advocate strategies that support both in-class and independent learning.

## **2.3 Listening and Vocabulary Development**

Listening skills and the development of vocabulary are closely related concepts in learning a language. Field (2008) criticizes the conventional comprehension approach to listening and suggests the adoption of the process approach, which integrates decoding skills with comprehension skills. Nation (2022) extends this by exploring the intricate element of vocabulary learning strategies and its impact on listening skills and fluency.

Braun and Clarke’s (2022) approach to reflexive thematic analysis is a powerful qualitative methodology for exploring learners' experiences or for conducting an evaluation of interventions in an educational setup, especially in understanding the impacts of podcasting on its learners' acquisition and engagement.

Vygotsky’s (1978) Sociocultural theory of learning remains a fundamental concept for an understanding of how learning takes place. Specifically, his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is an important construct when podcasting is considered as a learning paradigm for mobile learning, as it can scaffold learning development.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### **3.0 Participants**

Forty female and twenty male undergraduate students, whose age spectrum varies from 18 to 22 years, have been recruited from the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Medicine at Nile Valley University. The data suggests that the participants were at the intermediate level of proficiency, as informed by the placement test results, which were administered at the start of the semester. The respondents were also interested in participating voluntarily, hence allowing for informed consent.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

To achieve this, a convergent mixed-method approach was utilized. In this regard, statistical patterns and learners' experiences were collected through concurrent data collection over six weeks of intervention. Consequently, triangulation of data from the numerical approaches, including listening scores and vocabulary, and learners' self-narratives based on journal writing and group conversations was achieved.

#### **3.2 Instruments**

1-Pre- and post-intervention listening comprehension tests: each test consists of 30 multiple choice questions based on authentic podcasts' scripts.

2- Pre- and post-intervention measurement of students' vocabulary size, with target words being those presented at the podcast episodes found at 40 shades.

3-A Motivation Questionnaire - a set of 20 items from Gardner's Attitude/M

4- Reflective journals where students wrote down their experiences regarding podcasts each week.

5-Semi-structured focus group interview guides to obtain deeper perceptions about autonomy, cultural knowledge, and engagement.

#### **3.3 Data Collection**

The duration of the entire process of collecting the data was kept at eight weeks. It was systematically and scientifically organized to ensure consistency and reliability. In the initial week, students were given a series of baseline evaluations in the areas of listening comprehension and vocabulary. Additionally, students were required to fill out a survey on their motivations, based on Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery. For the rest of the weeks, that is, Weeks 2 through 7, students who participated in the experiment answered a total of twelve podcast-based listening comprehension questions. Two questions were assigned to each of the remaining weeks. Additionally, students completed comprehension questions and journal writing tasks for each of these questions. In Week 7, two thirty-five-minute sessions of focus group interviews, consisting of a total of 8-10 students, were conducted on the topics of learner autonomy, understanding of cultures, and motivational changes.

### **4. Results**

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Paired-sample t-tests compared pre- and post-test scores for listening and vocabulary; descriptive statistics summarized motivation changes.

Qualitative data from journals and focus groups underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. NVivo 12 facilitated systematic coding and retrieval of rich narrative excerpts.

The following results present compelling evidence of the positive impact podcast-based learning had on students’ language development and motivation, as measured through quantitative gains in comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and learner engagement:

#### 4.0 Table (1) Listening Comprehension

Metric	Pre-test	Post-test	Statistical Analysis
Mean Score (%)	60.2%	75.4%	-
Standard Deviation (SD)	8.9	7.6	-
Paired-Samples Test	-	-	$t(49) = 8.21, p < .001$
Effect Size (Cohen’s d)	-	-	1.16 (Large Effect)
interpretation	Lower baseline performance	Significant improvement	Strong statistical significance and impact

