Investigating the Effect of Podcasting on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension Skill

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Abstract

This study investigated the possible effect of podcasting on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension skill. A total number of seventy EFL learners were selected based on their performance on Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Then, they were divided into two groups (one experimental and one control group). Pre-test of listening was administered to both groups at the beginning of the study to examine their listening before introducing the treatment. Then, the experimental group received fifteen sessions of treatment which was teaching listening skill through podcasting while the control group received the traditional way of teaching. Afterward, both groups attended the post-test of listening at the end of the study. The data were analyzed through running the Independent and Paired Samples T-test methods. Based on the statistical analyses, it was concluded that podcasting had a statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening ability.

	The findings also revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the post-test scores between control and experimental groups. That is, the experimental group outperformed the control group in post-test of listening comprehension and the progress within the group for the experimental group was higher than that of the control group

1. Introduction

Listening is one of the important skills for the learners because it can support other skills like speaking and reading. It provides appropriate situations for the acquisition of other language skills (Galuh Elga Romadhon, 2019; Latif, 2015). Listening has a key role in communication. It is of great importance in English language classes. It provides input for learners. If learners cannot understand the input, the language learning process cannot start (Nunan, 2002).

However, many teachers do not pay particular attention to teaching listening skill. Listening skill is not tested in both university entrance examinations and final examinations. This can be one of the reasons why teachers do not seriously consider it in their instruction. The other reason is pertinent to the fact that many teachers view listening as a passive skill while Wilson (2008) states that it is an active skill that occurs in the mind and listeners can guess, predict, deduce, and interpret.

Listening skill has been overlooked in comparison with other skills, speaking, reading, and writing. English classrooms encounter limitations such as lack of proficient teachers, lack of sufficient time, insufficient sources and materials and anxiety in the learning environment for learners. That listening skills are the missing pieces of the puzzle of most language teaching programs in Iran is rather obvious. This becomes more apparent when the most common complaint on the part of language learners is taken into account, not being able to "listen" or "hear" appropriately. Learners are not familiar with the nature of listening, the manner of improving their listening skills, as well as how to overcome listening comprehension problems that occur during listening (Vahdat & Eidipour, 2016).

Language classrooms are not the appropriate environment for listening skill, which cause different challenges that stop learners' listening skill improvement. Overcrowded classrooms cause a lot of problems for

teachers and learners to teach and learn listening skill. The lack of language laboratories decreases the opportunities for learners to develop their listening (Hassen, 2016). One way to solve the mentioned problems is to make listening as interesting and pleasant as possible. Using a suitable method for teaching and learning listening is very important. Using technology has recently encouraged some researchers to examine its impact on EFL learners' listening comprehension. Podcasting is one of authentic resources for teaching listening comprehension. It is an innovative mobile technology involving video and digital audio broadcast that can be downloaded and played on mobile devices. Podcast provides convenience for listeners to choose and listen to their preferred program (Abdulrahman et al., 2018). Considering its usage in the language teaching contexts, some researchers have offered some reasons for including podcasts in language learning classrooms (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013).

Some studies indicated that learners' positive views towards language learning enhanced when podcast was used to support the learning process (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013; Hasan & Hoon, 2012; Yoestra & Putri, 2018). Asaadinezhad and Gorjian (2015) investigated the impact of Podcasts on pre-intermediate EFL learners' speaking skill. The findings represented that experimental group affected teaching more than control group. The other finding was that using podcasts in speaking skill enhanced both fluency and accuracy of learners' speaking proficiency. Besides, Shiri (2015) carried out a study with Iranian EFL learners. Results showed that learners who used podcast had higher listening comprehension score compared to those who did not.

In addition, Hosseini and Choobdari (2017) examined the role of podcasting in improving Iranian learners' vocabulary by organizing podcasting activities for experimental group and traditional tasks for control group. Results of the t-test displayed that experimental group significantly outperformed control group and learners had positive attitudes towards podcasting. Furthermore, Sayadi and Mashhadi Heidar (2018) conducted a study to examine the impact of Podcasts on Iranian autonomous and non-autonomous EFL learners' listening comprehension skill. 60 pre-intermediate learners were assigned randomly into two experimental groups (N=15) and two control groups (N=15). The collected data were analyzed through paired sample t-tests and a Two-way ANOVA. The results demonstrated that Iranian learners' listening comprehension improved after the treatment. These previous studies support the usage

of podcast in language learning skills in general and listening comprehension in particular.

The use of podcasts in the language classrooms enables learners to comprehend content, to increase their proficiency, and to improve their listening comprehension. Thus, in order to develop listening comprehension skill, podcast may assume a critical part. Podcast is regarded as a new innovation for making learners' listening comprehension ability. Few studies in Iran investigated the impact of podcast on listening comprehension at the English Institute level (NamazianDost et al., 2017; Sayadi & Mashhadi Heidar, 2018; Shafiee & Salehi, 2019). Thus, this research aimed to examine the impact of podcast on improving Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension skill at the Institute level.

2. The significance of the Study

This research emphasizes using podcasts as a learning tool to improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners in listening comprehension. Podcasts change the tendency to learn for those who cannot take part in traditional classes, yet they like to connect with the course material for all purposes. Podcasting should be included with regular classroom exercises as this is a great way to deal advanced learning styles. Podcasting actually makes preparing more useful. This doesn't mean that it can replace the real classes, yet it can be considered as a means to compensate the classroom participation. Learners can use this innovation as a complement to the real classes, where they can refer to the materials whenever necessary (McCombs & Liu, 2007; NamazianDost et al., 2017). Furthermore, this research will be an attempt to find out the application of technology in teaching listening in intermediate level. It found out whether podcasting can be used as an effective tool in encouraging learner autonomy.

