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The Use of Self-Created Podcasts to Enhance German Speaking Proficiency

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Abstract
This study focuses on podcasts as a medium for enhancing speaking competence in German as a Foreign Language (DaF) instruction. In contrast to existing research, this study emphasizes student-created podcasts and their didactic potential in higher education contexts. The key research questions explore how podcasts can be integrated into the classroom, how project-based learning through podcasts supports language acquisition, and how their use affects speaking proficiency. The study is conducted with German language students at UNJ and UNPAD at the B2 proficiency level. Initial survey results indicate that the use of podcasts increases students' motivation to learn German. Furthermore, findings suggest that creating their own podcasts not only improves students' linguistic abilities but also fosters 21st-century skills, including learning and innovation competencies as well as media, information, and technology literacy—skills that align with Indonesia's educational goals. The study's findings aim to provide German language instructors with further insights and practical ideas on how podcasts can be effectively implemented in DaF instruction to better meet the needs of today's learners.

Keywords: *Podcast, German Speaking Proficiency, Project-based Learning*

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, communication skills are of paramount importance in both academic and professional contexts. Mastery of foreign languages is essential, as they serve as a gateway to global communities and a key means of acquiring knowledge (Kharis, et al, 2020). Given this necessity, learning foreign languages has become essential, as proficiency in multiple languages constitutes a significant qualification for professional success (Sedláčková, 2019:7). Employers and universities place great emphasis not only on students' ability to communicate correctly in a foreign language but also on their competence in appropriately navigating the digital sphere. The latter aspect will be addressed later.

Successful communication primarily requires the ability to express oneself clearly in order to respond appropriately in any given situation. Therefore, it is essential for students to continuously enhance their oral expression skills. Although speaking proficiency is promoted in foreign language instruction, teachers often face time constraints that hinder the

implementation of sufficient practice-oriented exercises within classroom sessions. In traditional learning environments, there is often little time available for individualized and intensive speaking practice.

Given these challenges, digital technologies such as podcasts are becoming increasingly important in education. Podcasts allow students not only to consume content flexibly but also to create their own. In this study, we focus specifically on self-produced podcasts. This approach is particularly promising for developing speaking skills, as creating one's own podcast provides an immersive and creative opportunity to actively practice and reflect on language use. The podcast production process requires not only precise formulation and structured speech but also a critical engagement with one's linguistic expression and communication skills.

The use of podcasts in foreign language teaching is not a novel innovation. Research on the positive impact of listening to podcasts on learning success has been conducted by Evans (2008). In his study, Evans (ibid.) demonstrated that, compared to traditional textbooks, podcasts provide a more effective means of acquiring learning content. Furthermore, they foster a stronger sense of engagement with the material among learners. Based on these findings, we take this research a step further by exploring the use of self-produced podcasts to enhance learners' speaking skills.

The fact that today's students have grown up as 'digital natives' plays another crucial role. They are well acquainted with the functions and applications of audio and video media, making them particularly receptive to technology-based learning methods. Integrating podcast projects allows students not only to expand their digital competencies but also to develop their language skills in a way that aligns with their everyday reality and enhances their intrinsic motivation.

This study examines the potential of self-produced podcasts in the context of language acquisition. It analyzes the extent to which this method can contribute to improving students' speaking proficiency despite time constraints in conventional classroom settings, as well as how students perceive this activity

Theoretical Framework

The term podcast originates from the combination of "iPod," Apple's audio player, and "broadcast," meaning transmission or broadcasting (Ahlbach, 2022, citing Quandt, 2013). Podcasts are digital audio and video files in episodic form that are accessible via the internet and can be used at any time (ibid.). The widespread use of podcasts as a tool for foreign language learning has become a growing trend. According to the German Federal Association for Digital Economy (Bundesverband Digitale Wirtschaft), the rapid increase in the number of podcast users from 2.4 million to 11.8 million between 2018 and 2019 reflects this development (Ahlbach, 2022). One possible reason for this trend is that podcasts are easily accessible from home and on the go, and they can be recorded without extensive technical effort. Unlike radio broadcasts, podcasts are rarely subject to editorial guidelines, allowing for unrestricted content creation in terms of both subject matter and timing. In this study, the term podcast exclusively refers to the audio format.

