

The Role Of BBC Learning English Podcasts In Developing Speaking Skills Among EFL Learners

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Abstract

English podcasts are accessible, free of charge, and can be usefully exploited to enhance EFL students' speaking skills. The paper at hand sets out to examine whether the incorporation of BBC learning English podcasts in the teaching of oral comprehension and production contributes to the improvement of EFL learners' speaking skills. To this end, a quasi-experimental approach using a paired sample t-test is conducted on a random sample of first year EFL students. The paired sample t-test is used to determine if, after the treatment application, there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest speaking skills assessment means. The paired sample t-test succeeded in revealing a statistically reliable difference between the mean number of the pretest and the mean number of the posttest, and by specifying the preset level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), the alternative hypothesis has been confirmed. The results of the SPSS outputs confirm that teachers' integration of BBC learning English podcasts, more precisely 6 minutes English, can

provide EFL students with the opportunity to speak fluently through the improvement of vocabulary, word choice, grammar, pronunciation, and interaction.

Keywords: Podcasts, speaking skills, IELTS speaking test, learning/teaching process, improvement.

Introduction

It is repeatedly put that today's learners are products of a digital world (Prensky, 2001). Various technological devices and social media tools are integral parts of learners' lives and predictably, their daily digital experiences cannot go unnoticed in their learning process (Rakhmanina & Kusumaningrum, 2017; Rahmawati et al., 2018; Divana & Afifah, 2020). Learners nowadays extensively rely on countless audio and video recordings, predominantly on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, to access expert advice, talents, and real-life experiences, all of which contribute to improving their English language speaking skills (Izzah, 2017; Basri & Jabu, 2019). Podcasts, for instance, exhibit fluent English-speaking skills and provide learners with insights into the native context, thereby enhancing students' oral performance. Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate whether the appropriate use and integration of BBC Learning English podcasts in teaching oral comprehension and production can contribute to the enhancement of EFL learners' speaking skills. Given the substantial need to master this intricate skill in English language teaching and learning, the findings of this study are expected to be beneficial for both learners and teachers. To address these objectives, the present study focuses on the following research question:

Does the proper incorporation of BBC learning English podcasts in the teaching of oral comprehension and production enhance EFL speaking skills?

Correspondingly, the following hypotheses have been put forth as anticipated answers to the research question above:

1.1. Null hypothesis (H₀): If teachers incorporate BBC learning English podcasts properly in the teaching of oral comprehension and production, this would not enhance EFL students' speaking skills.

1.2. Alternative hypothesis (H₁): If teachers incorporate BBC learning English podcasts properly in the speaking activities of oral comprehension and production, this would enhance their students' speaking skills.

1. Speaking Skills Assessment

EFL Learners tend to judge and be judged by their articulate ability. Perhaps, for them, being able to convey a message to others clearly and accurately makes a difference and provides positive impressions. Relevant to this, to quote Ur (1984: 120), "many if not most foreign language learners are interested in learning to speak", and therefore the teaching of speaking, as an oral productive skill (Nunan, 2004), merits more thought (Bygate, 1987).

Whilst some studies (Brown, 2004; Thornbury, 2005) have indicated the importance of the mastery of English speaking skills and the advantages students can get by mastering it, other studies (Al Hosni, 2014; Noprival, 2012) have shown that EFL students still encounter some problems in speaking tasks. In response to this, it is

suggested that a look at what constitutes these challenges is important in understanding how to teach and what to assess in the speaking skills. In the words of Rahmawati (2014), teachers' lack of knowledge of how to assess students' speaking performance denotes that their teaching competence is far from effective. Given that speaking skills assessment is a debatable issue and may vary depends on the types of speaking, the five criteria used to evaluate students' speaking skills in the present study are the ones proposed by [Brown and Abeywickrama](#) (2010; cited in Rahmawati, 2015) and also used in IELTS band descriptors:

- a. **Fluency and Coherence (FC):** described as the ability to talk at length without hesitation, with only rare repetition or self-correction, and fully appropriate cohesive features to develop topics and link ideas together in a logical structure.
- b. **Lexical Resource and Range (LRA):** refer to the ability to use a wide range of vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics as well as using idiomatic language naturally and accurately.
- c. **Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GRA):** can be defined as the ability to produce appropriate complex sentences with minor grammatical occurrence.
- d. **Pronunciation (P):** does not mean to pronounce like native speakers, but to pronounce words correctly using a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety.
- e. **Interaction (I):** refers to being active in the conversation or presentation development such as having eye contact or engaging in any kind of action that involves the audience.

