

Self-controlled Podcasts: An Effective Way to Practice L2 Listening?

Tingting Kang

Northern Arizona University

### Abstract

This study investigated effectiveness of self-controlled podcast listening on ESL learners' (n=23) overall listening skills, listening comprehension of main ideas, details, and making inferences, self-rated listening abilities, and attitudes towards podcasts. Four instruments were developed including a pretest, a posttest, a coding system for self-controlled listening group, and a questionnaire to measure the dependent variables. Interestingly, the results showed that, first, the self-controlled podcast listening group (n=12) had lower mean scores in the area of overall listening skills and listening comprehension on details and making inferences on the posttest when compared to either the pretest or the control group (n=11). Second, owing to the improvement of the control group in the posttest, the listening passages on ESL Pod (Tse & McQuillan, 2012a) could benefit intermediate ESL learners' listening comprehension. Third, the technological function, rewinding 10 seconds, was most frequently used by the participants. Fourth, students who had the self-controlled podcast listening experience showed more positive attitudes towards podcast listening.

Keywords: self-controlled listening, MALL, podcasts

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### **Background**

According to Nation and Newton (2009), L2 listening was argued to be “the least understood and most overlooked of the four skills (L, S, R, and W)” (p. 37). In order to better understand the process of listening and teach listening more effectively, metacognition, which means “the ability of learners to control their thoughts and to regulate their own learning” (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 5), has been widely discussed in the field. Researchers argued that self-regulated learning, which refers to learners’ mastering of their learning process by controlling their own thoughts, feelings, and actions during the learning process, could develop learners’ self-efficacy and motivate them towards greater success (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Due to the development of computer technology, technical functions, such as speech rate (Zhao, 1997), pause, rewind, and fast-forward (Roussel, 2011), have been used to indicate learners’ self-regulated listening strategies. Nowadays, the Podcasts program in iPod/iPad provided more technical functions for learners to manipulate the listening passages, podcasts, which were highly praised in the foreign language learning context by L2 teachers, learners, and researchers (e.g. Abdous et al., 2009; O-Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007).

### **Research Questions**

This study is conducted to explore the following questions:

- (1) Does self-controlled podcast listening affect L2 learners’ overall listening skills?
- (2) Does self-controlled podcast listening affect L2 learners’ listening comprehension of main idea, detail, and inference questions?
- (3) Which technical functions do learners use during self-controlled podcast listening?

- (4) Does self-controlled podcast listening affect L2 learners' self-rated listening abilities?
- (5) Does self-controlled podcast listening affect L2 learners' attitudes towards podcast listening?

### Methods

Corresponding to the research questions, there are four dependent variables in this study: learners' listening comprehension, use of self-controlled podcasts technical functions, perceptions of their listening abilities, and attitudes towards podcasts listening. Four instruments were developed including a pretest, a posttest, a coding system for self-controlled listening practice, and a questionnaire.

Participants in this study were the Level 3 students (n=23) at PIE. Section A was assigned as the self-controlled podcast listening group (n=12), and Section B was the non-controlled podcast listening group (n=11). Table 1 demonstrated the overall research procedures for both groups. During the treatment process, the self-controlled podcast listening group was asked to listen to the podcasts individually by using an iPad, and their hands movements were video-recorded by the researcher. On the contrary, students in the control group listened to the podcasts together in the classroom as they did in the pretest.

Table 1

#### *Research procedures*

Group 1/Experimental Group	Group 2/Control Group
Pretest	Pretest
Technology training	-
Self-controlled podcasts posttest	Podcasts posttest
Questionnaire	Questionnaire

### Results

According to the results from the statistical tests, there were no significant statistical differences between self-controlled podcast listening and non-controlled podcast listening groups'

overall listening skills, listening comprehension of main ideas, details, and making inferences, and attitudes towards podcast listening. Nevertheless, the mean scores of each group on the pretest and posttest showed that the self-controlled podcast listening group had lower scores in the area of overall listening skills and listening comprehension on details and making inferences on the posttest when compared to either the pretest or the control group. Such issues as self-controlled listening training, technological training, listening time, and the nature of the inference questions might be the possible explanations for the experimental group's poor performance on the posttest. Additionally, the most frequently used iPad technical function was rewinding 10 seconds. Based on the observed Spearman's rho scores, students' total scores on the posttests had a moderate correlation to their listening time and the use of rewinding 10 seconds and pause/start functions.

### **Pedagogical Applications**

First, owing to the improvement of the control group in the posttest, the podcasts on ESL Pod could benefit intermediate ESL learners' listening comprehension. Second, due to the higher mean scores on experimental group's attitudes towards podcast listening than the control group, for teachers who want to introduce podcast listening into their L2 listening classes, it would be better if they provide opportunities for learners to operate the podcasts programs at the initial teaching stage to grasp learners' interests. Last but not the least, teachers could also introduce some successful self-controlled listening patterns produced by other learners, such as using the entire given time, the pause/start button, and the 10 seconds rewind button based on the results from this study or listening to the whole passage first (Roussel, 2011).

## References

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