The use of podcasts as a learning medium to enhance speaking and listening skills in foreign language teaching (FLT) has already been investigated. Alm (2013) researched the effectiveness of podcasts in FLT and found that they not only improve listening comprehension but also increase learners' motivation and engagement. He further stated that podcasts allow learners to enhance their language skills by fostering both active and passive language comprehension while also encouraging them to produce their own podcasts. Stanley (2006) examined the general applications of podcasts in FLT and concluded that they provide access to authentic language material. His study also highlights that podcasts contribute to improving learners' listening comprehension. As demonstrated in Lutfa's study,

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most participants acknowledged that podcasts enhance listening comprehension, support vocabulary acquisition, and improve speaking skills through repeated exposure and practice (Lutfa et al., 2024).

Regarding learner motivation, it has also been proven that podcasts can have a motivating effect, as they can be listened to outside the classroom and at an individual pace (Stanley, 2006). Alm (2007) investigated the use of new media in FLT based on the self-determination theory of motivation. She argues that learners using new media can experience the rewarding effects of their decisions and choices. A "more intensive engagement with the target language," which can influence language acquisition, occurs when learners take an active role in their learning process. In our case, students are allowed to choose the topic and content of their podcasts. This means they engage with the problem statement and the relevance of the topic. They formulate their individual hypotheses and negotiate them, relying on their prior knowledge.

Classroom Implementatation

The use of self-produced podcasts follows the following methodological principles: aligning the learning process with content that is meaningful to learners, activating learners, redefining the teacher's role, and transforming the concept of teaching materials (Neuner & Hunfeld, 1993).

In this study, students selected a topic of their choice. Based on this topic, they researched, developed, and formulated ideas, which they incorporated into their podcast scripts. This process represents a learner-centered approach that focuses on meaningful learning content for students. Active student participation is particularly evident in the podcast production phase. Within their groups, students independently express their ideas and discuss the feedback provided by the instructor on their scripts.

The role of the instructor in this process is limited to that of a facilitator and mediator, ensuring a smooth learning experience. The instructor is no longer the sole source of knowledge but rather a guide who helps students select and utilize appropriate knowledge sources. The concept of teaching materials, which are typically provided by the instructor, has changed in this study. Instead, students prepare their own teaching materials, which are ultimately shared among the group. The completed podcast is played in class, and each group creates a quiz, usually consisting of questions related to the content of the podcast.

Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach based on the distribution of a questionnaire and provides a descriptive explanation of the steps involved in implementing podcast use in the classroom. The sample consists of 60 students at the B1+ level who participated in the study. Of these 60 students, 40 questionnaires were successfully collected, resulting in a response rate of 67%. Participants were selected randomly to ensure a representative sample and to minimize bias.

Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire that included both closed-ended Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was specifically designed to assess students' perceptions and experiences of using podcasts as a tool to enhance their speaking skills during the learning process.

The questionnaire covered aspects such as the frequency of podcast use as well as subjective assessments of the effectiveness and applicability of this approach. Furthermore, it included questions on students' self-perception of their speaking skills, as well as their motivation and engagement in creating and listening to podcasts. Upon completion of data collection, the responses were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The answers

to the closed-ended and Likert-scale questions were converted into numerical values, while the open-ended responses were analyzed qualitatively to examine students' reflections on the podcast creation process.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study encompass two key aspects: (1) the steps involved in implementing podcasts in the classroom to enhance oral expression skills in German and (2) students' perceptions of this approach.

The implementation process begins with a brainstorming phase, during which students develop a concrete concept for their podcast. They are divided into groups and select a topic from a list of previously covered subjects. Subsequently, they engage in an in-depth exploration of the chosen topic. The instructor provides guiding questions, which, according to Made et al. (2016), are intended to stimulate students' knowledge, opinions, critical perspectives, and creative ideas regarding the planned project.

