USING PODCAST TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract: The article investigates the use of podcast technology as an innovative tool for teaching listening skills in foreign language classes. It examines the didactic potential of audio and audiovisual podcasts, their classification, and pedagogical functions in fostering comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and communicative competence. The study presents empirical research conducted with first-year students at the Academic Lyceum of the Uzbek State University of World Languages. The research involved pre-listening, listening, and post-listening stages, integrating interactive tasks such as vocabulary clarification, gap-filling exercises, and project-based activities. Results demonstrate that podcasts enhance students' motivation, facilitate authentic language exposure, and significantly improve listening comprehension. The study concludes that podcasting is an effective, versatile, and accessible method for developing listening skills in foreign language education.

Keywords: Podcast technology, listening comprehension, foreign language teaching, interactive learning, audio-visual materials, communicative competence, Web 2.0 tools, didactic innovation.

Currently, educators worldwide show particular interest in the integration of new information and communication technologies into the teaching process. Modern teachers are actively exploring the possibilities offered by Internet technologies in education.

Web 2.0 services, or social services, support group interactions. These include search engines, knowledge maps, social networks, blogs, services for storing bookmarks, videos, photos, and more. According to P. V. Sysoev, "The podcast social service is a type of Web 2.0 social

service that allows users to listen to, create, and distribute audio and video recordings" [Sysoev, 2009: 8].

The term *podcasting* was formed by combining the words *iPod* and *broadcasting*, and it represents a special format of audio and video programs distributed over the Internet. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a podcast is a multimedia file that can be downloaded from the Internet and listened to or watched on audio and video players.

When discussing audio podcasts, the following genres can be distinguished [Stupina, 2006: 24]:

• Chum-chat (friendly conversation), or talk show: a discussion on a given topic, for example, challenges in learning English faced by the participants. The number of people recording such a podcast may vary, but the optimal number is 3-4, so that listener attention is not overly dispersed. A distinctive feature is the relaxed, informal atmosphere, which makes any listener feel comfortable.

• Interview: a dialogue with a person who is an expert on the topic of interest to the podcaster.

• Storytelling, or narrative: a sequential account of events, usually structured around a plot.

• Monologue: a speaker's presentation in a free format on a given topic. Typically, it should last no more than 12–15 minutes to maintain listener engagement.

A high-quality podcast should meet the following requirements [Vladimirova, 2002: 39]:

• Clear audio without extraneous noise or interference.

• Relevance to the stated topic.

• Ability to maintain listener interest and attention, including elements of intrigue and unusual facts.

• Appropriateness for the target audience intended by the podcaster.

It is also important to note that medium- and high-level tasks associated with podcasts are recommended no earlier than the fifth grade.

To effectively use podcasts in lessons, it is necessary to first identify their key characteristics [Khokhlushina, URL]:

1. Multifunctionality. First, podcasts can serve as a tool for learning in foreign language classes. Second, they can provide an opportunity for informal discussion of the topic addressed in the lesson.

2. Media competence. Podcasts fit into the modern electronic and digital environment as both carriers and transmitters of information.

3. Interactivity. Learners can participate in an audio dialogue by expressing their thoughts and reasoning on the issue raised, as well as by solving learning tasks.

4. Ability to accommodate individual learner characteristics. Podcasts can be listened to not only "here and now" but also at any convenient time, offering an opportunity to implement a differentiated approach.

Podcasts can be used in the following ways:

- Listening to podcasts as homework, followed by discussion in class.

- Listening to podcasts with prior familiarization with lexical notes prepared by the teacher, making authentic podcasts accessible to lower-level learners.

- Listening to selected excerpts of a podcast or podcasts accompanied by a transcript (a written version of the audio file).

- Using selected podcast excerpts for dictation, followed by exercises on collocations, grammar rules, etc.

- Listening to podcasts at a slowed-down speech rate, which facilitates speech recognition for learners with lower proficiency.

- Having students create podcasts on a given topic in the form of group or pair discussions.