2. Podcasts inside EFL Classrooms

With the aim to get students energized and engaged in a hands-on learning process, teachers are expected to make use of different available resources. When utilized effectively in face-to-face settings, videos can serve as effective tools for course delivery and flexible learning (Paavizhi et al., 2020). While the use of videos as an educational medium is not new, the availability of video recordings, including podcasts and vlogs, on platforms like YouTube provides opportunities for the development of English language skills (Biel and Gatica-Perez, 2010; Izzah, 2018). Incorporating podcasts into the classroom, as highlighted by Palenque (2016, as cited in Rachmiati et al., 2021), offers teachers the ability to diversify their instructional approaches, fostering both student engagement and a sense of belonging in the learning environment. Similarly, Schunk and Pintrich (2008, as cited in Devana & Afifah, 2020) argue that video collections serve as audiovisual documentation of life experiences and facilitate communication and interaction on the internet. In line with these perspectives, podcasting, as a means of expressing and recording thoughts, opinions, and experiences, has gained popularity in recent times.

Expanding upon Palenque's viewpoint (2016), Farhan Abu Seileek (2023) investigates the impact of using recorded videos from BBC Learning English on the development of listening and speaking skills in the 10th-grade students. The study reveals that the exposure of students to a diverse range of real-life situations through podcasts enhances their motivation to learn, as they can comprehend and relate to similar circumstances in their own lives. Consistently, students can engage in an

authentic and motivating environment that promotes confidence and fosters autonomous learning (Sari, 2018; Qmaria & Zaim, 2020).

4. Method

To check the validity of the set hypotheses and achieve the objectives of this study, we opt for a quasi-experimental approach using paired sample t-test. The paired sample t-test, as a type of inferential statistics, is used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means taken from the same individuals, in our case, the pre-and post-test mean scores. Simply put it, the pre-test and post-test are used to assess the participants' speaking skills before and after receiving the treatment. Based on a purposive sampling, the sample consists of a single group of twenty (20) first year students studying English at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria. This group receives experimental treatment which has gone through three stages.

1. **The first stage** was through performing a pretest to assess the sample's speaking skills.
2. **The second stage** was through exposing the sample to a treatment which involved four sessions with different speaking activities through a careful and purposeful implementation of BBC learning English podcasts. Considering that videos can hinder students' performance if not managed successfully, the researchers make a lot of efforts to make the right choice of podcasts for students and tries hard to prevent common negative side effects associated with this approach.
3. The post-test was **the last stage** that occurs after the treatment. It was performed fundamentally to check the effectiveness of the manipulated independent

variable (the use of 6 minutes English podcasts from BBC learning English) on the dependent variable (students’ English-speaking skills). To ensure that both tests are appropriate and accurately scored, some factors are considered, including mainly how and what is assessed in EFL students’ speaking skills?

The format of both tests includes oral presentations of free topics. The researchers (as examiners) assess the sample’s oral performance against the five criteria proposed by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) and used in IELTS band scores. These main criteria consist of: (1) fluency and coherence, (2) lexical resource and range (3) grammatical range and accuracy, (4) pronunciation, and (5) interaction (listening and responding). Each criterion is worth explanation referred to in the theoretical background of the study at hand. Table 1 below clearly shows these criteria with a Likert scale that provides five rating points to measure quality:

Criteria	P	S	G	VG	E
1. Fluency-and-coherence					
2. Lexical resource and range					
3. Grammatical range and accuracy					
4. Pronunciation					
5. Interaction					

1. P= Poor; 2.S= Sufficient; 3. G= Good; 4. VG= Very good; 5. E= Excellent

Table1. Oral Presentation Assessment Criteria by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010)

5. Results

This section presents the global findings of the current study, utilizing SPSS version 26 for data analysis. It focuses on the evaluation of the participants' speaking skills based on the assessment criteria, both before and after the implementation of the experimental treatment. Subsequently, the findings of each test are compared to determine the effectiveness of the independent variable in relation to the null hypothesis.