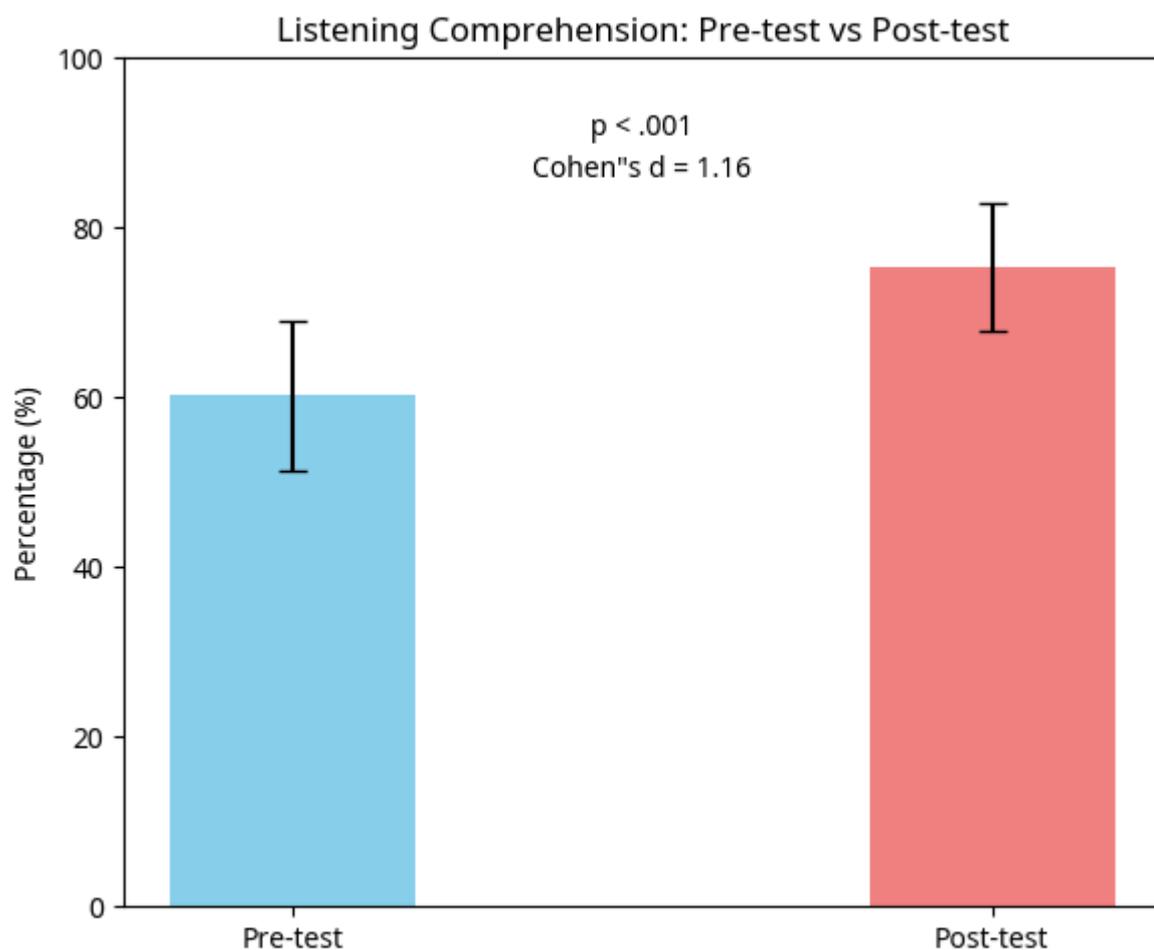


Figure (1) Listening Comprehension

Table and Figure (1) showed a clear shift from lower baseline performance to substantially stronger comprehension. Students' listening comprehension improved markedly after the podcast intervention. Mean scores rose from **60.2% (SD = 8.9)** to **75.4% (SD = 7.6)**. A paired-samples t-test confirmed the gain was significant,  $t(49) = 8.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a large effect size ( $d = 1.16$ ). These results show a clear shift from lower baseline performance to substantially stronger comprehension.