The aim of the present study is to determine the algorithm and methods for using audiovisual podcasts in teaching listening comprehension. To test the hypothesis that productive listening skills development in French language lessons is possible through the use of podcast technology, an empirical study was conducted. The study involved first-year students of the Academic Lyceum at the Uzbekistan State University of World Languages and consisted of three stages: diagnostic, formative, and control.

The purpose of the diagnostic stage was to identify the level of development of students' language skills, including listening comprehension. At this stage, a spoken test in the form of a conversation was conducted. During the formative stage, a lesson incorporating a podcast was carried out. At the final, control stage, the results obtained throughout the study were compared, demonstrating the effectiveness of podcasts in teaching listening comprehension in French language lessons.

During the diagnostic stage, we analyzed the listening skills of the study group. At the beginning of the lesson, students completed a test that simultaneously addressed two objectives: activating prior knowledge and determining the lesson topic "Daily Routine." It is noteworthy that during the introductory conversation, all students were active; they demonstrated their knowledge

by translating words, reading them correctly, correctly arranging activities in a daily schedule, answering questions calmly and without difficulty, and quickly deducing the lesson topic.

The selected podcast was seamlessly integrated into the structure of the lesson "Daily Routine", where the students 'task was to independently compose a monologue about their daily routine. The podcast, entitled *A Day in the Lyceum*, is recorded in an interview format in which a student describes the characteristics of the school routine in Uzbekistan. Working with the podcast is carried out in three stages:

1. Pre-listening stage
2. Listening stage
3. Post-listening stage

The audio text of the podcast was analyzed, and words that might cause difficulties for the students were identified. The unfamiliar words were written on the board along with their French definitions: *stuff*, *to bow*, *math (des trucs, s'incliner, les maths.)*. These words remained in constant visual view. In addition to providing the Russian and Uzbek translations, students also recorded these words in their vocabulary notebooks.

During the first stage, a discussion was conducted in which students talked about their subjects at the lyceum, which ones were their favorites and which were not, and why; what students do after classes, which clubs and sections they attend; and whether there are any special rules at the lyceum (bell schedule, behavior, dress code, etc.).

At the second stage, students listened to the podcast and answered questions about it. The questions were designed to check comprehension of the content. They were closed-ended, requiring students to choose one correct answer from the options provided. The second task involved filling in missing words in the text. For this, a fragment of the transcript with omitted words was displayed on the interactive board using a projector. To complete this task, students listened to the relevant fragment of the podcast once again.

The third stage of working with the podcast consisted of two tasks. The first task was to define the Uzbek and Russian words, which one of the students explains in the interview. These words refer to the names of school subjects. The second task consisted of five topics, all related in some way to school life: the length of the school year, a typical school day, teacher-student interaction, and extracurricular activities. Students were divided into pairs, each pair selected a topic, and prepared a short dialogue on it, which was then presented to the class.

The homework for the next lesson was to compose a narrative about their daily routine. In addition, students were required to prepare a project on life in lyceums in different countries. To

complete the project, students were divided into groups of three and collectively chose a country to study. In their projects, students answered the following questions:

- How do students get to the educational institution?
- Do students gather at the lyceum itself or in the courtyard before classes, where they are met by a teacher?
- Which subjects do they study?
- What time do lessons start and end?
- What do students eat for lunch? Do they bring food from home or buy it in the cafeteria or canteen?
- How many students are usually in a class?

One week was allocated for the project, and in the final lesson of the term, students participated in its presentation. Students presented their projects in various ways: some used a slideshow presentation, others showed photographs of students from the selected country, and some prepared a large poster.

In the next lesson, after checking the homework (students shared their daily routines), a test was administered to evaluate the effectiveness of the audio podcast as a pedagogical tool for teaching listening comprehension.

Based on the results obtained from the theoretical and empirical study on the use of podcasting technology in teaching listening comprehension, it can be concluded that this technology is effective in developing listening skills among younger students.

In summary, it can be stated that the podcast, as a media resource, is, alongside other tools, an essential technical means of foreign language instruction, enabling the achievement of complex objectives in language education.

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