4.1. Pre-test Results

Initially, the pre-test results are displayed to assess the target sample's speaking skills before receiving the treatment.

4.1.1. Overall Pre-test Oral performance

	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource and range	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation	Interaction
Mean	1,6	2,25	2,2	1,6	2,35
Mode	1	2	2	1	3
Std. Deviation	,75	,63	,89	,82	1,26
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	3	3	4	4	4
Freq (%)					

1.Poor	11=55%	2= 10%	4= 20%	11= 55%	7= 35%
2.Sufficient	6= 30%	11= 55%	10=	7= 35 %	3= 15%
3. Good	3= 15%	7= 35%	50%	1= 5%	8= 40%
4.Very good	/	/	4= 20%	1= 5%	2=10%
5.Excellent	/	/	2= 10 %	/	/
			/		

SPSS Output 1. Overall Pre-test Performance

The SPSS output 1 gives inferential statistics distributed in different columns, including the columns labeled: 'Mean, Mode, Standard Deviation (SD), Minimum & Maximum values and Frequency'. It shows that the lowest mean score, before the treatment, is related to the criteria 'fluency & coherence and pronunciation' (1.6) while the highest mean score is reached in the criterion 'interaction' (2,35). For the criteria 'lexical resource & range and grammatical range & accuracy', the means are (2.25) and (2,2) respectively. As for the dispersion indicator 'the SD', it is quite similar for all the criteria. The obtained data indicate that the SD is low (no high variability), meaning that, for each criterion, the students produced nearly equivalent levels.

Evidently, prior to the treatment, the output 1 denotes that the rating point '1 representing poor' is the minimum value for all the criteria, whereas it is found that the rating point '3 representing good' is the maximum value for the criteria 'fluency & coherence (15%) and 'lexical resource & range' (35%). For the next criteria 'grammatical range & accuracy, pronunciation and interaction', the maximum value is '4 representing the quality measure 'very good'. It is noteworthy that the maximum value '4' is reached by only very few students (2=10%, 1=5%, 2= 10%). This is proved by the values

represented in the column labeled ‘Mode’ denoting the rating point with the highest frequency.

4.2. Post-test Results

The post test results are displayed in order to identify whether the performance of the selected sample has developed or not owing to the experimental treatment.

4.2.1. Overall Post-test Oral performance

	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource and range	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation	Interaction
Mean	2,6	3,45	3,1	3	3,65
Mode	2	3	3	3	4
Std. Deviation	,68	,68	,71	,79	,87
Minimum	2	2	2	2	2
Maximum	4	5	4	5	5
Freq (%)					
1.Poor	/	/	/	/	/
2.Sufficient	10=50%	1= 5%	5= 25%	11= 55%	2= 10%
3.Good	8= 40%	10= 50%	11= 55%	7= 35 %	6= 30%
4.Very good	2= 10%	8= 40%	3= 15%	1= 5%	9= 45%
5.Excellent	/	1= 5%	1= 5 %	1= 5%	3=15%

SPSS Output 2. Overall Posttest Performance

The SPSS output 2 indicates that the participants, after receiving the treatment, reached higher means for the assessment criteria than that recorded in the pretest (2.6, 3.45, 3.1, 3, 3.65). As for the dispersion aspects, the SD is low; revealing that, with this enhancement in students’

speaking skills, there is still no high variability. Worthy of attention also is that there is a remarkable increase for the minimum and maximum values. The participants' lowest rating point for all the criteria is (2 representing the quality indicator 'sufficient') while the top grade scored by 6 post-test takers, after the treatment, is (5 representing the measure 'excellent') in these assessment criteria (lexical resource 5%, grammatical range 5%, pronunciation 5% and interaction 15%). More importantly, for the column labeled 'Mode', it can be observed that the rating point (1=poor) has no (zero) frequency which can be attributable to the experienced instructional practice.