#### 4.1 Table (2) Vocabulary Acquisition

Metric	Pre-test	Post-test	Statistical Analysis
Mean Score (%)	54.7%	71.3%	-
Standard Deviation (SD)	9.8	8.4	-
Paired-Samples Test	-	-	$t(49) = 7.45$ , $p < .001$
Effect Size (Cohen's d)	-	-	1.05 (Large Effect)
Interpretation	Lower baseline performance	Significant improvement	Strong statistical significance and impact

Figure (2) Vocabulary Acquisition

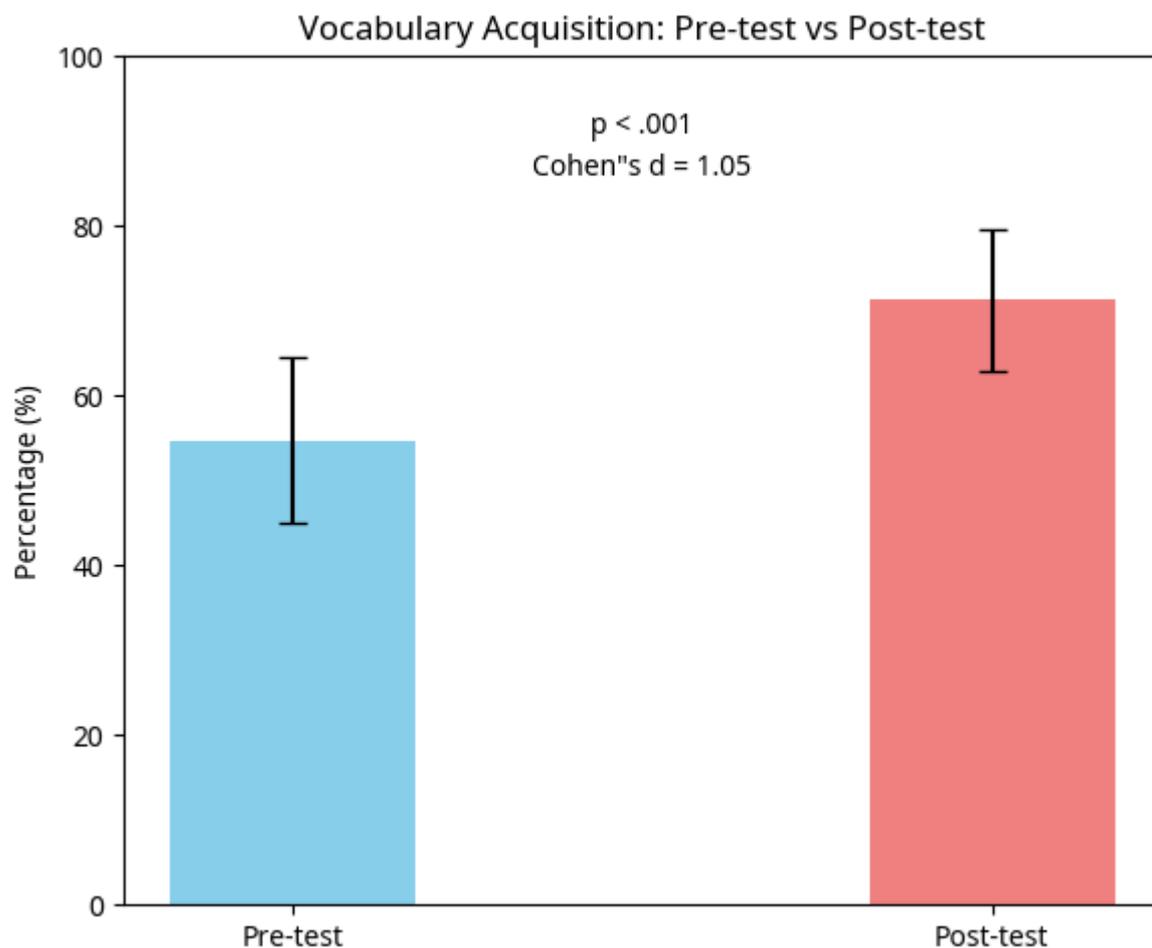


Table and Figure (2) represented Students demonstrated notable gains in vocabulary knowledge following the podcast intervention. Mean scores rose from **54.7% (SD = 9.8)** on the pre-test to **71.3% (SD = 8.4)** on the post-test, an improvement of 16.6 percentage points. A paired-samples t-test confirmed this increase was statistically significant,  $t(49) = 7.45$ ,  $p < .001$ . The effect size,