The findings of this study can have a great value in increasing English language ability among Iranian EFL learners. In addition, the findings of this research can change the attitudes of EFL teachers towards using podcasts in teaching listening comprehension skill either inside or outside their classes. The findings of this research may provide information to further research studies, which include CALL in the field of education in Iran. This research looks forward to taking hold of attention of the Iranian

English language teachers. It indicates to them an alternate way where they can reconsider their traditional teaching methods and incorporate CALL in teaching listening skills.

3. Research Question

This research attempts to investigate the impact of podcast on Iranian intermediate learners' listening skill. To meet the aims of this study, the following research question was presented: Does podcasting effectively improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension?

4. Research Hypothesis

To fulfill the aim of the study practically through the above-mentioned research question, the following null hypothesis was considered: Podcasting does not have effectively improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension.

5. Literature Review

5.1 The Theoretical Framework

Communicative method has received a lot of attention with the emphasis on the use the language materials in authentic situations. Learners use the target language in the areas that are meaningful to them and it is a more student-centered approach. This approach requires learners to understand meaning of information rather than the accuracy of forms in the target language. This means that the method promotes learners to make their language learning more meaningful rather than looking for perfection pronunciation or grammatical structures (Schulz, 2006).

These are the methods, which are rooted in communicative skills and students' mental faculty, have been popular to date. Among those methods, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is still the main focus. This method focuses on using meaningful, sensible and challenging activities in the process of language acquisition which persuades learners to interact with each other in a learner-cantered class. TBLT stimulates learners to

become more independent and provides a friendly environment for the development of critical thinking (Faramarzi et al., 2019; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2015).

TBLT approves creativity and innovation in task presentation. The original nature of this method necessitates the application of the most popular educational process, which is virtual communities. With the help of various innovative and creative technologies like blogs, wikis, portfolios, games, and online applications, researchers can decrease emotional barriers and promote collaborative learning in a motivating atmosphere. TBLT supports collaborative learning, which is fully in line with the principles of teaching with podcasting technology. Consequently, developing podcasting tasks and creating an online place for learners involved in a distance learning program can be a big step forward to gain the true potential of podcasting technology in computer-aided learning (Faramarzi et al., 2019).

5.2 Podcast

Podcasts are one of the latest web-based materials that have significantly contributed to the EFL learning. They are usually downloadable audio or video files that can be played directly without any special software or MP3 player (Heilesen, 2010). The easiness in using technology is very important for its maximum utilization. Ho et al. (2016) confirm that once people feel they can operate or learn new technology easily; their intention to use it will become stronger. If people realize that it is easier to use podcast and they do not need to put too much effort into using it, they would be more willing to use it in listening. Podcast is one of the fastest growing web based trends in the educational institutions for a variety of purposes, and listening skill can be one of them. Podcasts distinguish from other types of online multimedia materials mainly because they provide users the opportunity to download content automatically.

The technology for podcast is readily available, easy to use and inexpensive, making it a more attractive option for providing additional flexible learning resources for students. The use of podcast is revolutionizing the English learning process. Its emergence seems to propose rich source of material for use in an EFL context and to assist listening instruction in specific. Podcast gives students flexibility when and

where to learn at their desired learning pace and path. A major consideration in using podcasting in education is that it allows flexibility. The podcasting literature has determined that time, location, and pacing as the dimensions where this flexibility can be realized. As a result of the time flexibility of podcasting, a learning activity is no longer constrained by time and location (Salmon & Nie, 2008).

Learners can access learning materials on the move, assuming they own personal mobile devices such as mobile phones and personal media players. A further advantage of podcasting is the provision of bite-sized learning opportunities (Lee & Chan, 2007), enabling learners to take advantage of idle time for constructive learning purposes. The facility to download podcasts and listen repeatedly allows learners to work at their own pace to achieve the desired learning outcomes. These three dimensions of flexibility also contribute to learners' choice and control, which are considered key elements of learner autonomy and independent learning.

According to Yoestra and Putri (2018) and Romadhon (2019), podcast is the best choice that can be used in listening comprehension classes due to the following reasons. The first reason is that it can make learners know the original English. That is, learners can listen to the authentic materials to improve their conversation. Furthermore, the materials of the podcast are full of the real life speech that are based on the native speakers' speech in order for the learners catch the authentic vocabularies with their pronunciations. The second reason of using the podcast is that it encourages learners to learn listening outside the language classes. Teachers can use podcast for teaching listening because it is very simple to use. Learners can control their own learning through selecting their favorite materials for listening. The last reason is that it can strengthen learners' active learning in listening classes. Using podcast can encourage the teachers to make an active class for their learners.

Despite the positive impacts of using podcast in the learning and teaching of language skills, its usage has some challenges for both teachers and learners. The first challenge is that in order to effectively use the podcast, learners or teachers should be connected to the internet. Teachers should make certain that the educational centers and learners have access to the internet (Romadhon, 2019). In Iran, access to the internet is sometimes restricted, so podcast is just used by the learners in the educational centers where the internet connection is good. The

second challenge is pertinent to the complexity of the content of podcast. Teachers should create the content which is suitable with the level of their learners. Teachers applying podcast in teaching listening skill must upload their content with connected internet data. That is, internet access is not evenly distributed in some educational centers of Iran. Therefore, it can be a serious challenge to effectively and appropriately use podcast in the other parts of Iran.