4.3. Paired Sample T-Test: Comparing Means and Hypothesis Testing

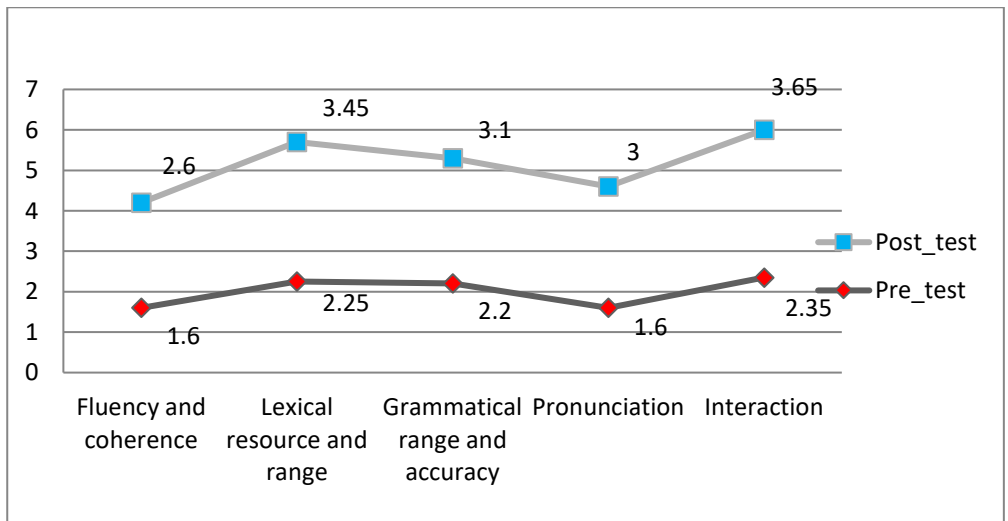


Figure 1. Difference in Means

4.3.1. Comparing Pretest Posttest Means

As for the comparison of each assessment criterion pretest posttest means, having a look at Figure 1 above, one may deduce that students’ oral performance is progressed. The means difference cannot be regarded as remarkably significant, but sufficiently important to be worthy of attention for almost all the criteria. The order of the slight difference in means from small, medium to large can indicate which aspect improvement is more significant:

- Fluency and coherence (-1),
- Grammatical range and accuracy (-1.1),
- Lexical resource and range (- 1.2),
- Interaction (-1.3),
- Pronunciation (- 1.4)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig.
			Lower	Upper			
Pre-test	2	,36	-1,41	-,90	-	4	,000
Post-test	3,16	,40			12,5		
Difference	-1,16	,20					

SPSS Output 3. Paired Differences

In the SPSS Output 3, the column labeled ‘Mean’ presents the difference between the pre-test and posttest means (1.16), the next column is the **standard deviation (SD)** of the difference between the two means (, 20), and the column labeled "t" gives the observed or calculated ‘t’ value (-12,5). It can be easily observed that the mean score of the selected sample is different after the experimental treatment (3.16-2= 1.16). Clearly, the mean score of the post-test is higher than the mean of the pre-

test ($3.16 > 2$). Furthermore, the standard deviation is low and close to zero (36 /, 40) because all the assessment criteria rating points are clustered around the mean value. Therefore, it can be concluded that the gathered data is homogenized, no high variability between the five-point rating scale of the criteria (the Pretest mean is '2', meaning that, as the SD is low, the rating points of the criteria are clustered around the measure 'sufficient', whereas the post-test mean is 3.16 and the rating points are clustered around the quality measure 'good').

4.3.2. Hypothesis Testing

It is worth mentioning that the hypothesis-testing procedure involves using the obtained sample data to determine whether H_0 can be rejected, and accordingly, if H_0 is rejected, the statistical conclusion is that the alternative hypothesis H_1 is true. This can be achieved by determining three main criteria namely, (1) the type of the hypothesis, (2) α (the **preset** level of significance) and (3) the p-value (the **observed** level of significance= sig). Once we find the p-value, we compare the p-value to our preset significance level:

- If our p-value is **less than or equal to α** , then there is enough evidence to **reject the null hypothesis** ($p \leq \alpha$).
- If our p-value is **greater than α** , there is not enough evidence to **reject the null hypothesis** ($p > \alpha$).