Cohen’s  $d = 1.05$ , reflected a **large impact**, indicating that podcasts strongly supported learners’ acquisition and retention of new words.

4.2Table (3) Motivation

Metric	Pre-test	Post-test	Statistical Analysis
Mean Score (out of 5)	3.1	4.0	-
Paired-Samples Test	-	-	$t(49) = 6.02, p < .001$
Statistical Significance	-	-	Highly significant ( $p < .001$ )
Interpretation	Moderate baseline	Strong improvement	Substantial gain in performance

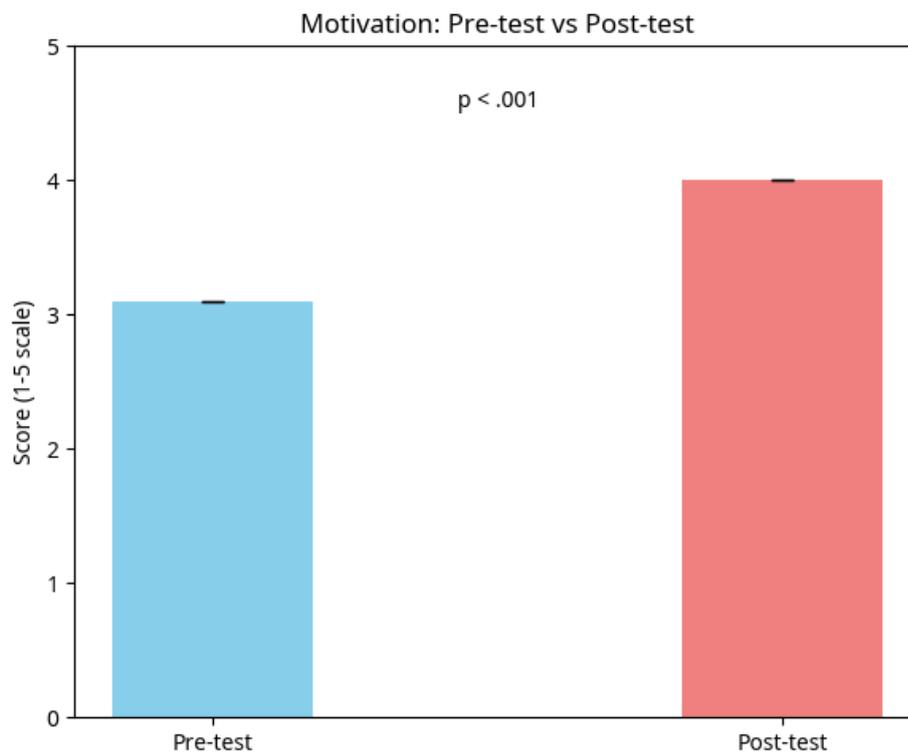


Figure (3) Motivation

Table and Figure (3) reported a clear rise in Learners motivation after the podcast intervention. The mean score increased from **3.1** to **4.0** on a 5-point scale, representing a 29% boost in self-reported engagement. A paired-samples t-test confirmed this change was statistically significant,  $t(49) = 6.02, p < .001$ . These results indicate that podcasts not only enhanced language skills but also strongly energized students’ willingness to participate and persist in their learning.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that podcasting has the potential to be a highly effective means through which English language learning can be furthered in higher education. This is shown by the 15.2% gain in listening comprehension scores-from 60.2% to 75.4%\_ along with the fact that authentic, context-rich input is able to rapidly accelerate comprehension skills. These results are in

line with international evidence that suggests exposure to unscripted speech and diverse accents sharpens learners' decoding strategies—a conclusion supported further by a large effect size,  $d = 1.16$ .