5.3 Listening

Different researchers provided different definitions for the term listening comprehension. It is important for EFL learners to realize the oral input in the language classes in order to meet learning, which involves the development of listening comprehension. Fang (2008) considered listening skill as a dynamic process which requires the person to concentrate on an aural input, make the meaning, and connect it with the previous knowledge. Furthermore, comprehension is the ability to comprehend something, which reveals an intelligent power of thought and reasoning of humans or intelligent system (Hassen, 2016; Wang & Gafurov, 2015).

Although listening comprehension is very important skill in second and foreign language learning and correct listening comprehension teaching is important for target language proficiency, it was one of the neglected skills in language classrooms particularly until the late 1960s. At that time reading and grammar were more important than other skills like listening and speaking. Teaching listening skill was not accepted as an important aspect of language teaching for both researchers and teachers (Shafiee & Salehi, 2019).

Listening has a key role in foreign language teaching and learning. If learners face serious problems in understanding the oral input, the objectives of teaching and learning will not be met. Therefore, dealing with the issues of poor listening is very important. These issues are pertinent to the message, the speaker, the listener, and the physical environment. The difficulties are substantially caused by the speed of the remarks, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Hassen, 2016; Renukadevi, 2014). Listening comprehension has not been paid enough attention as compared to other language skills, yet its significance in EFL teaching and learning is now well established (Hogan et al., 2014). Listening is one of the

important components of communication. The continuous exposure to the auditory materials like TV, podcasts, or movies develops EFL learners' listening comprehension skill. While listening to English materials, learners can distinguish between different English accents and understand how using English in real-life situations can appear in vocabulary usage, grammar, and style.

The practice of listening is very significant in EFL learning. Due to non-native English environment, learners have little opportunities for a long-run communication with native speakers of English, which is regarded as a useful source of feeding listening skill (Mike, 2013). Although internet enhances the chances of having real communication with native speakers, yet listening practice is significant in terms of concentrating on the development of a specific feature of listening abilities. As a result, EFL teachers have realized the importance of developing learners' listening comprehension by incorporating it in the syllabus (Hassen, 2016).

As a lot of Iranian teachers believe, though we have a lot of information about listening and its role inside and outside the language classes, it has been neglected compared with other language skills. It is connected to its implicit nature, the nature of the acoustic input, and the problem in accessing the processes. Learners who learn to control their listening processes can improve their comprehension and this can impact the development of other language skills (Vandergrift, 2007). Improving listening skills has not yet been considered worthy of its importance in language teaching. Access to the appropriate materials has many limitations. Lack of exposure to real life situations for language development is a significant problem for EFL learners. Therefore, it is very important for EFL program designers to prepare learners for effective listening by placing authentic listening materials in English language courses. Iranian learners studying in an EFL environment do not have enough opportunity for full exposure.

Additionally, technology plays a key role in teaching; innovative tools and techniques provide teachers with a variety of educational sources, involving video materials, to be implemented in EFL classes. In order to develop learners' listening comprehension, video materials can be a substitute for learning, as they benefit from conversations between skilled English speakers. These conversations not only lead to listening comprehension skill, but also increase learners' pronunciation. As Ehteshami and Salehi (2016) express, learners listen to interesting and

attractive materials that motivate and draw their attention. Thus, choosing the right video materials can facilitate the listening process. In addition, appropriate video materials will encourage incorporation of different skills and diversity into the language classes.

5.4 Previous Studies on Using Podcast in Listening Comprehension

Investigating the impact of podcasting on learners' listening comprehension is more crucial because of its rapid acceptance in higher education. A lot of studies have examined the role of visual support in listening tasks. Many researchers have investigated its effect from several views finding mixed results, although positive impacts have been widely recognized in these cases.

In the field of language teaching specially listening, podcasts provide a unique feature of content choice and a lot of real-life speaking materials which permit learners to study at their own time and pace (Kavaliauskiene, 2008). The use of multimedia in teaching and learning different subjects presents learners multimodal presentation and multi-coding of information. It has appealed to teachers and learners for its great potentiality, capability, and practicality. It is becoming a new mode of communication in teaching various courses. Educational technologists stated that using multimedia both inside and outside the classroom increases learners' learning process (Chan et al., 2011; Hasan & Hoon, 2012).

Research indicated that podcast increases academic success, decreases stress and furthers learners' cooperation, and provides learners with samples of authentic materials (Lee & Chan, 2007; Thorne & Payne, 2005). Several studies have been done about using podcast for developing various English language skills (Hasan & Hoon, 2012; Istanto, 2011; Lee & Chan, 2007; Putman & Kingsley, 2012; Stoltenkamp et al., 2011). Lee and Chan (2007) and Hasan and Hoon (2012) state that podcasts provide teachers with the possibilities of facilitating language learning and challenge the traditional teaching methods. Traditional classrooms do not give more significance to the listening activities. According to Istanto (2011), podcasts are used as supporting materials along with the course materials to develop students' language proficiency.

Stoltenkamp et al. (2011) indicated a positive correlation between podcasting and learners' enhanced group work. The results of Putman and

Kingsley's (2012) research supported that podcast assists learners in improving their vocabulary. A study carried out by Al Qasim and Al Fadda (2013) examined the impact of podcasting on listening comprehension of female Saudi EFL undergraduates. In that quantitative study, they employed a total of 46 female undergraduates of a Saudi university. The samples were divided into two groups as a control and experimental groups. The study employed students' created podcasts as the instructional material. Data were obtained after six weeks of treatment period. The results represented a significant difference between control and experimental groups in favor of experimental group.