In the next step, students compose a script for their podcast. Once the script has been drafted, the instructor reviews and corrects it, providing targeted feedback, which is then discussed with the students. The third step involves the actual production of the podcast. Based on the revised script, students record their voices. A minimum of three repetitions is required to ensure optimal results. During these repetitions, students receive targeted training in pronunciation. In the final step, the completed podcasts are presented in class, which contributes to the development of students' listening skills. Additionally, each group prepares an interactive element, such as a quiz, which is based on the podcast content and is to be completed by members of other groups.
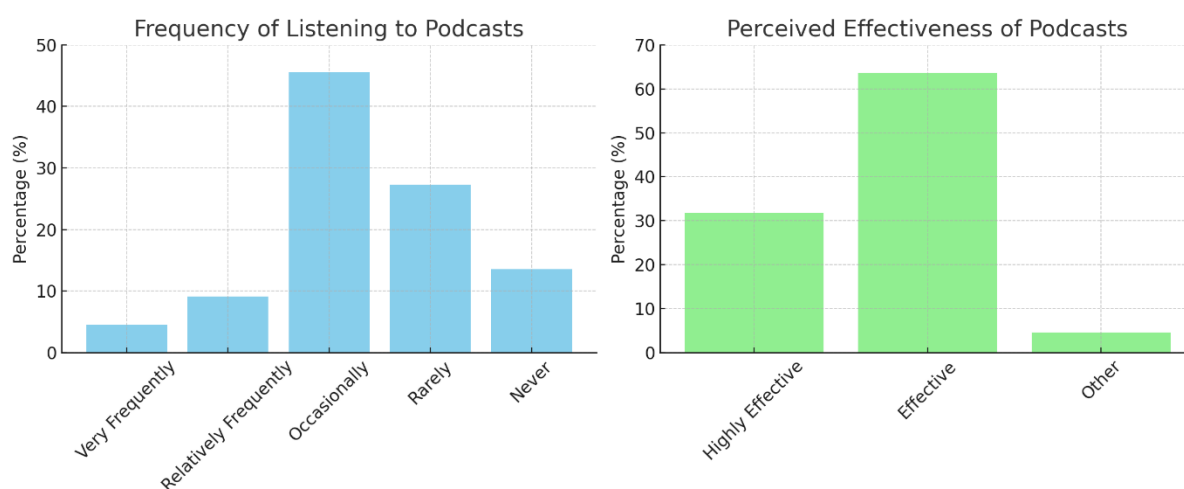

Figure 1.: Students' Podcast Engagement and Perceived Effectiveness.

This figure illustrates (left) the frequency with which students listen to podcasts in their daily lives and (right) their perceived effectiveness of podcast use in improving speaking proficiency. The data were obtained from a questionnaire distributed to 40 B1+ German learners.

Another key finding of this study concerns students' perceptions. The participants completed a questionnaire divided into four sections: demographic background, experiences with podcast creation, the impact of podcast production on their speaking skills, and their

overall conclusions. In the first section, which focused on demographic information, students were asked how frequently they listen to podcasts in their daily lives. The results showed that 45.5% listen to podcasts occasionally, 27.3% rarely, 13.6% never, 9.1% relatively frequently, and 4.5% very frequently. Regarding the specific podcasts they listen to, most students named *Easy German* as their preferred choice. The next question assessed students' comfort with their speaking skills. Half of the respondents (50%) indicated that they felt relatively comfortable, while 40.9% considered their abilities to be average. The remaining students reported feeling either uncomfortable or very comfortable with their speaking skills. The following section explored students' experiences with podcast creation. A majority of students (50%) described their experience as positive, while 45.5% rated it as very positive. This trend is illustrated in the figure below. Additionally, 45.5% of respondents stated that producing podcasts helped them improve their speaking skills, while another 45.5% found this support particularly beneficial. The aspect in which students showed the most noticeable progress after creating their podcasts was pronunciation and intonation.

