Using podcasts for enhancing listening and speaking skills in EFL classes

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Abstract: Integration of technology into EFL classes can facilitate the learning process if used properly. It enables teachers to create an interactive and productive environment in EFL classroom. This article explores the use of podcasts as educational technology and provides some ideas for how EFL teachers can apply them in their classrooms.

Key words: communication skills, broadcasting, digital media, podcaster, the gist of the podcast, segment, episode.

Advancement of new technologies has extended many opportunities for facilitating language learning at all stages of education. Current requirements of teaching foreign languages support using a variety of technology-based resources in accordance with the learner's needs. Also, modern trends in teaching and learning foreign languages emphasize communicative approach and authenticity. Using podcasts, as one of the modern tools of teaching and learning English,is considered to meet the contemporary demands in education that enhance the learners' knowledge and communication skills in EFL classes. Podcasts can serve as authentic materials that are proved to be one of the most effective ways of language acquisition.

Originally, a podcast is simply an audio or video transcription of information that can be downloaded and played anywhere and anytime. It is kind of satellite radio, but in pre-packaged, time-limited formats. Podcasts are recorded using software or online recording programs, exported to a digital warehouse (such as iTunes), and then downloaded by anyone who searches for that topic or anyone who has a direct link to the podcast itself. The term "podcasting" is an amalgamate of "iPod" and "Broadcasting" and has been defined by Wikipedia as a type of digital media consisting of an episodic series of audio, video, PDF or ePubfiles subscribed to and downloaded through web syndication or streamed online to a computer or mobile device. Simply put, podcasting is a type of radio show which allows access to periodic information through downloads on portable devices. It is easy to create and view a podcast and all an individual requires is a computer, internet connection and a recording device.

Podcasts for educators go beyond just passive listening. You can use this communication tool in your own classroom. Podcasts can be used to:

➢ **provide** information in a fun and entertaining way (thus, increasing student engagement)

➢ **extend** student learning with critical links between content areas

➢ **synthesize** student learning through podcast creation and

➢ **communicate** with parents and the community.

Podcasts can be used as part of your classroom listening activities. Here are some ideas for how you can use them in your classroom.

Listening comprehension quiz: Here, you are interested in having students focus on listening for understanding and meaning.

To do it:

1. Play the podcast. You can present the podcast once or a few times.

2. Students then demonstrate their understanding with a short quiz, questionnaire, or written summary.

Listening comprehension discussion: Again, in this activity you want your students to practice listening for general meaning. But here, you are using the podcast as an opening for discussion.

To do it:

1. Play the podcast. You can present the podcast once or a few times if needed.

2. Put questions that you want to engage with on the board. Some examples are:

➢ What is this episode about?

➢ Who is speaking?

➢ What are they talking about?

➢ What is the general mood of the conversation?

➢ Where are they?

3. Students can discuss answers to questions in partners, in small groups, or as a class.

Introduce new vocabulary. Here, your goal is to introduce new vocabulary.

To do it:

1. Start by teaching key target vocabulary and creating a glossary of the new words. These will be a guide for students to use as they listen to the podcast.

2. Provide a transcript of the podcasts as a cloze activity with blank spaces where the key words should be. Students can populate the blank spaces with the correct key vocabulary. Pro tip: you can get key vocabulary lists and transcripts for episodes of "English Learning for Curious Minds" podcast when you become a member.

Vocabulary Bingo. Here, your goal is to have students recognize vocabulary words using the game of Bingo.

To do it:

1. Teach key vocabulary and choose a podcast that uses those words.

2. Create bingo sheets based on the key vocabulary.

3. Play the podcast.

4. Students have to listen for the phrases. If they find one, they cross off that square. If they get 5 squares in a row, they win.

Conversation starter: Here, your goal is to begin a class discussion or conversation. The purpose of the podcast is to provide some background information or to introduce an idea or topic. You can also use it to start off a unit – maybe on the environment or fair trade.

To do it:

1. Play the podcast.

2. Have the class summarise what they heard.

3. Ask them what they think about the podcast content. Do they agree? Disagree? Why? Do they think there is a problem? What is it? Who is responsible?

4. Have students discuss questions in partners, small groups, or as a class.

Write a letter to the podcaster. Here, your goal is to practice writing. The podcast is simply a piece of material for the students to respond to.

To do it:

1. Play the podcast.

2. Have the class summarise what they heard and discuss it if necessary.

3. Ask students for examples of how they might respond to the podcaster. What would they say to her or him?

4. Introduce a letter-writing activity. It can be a full letter or a paragraph or just sentences depending on the level of the students.

5. Depending on student interest, you could actually send the letter.

On that note, we love to hear from students and listeners of the English Learning for Curious Minds podcast! We encourage you to email us here.

Listen for grammar. Here, your goal is to have students notice particular grammatical constructions.

To do it:

1. Introduce and teach the grammar points that you are targeting.

2. Choose a podcast in which the speaker makes use of those target grammar constructions.

3. Play the podcast for your class.

4. Have them write down instances of the grammar construction. Or, provide a multiple choice sheet and have them circle the instances of the target grammar construction that they hear.

Listen for pronunciation. Here, your goal is to have your students notice particular aspects of pronunciation, intonation, register, or accent.

To do it:

1. Introduce the aspect of pronunciation that you're interested in.

2. Play the podcast.

3. Have students try to repeat the sounds. Or, have them compare the pronunciation or accent from a speaker in one podcast with that of a speaker in another podcast.

General activity tips. Here are some things to keep in mind as you use podcasts for in-class activities.

➢ **Pre-teach.** Make sure you set your students up for success by pre-teaching anything necessary for the podcast.

➢ **Choose appropriate length.** Shorter podcasts are better for in-class activities. You can break-up a longer podcast by playing segments of them.

➢ **Have a purpose.** Make sure students know why they're listening and what they're listening for (a certain piece of grammar, the gist of the podcast, certain vocabulary, etc.)

> ➢ **Filter.** Go through the podcast ahead of time to choose the segment you want to present. Make sure it will work and is appropriate for your activity.

Create a Class Podcast

This may be my favourite way to use podcasts to teach English. The goal here is to make a class project where your students make their own podcasts. This works best as an individual or small group activity. Each student or group can create a podcastepisode on a common topic. Then you can put them together into a digital collection or series. The podcast is very flexible; it can be used for a variety of class topics and at any level.

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