The other study conducted by Shiri (2015) examined the effect of podcasting on Iranian students' listening comprehension. The findings showed that the students who used podcast had higher listening comprehension score and higher learning motivation, compared to those who did not. The interview results displayed that learners regarded podcast as a significant learning tool that supported their listening performance.

Moreover, Shahid and Ali (2017) carried out a study to examine the impacts of video-podcasts on Saudi Arabian EFL learners' listening comprehension skill. A quasi-experimental pre-test post-test design was used. 120 English major male undergraduates participated in this research. The results of ANCOVA analysis represented that the video-podcast group outperformed control group on post-test. The findings suggest that video-podcasts are considered as useful resources for improving EFL learners' listening comprehension.

In addition, Widodo and Gunawan (2019) conducted a research to investigate whether or not Podcast significantly affects students' listening comprehension. A cluster random sampling was used and 60 students took part in this research. A quasi-experimental post-test only control group design was used. An objective test, including 30 items was given to students. The data were collected and analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Based on the results, there was a significant difference of post-test score between students who were taught applying podcast and students who were instructed conventionally. The findings demonstrated that podcast has a significant effect on students' listening comprehension ability.

Finally, Mirza Suzani (2020) investigated the impact of podcasting on Iranian TEFL students' listening comprehension skill. To this end, two

groups, an experimental and a control group (n=30 in each group) were chosen. First, the homogeneity of students was tested by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test of normality and independent sample t-test in the pre-test. Next, independent sample t-test was used to compare the impacts of listening to podcasts between experimental and control groups. According to the obtained results, the mean scores between two groups were significantly different and the mean scores in experimental group were more than control group.

Some researchers claimed that using technologies in general and podcasts in particular may provide disadvantages in teaching and learning process. Heilesen (2010) conducted a literature review on experiences with podcasting in higher education. He found that the impact of podcasting on learners' performance was somehow weak. Rahimi and Hosseini (2011) asserted that learners had negative opinions towards using CALL. Learners did not believe that CALL can take the place of traditional method. The results of this research demonstrated that Iranian learners do not agree with the replacement of traditional methods with CALL. In the same way, Aryadoust and Lashkary (2009) conducted an investigation into the effect of technologies on improving Iranian learners' vocabulary. They did not find any significant difference between post-test scores of participants in two groups.

Moreover, Davoudi and Rezaei (2016) investigated the impact of podcast on Iranian EFL learners' language comprehension. Sixty male and female university students participated in the experiment. They were assigned into the experimental and control groups. Experimental group received just audio file of the podcasting, and the control group received a different treatment which was the transcript file of the same audio podcast file of the experimental group. No significant difference was found in language comprehension scores across posttest between two groups.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This study used a quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest control group research design. The most important rationale for selecting such a design was because it was not desirable to randomly assign treatments to participants individually. Randomization of samples is mostly ideal for fully-

experimental designs in which samples are selected randomly for control and experimental groups (Shadish et al., 2002). Consequently, one class formed the experimental group (34 learners), and the other class formed the control group (36 learners).

6.2 Participants

Sample population in this research involved 95 Iranian intermediate learners. They are studying English in a Private Language Institute in Guilan, Iran. To homogenize the participants, Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered and 70 intermediate students were chosen as the main participants of this research. The participants were selected based on convenience non-random sampling method. Participants were assigned into two experimental and control groups. Participants were female. Their age ranged from 15 to 30 years, and they were all Persian natives. Random assignment of the learners into experimental and control groups was not possible. Thus, one class was considered as experimental group (34 learners), and the other one as control group (36 learners).

6.3 Instruments

6.3.1 Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

The first instrument of this study was the OPT. QPT was administered to 95 EFL learners in order to choose a homogeneous sample. The test comprised different types of items including both the components and skills of the English language. This placement test included three parts. Part one and two consist of 60 multiple-choice items, and in part three, they were supposed to write a writing. This instrument was used to collect information on the learners' proficiency.

6.3.2 Pre-test

The second instrument was a listening pre-test. To understand learners' listening comprehension level, a researcher-made pre-test was designed based on learners' textbook. It consisted of 10 multiple-choice items. Learners accomplished the test individually in almost 10 minutes

after which their copies were collected to be analyzed. Then as treatment, learners in the experimental group received listening skill based on the principles of the Podcasting and learners in control group were exposed to listening skill based on traditional teaching method. The reliability of pre-test was calculated through a pilot study and it was met according to Cronbach Alpha formula as (r=.77). In addition, two Associate Professors of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) confirmed the validity of pre-test.

6.3.3 Post-test

The third instrument of this study was a listening post-test. It was distributed to the learners to evaluate their listening after the treatment period and to measure the effect of using podcast on their listening comprehension skill. The reliability of post-test was calculated through Cronbach Alpha formula as (r=.81). Additionally, two Associate Professors of TEFL confirmed the validity of post-test.

6.4 Data Collection

The first step in this study was administering OPT to homogenize the participants. It was administered to 95 EFL learners. After analyzing the results, 70 subjects were chosen at intermediate level. Then, they were divided into two groups. One group was considered as experimental group (34 students) and another as control group (36 students). In order to find out their listening ability, pretest of listening was administered to both experimental and control group. A pretest of listening was given before the treatment to the experimental and control groups. The goal was measuring the participants' listening ability. The pretest had 10 questions. The students were asked to answer the questions of listening in 10 minutes.