Similarly, the gain in the case of vocabulary acquisition amounts to 16.6% (from 54.7% to 71.3%,  $d = 1.05$ ). This is taken to represent how repeated encounters with lexical items in meaningful contexts foster retention and transfer. Indeed, in the focus groups, learners reported keeping a record of unfamiliar words and/or re-listening to segments as beneficial to vocabulary growth but also to their confidence in independent learning. The benefits of motivation also stood out: the mean was elevated from a low of 3.1 to a strong 4.0 on a scale of 5.0. This point was further underscored as it relates to the framework of self-determination theory. By providing students with the choice of selecting the podcast episodes on topics of their own interest raised their level of intrinsic motivation. The journal writing also reflected autonomous learning schedules set up by students themselves.

In addition to linguistic abilities, podcast use facilitated cultural awareness. The use of international dialects, cultural expressions, and assorted social settings helped to enrich students' cultural/intercultural awareness, which is unlikely to be achieved by using standardized textbooks. The students associated this with deeper reflections on being Sudanese, illustrating that podcasting is a bridge for both linguistic and sociocultural awareness.

However, the challenges were still there, considering that despite having these successful experiences, there were instances of interrupted listening plans due to inconsistent access to the Internet, coupled with instances of difficulties that some learners encountered because of the fast rate of speech of the natives.

Overall, such findings point to a media of podcasting that, far from only contributing to listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, also has a powerful effect in terms of increased motivation, autonomy, or even interculturality. Therefore, podcasting has a potential of sustainability in EFL contexts in Sudanese higher education or similar settings.

## 6. Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of podcast-based learning in academic environments, researchers may address the following recommendations:

1. Effectively integrate podcasts into educational settings, institutions can embed podcast assignments within existing listening modules and support learners with scaffolded materials such as pre-listening glossaries and post-listening reflection prompts.
2. Faculty development plays a key role, where workshops can be offered to help educators select level-appropriate podcasts and design engaging, interactive activities.
3. Teachers may also collaborate to establish student-led podcast clubs that foster peer support and active learning. On the infrastructure front, partnering with campus IT ensures reliable Wi-Fi in study areas, while alternative offline distribution methods—like USB drives or campus radio—can accommodate students with limited internet access.
4. Student support should include training in note-taking and prediction strategies tailored to authentic audio content, alongside promoting journal writing and peer discussions to enhance reflective learning.

For future research, longitudinal studies can be conducted to assess retention across semesters, compare podcasting with other digital media formats such as video blogs and audiobooks, and explore its impact on students' speaking and writing skills through peer-reviewed podcast activities.

## 7. Conclusion

Based on the findings derived from the study, it was established that the effect of using podcasts for learning was predominantly significant on Nile Valley University's students, especially those from the English department's undergraduate cohorts. For instance, learners' listening skills improved significantly, evidenced by an increase of 15.2 percentage points, which was highly significant and had a large effect size ( $d=1.16$ ). Moreover, vocabulary development was enhanced significantly when the learners' progress was assessed, and an increment of 16.6 percentage points was realized, which had a medium effect size ( $d=1.05$ ). In addition, there was a notable increment in the learners' motivation level, nearing a whole point when using a scale of 5, and thus a good effect size ( $d=.64$ ). These findings demonstrate how powerful the effects of using podcasts for teaching can be, especially by breaking away from conventional approaches and providing opportunities for learners to seek a deeper level of understanding and vocabulary development, in addition to increased motivation and teaching in a more just manner using the opportunities presented by student agency.

In order to ensure the stability and emergence of such accomplishments, ongoing institutional dedication and targeted research will be necessary, resulting in a more reactive and student-centered approach to English education.

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## Appendices

Appendix (A) Link of the Podcasting

<https://t.me/Elitebodcast>