It is worth remembering that the nature of the hypothesis of the study at hand is one tailed; the researchers determine the effect of the treatment as being positive for the alternative hypothesis. Moreover, to draw the right inferences from the statistical test, the

researchers specify the ' α ' level as: **0.05** (5%), that is to say, we are 95% confident that the results were due to the reflection of the treatment, but 5% of the results were actually just due to chance. The third criterion refers to the observed level of significance (sig) which is presented in the column as **Sig. (2-tailed) = ,000**. Following the decision rule given before, it is noticed in the SPSS output 3 that the **p-value** is less than the ' α ' level (**,000 < 0,05**), hence, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. That implies that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the proper incorporation of BBC learning English podcasts in the teaching of oral comprehension and production contributes to the improvement of EFL students' speaking skills. Yet, noticeably, based on the value of the SD discussed in the section 'comparing means', it can be deduced that the speaking skills enhancement is not that highly remarkable for the selected sample, there is a shift from the rating point '2 to 3', that is, from 'sufficient' to 'good'.

6. Synthesis of the Main Finding

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of incorporating BBC Learning English podcasts in enhancing the speaking skills of EFL students. A paired sample t-test was conducted as part of a quasi-experimental research design to analyze the data collected. The findings indicate a significant improvement in the participants' speaking skills after receiving the treatment. The improvement is evident across five criteria: fluency and coherence, lexical resource and range, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation, and interaction. These criteria, based on Brown and Abeywickrama's (2010) framework and IELTS band scores, demonstrate the positive impact of the

experimental treatment. The paired sample t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pretest ($M=2$, $SD=.36$) and posttest ($M=3.16$, $SD=.40$), supporting the alternative hypothesis ($p=.000 \leq \alpha=0.05$).

The increase in posttest means can be attributed to the careful and purposeful use of BBC Learning English podcasts as the manipulated independent variable, which positively affected students' speaking skills as the dependent variable. Analyzing the pretest and posttest results separately for each aspect of speaking skills, it is noteworthy that the lowest rating in the pretest was 'poor' for all assessment criteria, while the highest rating was 'very good' achieved by only four students. However, in the posttest results, the lowest rating improved to 'sufficient' for all criteria, and the highest rating reached 'excellent' for six students. Notably, the 'poor' rating had a frequency of zero in the posttest results.

Further analysis reveals the rate of increase in each criterion, showing that pronunciation (-1.4) and interaction (-1.3) experienced the highest growth, followed by lexical resource and range (-1.2), grammatical range and accuracy (-1.1), and fluency and coherence (-1.1). This significant improvement across all aspects of speaking skills demonstrates the positive effects of the treatment. Consistent with previous research conducted in various contexts (Khashan and AbuSeileek, 2023; Munawara, 2022; Rachmiati et al. 2021), it can be argued that the deliberate use of BBC Learning English podcasts as an instructional tool for oral comprehension and production fosters fluency,

vocabulary enrichment, accurate grammar and pronunciation, and essential skills for social interaction.

7. Concluding remarks, Limitations, and Implication for further research

This study attempts to address the needs of students and align with teachers' expectations. By employing BBC Learning English podcasts, as readily accessible digital teaching tools, learner autonomy can be encouraged, providing students with exposure to authentic language use. In turn, teachers can leverage the findings of this study to align their instruction with their desired outcomes. Considering the current technological landscape in which students are immersed, podcasts emerge as an effective instructional strategy to enhance various aspects of EFL speaking skills. It is important to emphasize that teachers, as facilitators, play a critical role in selecting relevant podcasts that align with instructional objectives.

Despite the promising results that align with previous research findings, the investigation of BBC podcasts' effectiveness in developing EFL students' speaking skills encountered certain difficulties and limitations. Challenges such as the absence of digital laboratories and technological constraints, including limited Internet access, within the research setting have had an impact on instructional time and the implementation of the treatment. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies address these limitations by exploring the same research problem in different settings, with larger sample sizes and longer treatment durations to address the identified gaps and

obtain more conclusive results. Additionally, based on the findings of this study, further research can explore the potential of BBC Learning English podcasts in reducing shyness and anxiety among students, and examine the strength of the relationship between these variables through correlational research.

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