After the pre-test, the researchers practiced the treatment on the experimental group. As podcasting was the treatment of this study, the researchers selected some podcast files to be used prior to each session. Learners in experimental group had the opportunity to choose the time they wanted to listen. The learners chose the order of the podcast files that the researchers assigned them to be heard during the term. In the control group, the learners were asked to listen to a radio program in

English for 8 times before each session. Based on the teacher's teaching, there was no linear direction to do the activities and the learners were free to return to any part they needed and follow the process as they have required. The teacher did not teach the content of the podcasts and the learners listened to the files prior to their class time. That was a quick review of the learners' listening practices and their general understanding of the topic to be discussed in groups within the class.

The following activities were performed within each class:

Each session all learners listened to one podcast in the experimental before beginning the class. Each class was divided into two groups of 7 to 9 learners. Each podcast was divided into similar parts for every learner within his group. Every session a group of learners (7 learners in experimental group) and (9 learners in control group) transcribed one podcast for the next session.

Each session the above groups shared the whole transcription with all their classmates before starting the class. According to the instructor's teaching, each learner had to write his comprehension of the podcast he listened to in advance and write one paragraph as a summary about his comprehension. The instructor asked learners to think about the subject and remember their experience towards that podcast. The instructor asked the learners to express their comprehension of the matter and created a free discussion concerning the podcast they listened to. Finally, every session learners engaged in different types of activities.

The treatment took 15 listening sessions. All groups had the same materials and time of teaching. Four lessons of the book entitled "New Interchange 1" were instructed to the learners. Before starting teaching in every lesson, the researchers provided some background knowledge for the learners then they played the CDs for them. The researchers asked the learners to carefully listen to each lesson. The researchers reformulated the learners' incorrect responses in conducting the listening comprehension exercises without mentioning their errors and letting them find out their errors. The researchers provided constructive comments on the learners' errors in the experimental group. Learners of control group were taught traditional listening comprehension exercises involving question and answer and class discussion. The researchers corrected learners' mistakes without providing valuable feedback for them. After seven sessions, the posttest of listening was administered to

both groups and the questions were answered in 10 minutes by the learners.

6.5 Data Analysis

The data of this study were collected through OPT which was administered to 95 Iranian learners and based on its result, 70 learners were selected at the intermediate level. The data were analyzed by running an Independent Samples t-test between posttest of the study. Also, paired-sample t-test was run between pretest and posttest of the groups of the study. By using the paired sample t-test, we can statistically conclude whether or not training has improved the efficiency of the learning.

7. Results

This section presents the results of the statistical analyses that were run to provide answer to the research question. Investigating the possible effect of podcast on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening was the main goal towards which this study was focused. 70 EFL learners were selected based on their performance on OPT. Then, they were divided into two groups (one experimental and one control group).

For the data analysis, the data collected from listening tests were summed up. Next, the procedures of descriptive statistics (comprising means and standard deviation) along with inferential statistics namely independent samples t-tests and paired samples t- tests were carried out. T-tests were run to see if there were any significant differences between two groups in terms of their listening before and after the completion of the specific treatment for the experimental group. Before running the parametric tests, normality was examined for the distributions. Besides, the reliability of listening test was estimated by computing Cronbach's Alpha. Data analyses procedure that includes both descriptive and inferential statistics are presented in the following section.

7.1 Reliability Analyses for the Listening Test

First, the reliability of listening tests was estimated via running Cronbach's Alpha to the results of the tests in a pilot study with ten

participants. The results of the reliability analyses for the listening tests are indicated in

Table 1

Reliability Statistics for the Listening Tests

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	N of Sample
Listening test (pretest)	.77	10	10
Listening test (posttest)	.81	10	10

The internal consistency for the listening tests showed acceptable standard of reliability. The commonly accepted rule adopted from George and Mallery (2003) was used for interpreting the internal consistency within the items of the listening tests. The rule for interpreting the reliability results is given in Table 2.

Table 2

Rule for Interpreting the Reliability Results (Adopted from George and Mallery, 2003)

Cronbach's Alpha	Internal Consistency
$0.9 \leq \alpha$	Excellent
$0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$	Good
$0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$	Acceptable
$0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$	Questionable
$0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$	Poor
$\alpha < 0.5$	Unacceptable

Based on the rule given in Table 2, the reliability analysis of the listening tests showed that the internal consistency within items for the pretest of listening was "acceptable," that for the posttest of listening was "good" for this specific sample.

7.2 Examining the Normality Assumption

Tests of normality were produced through the Explore command in SPSS to test whether listening test scores were distributed normally. To compute the 5% trimmed mean, the top and bottom 5 percent of the cases were removed and a new mean value was calculated. Then, original means and new trimmed means were examined to find the possible differences for the listening tests. The results are shown in the following table.

Table 3

Statistics for the Listening Tests

| | | | Statistic | | Std. Error | |
| | | | Groups | | Groups | |
			Ex.	Ctrl.	Ex.	Ctrl.
Pretest	Mean		14.29	14.38	.25	.22
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	13.77	13.92		
		Upper Bound	14.81	14.84		
	5% Trimmed Mean		14.27	14.37		
	Median		14.00	14.00		
	Variance		2.21	1.84		
	Std. Deviation		1.48	1.35		
	Minimum		12.00	12.00		
	Maximum		17.00	17.00		
	Skewness		.10	.32	.40	.39
	Kurtosis		-.70	-.59	.78	.76
Posttest	Mean		16.94	14.58	.26	.23
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	16.39	14.11		
		Upper Bound	17.48	15.05		
	5% Trimmed Mean		16.95	14.59		
	Median		17.00	15.00		
	Variance		2.42	1.90		
	Std. Deviation		1.55	1.38		
	Minimum		14.00	12.00		
	Maximum		20.00	17.00		
	Skewness		-.10	.05	.40	.39
	Kurtosis		-.74	-.60	.78	.76

Note. Ex. =Experimental, Ctrl. = Control

As it was depicted in Table 3, since the trimmed means were close to the original means, the scores for the listening tests were considered to be normally distributed. Moreover, the values of the Skewness and

kurtosis were within the range of (+2) supporting that the distributions for the listening test scores were normal.