Students identified several aspects of the podcast creation process that they particularly enjoyed, including pronunciation exercises, intonation, word choice, creativity, and collaboration. However, they also faced some challenges, such as a limited vocabulary and difficulties with grammar, which made script writing more challenging. These issues were mitigated through the use of artificial intelligence, particularly online translators. Additionally, students frequently encountered pronunciation and intonation difficulties during the recording process.

Overall, podcast production had a positive impact on students' speaking skills. Notably, 77.3% of students believed that their speaking abilities had significantly improved. Furthermore, podcast creation boosted their confidence in speaking German. When asked about the effectiveness of podcasts in improving speaking skills, 63.6% of students considered this method effective, while 31.8% rated it as highly effective. When asked about the effectiveness of podcasts in improving speaking skills, 63.6% (n=28) of students considered this method effective, while 31.8% (n=14) rated it as highly effective. The mode value in both cases was in the "effective" category, suggesting a consistent trend across participants.

Based on their experiences with podcast production in the classroom, students suggested several ways to enhance the learning process. One recommendation was to select topics that are both interesting and relevant to students' daily lives. Additionally, instructors could actively participate in podcast creation, for instance, by serving as co-speakers in the recordings. Another suggestion was to provide dedicated studio spaces for podcast production.

These findings corroborate Alm's (2013) assertion that podcasting fosters learner autonomy and motivation by offering opportunities for authentic language use beyond classroom constraints. Furthermore, the process aligns with Stanley's (2006) observation that podcasts promote listening comprehension and pronunciation through repeated exposure and practice.

Notably, the students' preference for topic relevance highlights the importance of personalization in language tasks, which enhances learner engagement a factor crucial for sustained language development. The challenges related to vocabulary and grammar suggest that while self-directed production supports creativity, it still necessitates structured linguistic scaffolding from instructors. This balance between autonomy and guided instruction is central to effective digital-based language pedagogy. Beyond language learning, self-produced podcasts also help students develop competencies essential for the 21st century. One of these is digital literacy. Throughout the podcast creation process, students utilized digital tools to record, edit, and upload their podcasts to a platform agreed

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upon with the instructor. Moreover, the process fostered creativity, teamwork, critical thinking, and communication skills.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings regarding the use of self-produced podcasts to enhance speaking skills, four key steps can be identified for implementing podcast production in German language instruction, particularly in speaking skills development. These steps include: (1) engaging with the learning context, (2) processing learning materials, (3) creating and securing the learning product, and (4) networking and transferring knowledge.

Students' perceptions of the podcast production process are largely positive. They consider podcast creation to be an effective method for improving their German-speaking skills. Several factors contribute to this effectiveness: throughout the podcast production process, students practice pronouncing vocabulary with correct pronunciation and intonation. When drafting the script, they engage with new vocabulary and apply grammatical structures correctly. Furthermore, podcast production fosters creativity and teamwork.

The selection of topics that are both interesting and relevant to students' lives plays a crucial role in the podcasting process, as it increases student motivation and enhances their overall enjoyment of the learning experience. However, it is important to acknowledge that this study had limitations in scope and sample size. The findings are based on a relatively small group of participants from specific institutions, and the analysis relied primarily on self-reported perceptions. Despite these limitations, the results indicate that topic relevance and student engagement are crucial factors in podcast-based speaking instruction.

Recommendations

This study has highlighted two main aspects: first, the steps involved in creating self-produced podcasts for enhancing speaking skills in language instruction, and second, students' perceptions of the process. However, the findings do not yet provide comprehensive insights into the specific impact of using podcasts in German language teaching.

In light of the study's limited sample size and its reliance on perception-based data, future research could adopt a larger and more diverse cohort, combined with pre- and post-tests to measure speaking proficiency improvements objectively. Such studies would provide more robust evidence regarding the long-term benefits of self-created podcasts in foreign language instruction.

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