7.3 Descriptive Analyses for the Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

To select homogeneous participants for the present study, OPT was administered to a group of EFL learners (n= 95). Seventy language learners whose scores fell within the range 37-47 were chosen as the main sample for the current study. Based on OPT direction, scores within the range of 1-17 are considered (Beginners), 18-27 (Elementary), 28-36 (Lower intermediate), 37-47 (Intermediate), 48-55 (Advanced), and 56-60 (very advanced). The results of the OPT test for 95 EFL learners are revealed in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the QPT Scores QPT scores

QPT scores		
N	Valid	95
	Missing	0
Mean		43.3158
Median		44.0000
Mode		39.00[a]
Std. Deviation		6.73079
Variance		45.303
Skewness		.101
Std. Error of Skewness		.247
Kurtosis		.065
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.490
Range		33.00
Minimum		29.00
Maximum		62.00
Sum		4115.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Table 4 presented the results of group statistics for the OPT scores which was administered for selecting homogeneous sample. Measures of central tendency such as the mean (43.31), the median (44.00), the mode (39.00) and measures of dispersion particularly the variance (45.30), and

standard deviation (6.73) as well as measures of distribution such as Skewness (.101) and Kurtosis (.065) were computed for OPT.

7.4 Descriptive Statistics for the Listening Tests (Pre and posttests)

After dividing participants into two groups of control and experimental groups, they were given a listening test to examine the possible initial differences between two groups regarding their listening before introducing the specific treatment. Afterwards, a post-test of listening was given to the students at the end of this research. Table 5 demonstrates descriptive statistics for pre and post-test scores of listening.

Table 5

Group Statistics for Pre and Post-test Scores of Listening

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	34	14.2941	1.48792	.25518
	Control	36	14.3889	1.35810	.22635
Posttest	Experimental	34	16.9412	1.55585	.26683
	Control	36	14.5833	1.38099	.23017

For the listening test that was administered at the starting of the study, mean scores for experimental and control groups were (M experimental = 14.29) and (M control=14.38), respectively. With respect to the scaterredness of the scores, standard deviation for experimental group was slightly higher than that of control group (SD experimental = 1.48; SD control =1.35). For the post-test of listening that was administered at the end of the study, mean scores for experimental and control groups were (M experimental = 16.94) and (M control =14.58), respectively. Furthermore, similar to the pretest scores, the standard deviation for experimental group was slightly higher than that of control group (SD experimental = 1.55; SD control=1.38). Figure 1 displays the means of two groups on pre-test of listening at the beginning of this study.

Figure 1

*The comparison between the means of the two groups on pre-test of listening*
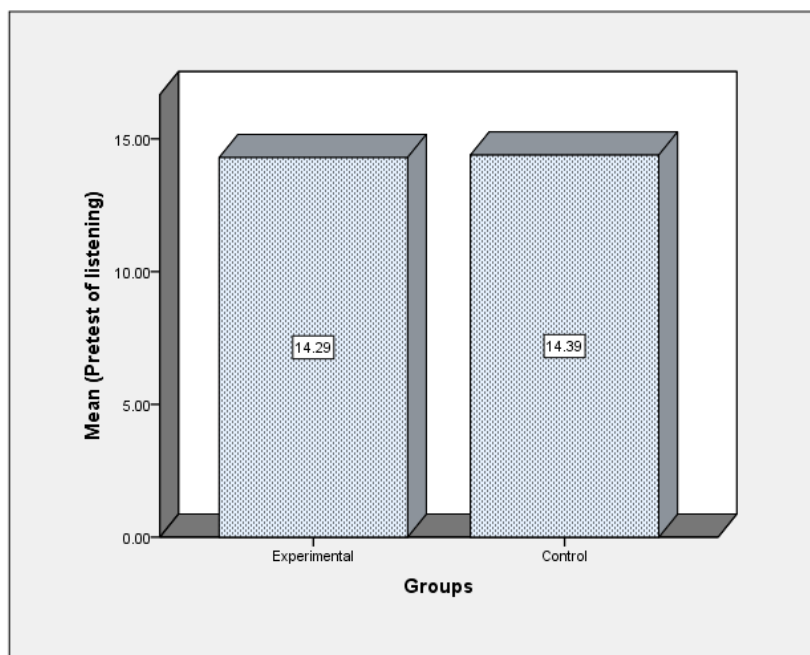
As shown in Figure 1, the two groups were at the same level regarding their listening test scores and performed almost similarly in the first administration of the listening test at the beginning of the study. This suggested that participants of two groups were homogeneous in terms of their listening skill. Figure 2 displays the means of the two groups after exposing the experimental group to podcast on post-test of listening at the end of the study.

As indicated in Figure 2, the two groups performed differently in the second administration of the listening test. Students in experimental group outperformed their counterparts in control group in their listening test scores. In order to examine the participants' possible improvement within groups, two paired samples t-tests were also run. Results are shown in Table 6.

Figure 2

The comparison between the means of the two groups on post-test of listening
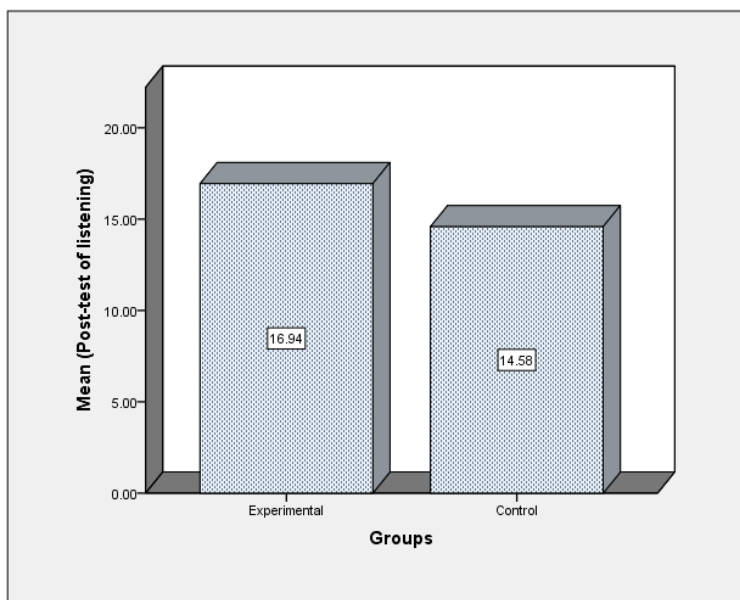
Table 6

Paired Samples Statistics for Listening Test Scores

Groups			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	Pair 1	Pretest	14.2941	34	1.48792	.25518
		Posttest	16.9412	34	1.55585	.26683
Control	Pair 1	Pretest	14.3889	36	1.35810	.22635
		Posttest	14.5833	36	1.38099	.23017

For the listening test, the mean score of experimental group changed from (M=14.29) in pre-test to (M=16.94) in post- test; that of control group improved from (M= 14.38) in pre-test to (M= 14.58) in post-test.

7.5 Inferential Analyses of the Data

Inferential statistics including the parametric tests of paired and independent t- tests were performed to provide answer to the research question and examine the null hypothesis. Independent-samples t-tests were run to compare students' performance in control and experimental groups on pre and post-tests of listening. Results for pretest are given in Table 7.

Table 7

Independent Samples T- tests for Listening Scores (Pretest)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.23	.63	-.27	68	.781	-.094	-.77	.58
Equal variances not assumed			-.27	66.52	.782	-.094	-.77	.58

The results of independent samples t- test showed that in pretest of listening, there was no statistically significant difference in listening scores for control (M =14.38, SD = 1.35) and the experimental group (M =14.29, SD = 1.48; t (68) = -.27, p = .781, two-tailed). The degree of differences in means (mean difference =.094, 95% CI: -.77 to .58) was very small (eta squared= .0010). It meant that, two groups were at the same level of proficiency in terms of their foreign language listening in the administered test at the beginning of the study. After making a comparison between two groups in terms of their pretest scores, an independent sample t- test was run to results of the posttest. The results of t- test for posttest scores are given in Table 8.

Table 8

Independent Samples T- tests for Listening Scores (Posttest)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.35	.55	6.71	68	.000	2.357	1.65	3.05
Equal variances not assumed			6.69	65.95	.000	2.357	1.65	3.06

For the posttest of listening, there was a statistically significant difference in the listening scores for the control (M =14.58, SD = 1.38) and the experimental group (M=16.94, SD = 1.55; t (22) = 6.71, p = .000, two-tailed). The extent of differences in means (mean difference = 2.357., 95% CI: 1.65 to 3.05) was small (eta squared=.3983). This was considered a medium effect size using Cohen's (1988) criteria of .1=small effect, .3=medium effect, .5=large effect.

In order to test if differences between pre and posttest scores of listening within groups were statistically significant, paired samples t- tests were conducted to results of pre and posttest of listening for two groups. Results are shown in Table 9.

Both groups improved their listening scores in post-test. Results of paired samples t-tests indicated that improvement was statistically significant simply for experimental group (P ≤ .05). In other words, experimental group made a higher improvement as compared to the control group in the posttest of listening. For the listening test, the mean difference between pre and posttests for control group was (.194) points. In contrast, the mean difference between pre and posttests for the experimental group came to (2.64) points. Results suggested that experimental group performed better than control group in posttest of

listening. Besides, progress within the groups for experimental group was higher than that for control group.

Table 9

Paired Samples Test for Pre and Posttest of Listening

Groups		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Experimental	Pretest - Posttest	-2.64	.59	-2.85	-2.43	-25.85	33	.000
Control	Pretest - Posttest	-.194	.62	-.40	.01	-1.8	35	.070

7.6 Evaluation of the Research Question

In order to find answer to the research question, an independent-samples t-test was carried out to compare the mean scores on listening for two different groups. Results of independent-samples t-test proved that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores for two groups for the posttest of listening. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected implying that podcast has a statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension skill.

8. Discussion

This study investigated the possible effect of podcasting on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension skill. This section includes detailed discussions about the results of this study. In the present study, the researchers applied an experimental method design in response to the research purposes and the nature of research question. In this design, the data were gathered based on quantitative approach to examine the cause-and-effect associations among the independent and dependent variables. Pre-test of listening was administered to the both groups at the beginning of study to examine their prior ability with respect to their listening. Then, the experimental group experienced podcasting

and placebo was given to the control group. Afterwards, both groups attended the post-test of listening at the end of the study. It was observed that podcasting had a statistically significant impact on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening ability.

The effectiveness of podcasts in EFL has widely been recorded for the improvement of learning environment, learners' positive attitude toward language learning which ultimately leads to successful learning experience. Taken together, the results suggest a key role for podcasts in promoting learning process. Moreover, the idea of teaching and learning using podcasting is to bring the learners to improve listening comprehension in an interesting and attractive situation. The variation of podcasting that combines some aspects like audio, video, and text adjusted in an attractive way will make the learners feel interested and focus to pay more attention to the listening material being given. Podcasting may lead to a more natural environment, increasing the learning process.

According to the obtained results, learners were exposed to many interesting authentic materials in the podcasts for performing their listening activities. The exposure to the authentic listening materials made learners more motivated and got better understanding in the listening process. This finding is supported by Chan et al. (2011), indicating that podcast motivated learners' language skills. The findings revealed that though using podcasts, learners were provided opportunity to learn new vocabulary knowledge by accessing numerous listening materials (Fitria et al., 2015). Learners accomplished some meaningful activities provided in the Podcasts like acting out individually, in pair or in group, discussing together, sharing ideas in solving problems, and answering listening comprehension questions. When learners are exposed to various sources, their vocabulary knowledge can be improved (Chan et al., 2011).

Using podcasting was effective in improving learners' listening comprehension. This has been supported by the findings of the pre-test and post-test of learners' listening comprehension. Findings proved that the performance of control and experimental groups in pre-test was identical. But findings of post-test represented that experimental group outperformed the control group. That is, the experimental group who received the instruction by using podcasting, performed better in post-test in comparison to control group. It can be stated that the use of podcasting had a great impact on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension skill.

The higher scores gained by the experimental group has demonstrated the impact of podcasting on improving learners' listening comprehension. This finding is in line with some studies in which learners who were taught through podcasting performed better in listening comprehension than those who did not taught via podcasting (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013; NamazianDost et al., 2017; Shahid & Ali, 2017; Shiri, 2015; Vahdat & Eidipour, 2016; Widodo & Gunawan, 2019). This finding is also in agreement with the studies done by Al Qasim and Al Fadda (2013) and Khedidja Kaouter and Mechraoui (2015) who contrasted between listening with podcast and the conventional listening strategy. Findings specified that experimental group demonstrated higher progress in comparison to traditional teaching group.

Findings revealed that learners in experiment group had a high motivation to study English through utilizing podcast because of the features provided by podcast like different classroom activities. Podcast provides learners an opportunity to eagerly respond to teachers so that the levels of their learning increase. Many exercises of podcasts stimulates learners to use their creativity and to improve their listening ability. This motivation is seen from learners' eagerness during the treatment period applying podcast in their class. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Abdulrahman et al. (2018), indicating that podcast assists learners in listening comprehension in which they use their imagination and build pictures of who and what they are listening to in their head. The above finding is supported by Lee (2009) who declared that podcasts motivate learners become more imaginative, increases learners' vocabulary and assist them to learn new things which is very difficult to find in conventional classes.

Podcasts made an impression on EFL learners with its meaningful content for listening, Learners were exposed to new vocabulary and content knowledge by the tasks of podcasts. Learners felt that their listening comprehension skill and vocabulary knowledge were improved. Previous findings indicated that learners can learn new vocabulary and content knowledge through listening to appropriate materials (Putman & Kingsley, 2012). Learners realized that activities in podcasts are very attractive and connected with real life situations that help them activate their critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving skills. Therefore, learners felt that working on podcasts tasks are very fascinating

and challenging. Through the challenging activities, learners felt motivated to complete listening tasks (Abdulrahman et al., 2018).

However, contrasting evidence exists about using podcasting in language learning. Baker et al. (2011) examined the benefits of incorporating podcasting into a university course. The findings represented that there was no difference between the performance of control and experimental groups. In a similar way, the current research contradicts to the study of Sutton-Brady et al. (2009) in which the participants favored the traditional study over the learning via podcasts. The findings revealed that time pressure and participants' level of English language are the main barriers that stopped the podcasts success among the participants of this research.

The findings of this study contradict to the study performed by Clark et al. (2009). In their research, the participants rejected the mobile potential of podcasting in favor of traditional study habits. Reasons for this rejection involve time pressure, learners' English language skills, and their knowledge of the medium. Jham et al. (2008) claimed that using podcasts provides disadvantages in teaching and learning process like having technical limitations, focusing on a passive learning experience instead of active learning experience, and providing negative impacts on learners' presentation in the language classes.

9. Conclusion

Investigating the effects of podcast on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension was the main goal towards which this study was focused. The success of podcasts depends on the teachers' ability with using podcast and the proper choice of the materials in a way that guides the learners to meet their learning aims. Statistical analyses demonstrated that podcast had a statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension. Furthermore, results of paired samples t-tests determined that both groups progressed in the post-tests of listening. However, this progress was statistically significant for experimental group. That is, experimental group had a higher achievement as compared to control group in posttest of listening.

The most notable pedagogical implication which can be inferred from this study is that podcasts could improve students' listening comprehension. The findings of this study can be of interest to different

groups such as curriculum planners, L2 specialists, EFL learners, and EFL teachers. By thinking about the results of study in regards to the significance of podcasts, teachers can enhance the learners' listening by using podcast in their classrooms. Using technology like podcast, teacher is also able to design proper instruction and develop his/her skill in operating technology. From that reason, having ability to use computer or technology to improve students' academic performance, teachers need to receive training for continuous professional development. It is expected that podcast as a tool of learning can help teacher and students reach the goals of education. Language teachers should undertake a guiding role throughout the process of access to right podcast sites and encourage students to create their own podcasts on a regular basis. In order to incorporate podcasts in EFL teaching and learning at language institutes, the following recommendations should be considered; time allocation, availability of electronic tools in language institutes, and teachers' familiarity with computer technologies in general and podcast in particular.

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