

Podcasts impact on the listening skill development in a private school in a Latin American country

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Abstract

Podcasts are digital tools, which consist in audio files that can be downloaded from any technological devices connected to internet. There is some research that support the use of this tool in the processo of EFL classes, but there is a research gap in the field in our country. For this reason, this research analyzed the effectiveness of the use of podcasts as a didactic tool to improve the listening comprehension skill in English in eighth grade students. A population of 72 students was evaluated through a pre-test and post-test. This is a quasi-experimental design with quantitative data. Statistical analyses were used to measure the impact of the intervention. The Mass Whitney test was applied due to the lack of normality in the data. The results of the Mann Whitney U test revealed a significant difference in the development of the skill after the implementation. Likewise, the paired t-test results demonstrated a relevant variation in the English listening comprehension skills before and after the implementation of the podcast, with a p value less than the significance level of 0.05. The research findings suggest that the use of podcasts as a teaching tool is effective in improving listening comprehension skills. The results open the door for implications aimed at the use of podcasts in English classes to help students reach proficiency in the language.

Keywords: education; educational environment; learning opportunities; podcasts, EFL classes

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of technological resources in the teaching and learning process is certainly considered a current necessity that allows educators to reimagine and redesign their methodologies for the benefit of students. Among the several technological tools available in the market, podcasts have become popular due to its easy accessibility and the content they bring to the classroom. Thus, the present study aimed to intertwine technology with language acquisition by integrating podcasts into English teaching, offering students an opportunity to transcend traditional methods and improve their listening comprehension skills.



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Teaching English, particularly in contexts where English is not spoken even in the borders, often involves overcoming a lack of exposure to natural speech patterns, accents, and vocabulary diversity. Traditionally, English instruction has relied heavily on structured, textbook-based methods that may lack real-world linguistic complexity. Podcasts provide an authentic alternative by exposing learners to the natural flow of language, varied accents, and idiomatic expressions. This exposure mimics a real-world environment where students can experience English as it is used in everyday situations, significantly enhancing their comprehension abilities.

In this captivating quasi-experimental, quantitative study, 72 eighth-grade students from general basic education were divided into three groups. To assess their listening abilities, an internationally validated test was conducted before the intervention, along with one designed by the researcher. Following this, a 12-week intervention introduced students to listening exercises enriched with podcasts.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education orchestrated a plan called *Learning Together at Home* to ensure the continuity of the educational process (Ministry of Education, 2020-2021). When students returned to classrooms, various assessments were conducted to evaluate English language skills. The results of these evaluations revealed a significant deficiency in students' listening comprehension skills, as confirmed by English teachers during subject-area meetings. To address this challenge, the podcast, a dynamic, and independent learning tool, was reimagined as a vital resource for developing auditory skills in the English subject. Podcasts certainly offer students the freedom to download files from any device, anytime, creating a verdant and independent learning environment that promotes confidence and self-sufficiency (Ortiz & Paredes, 2020). According to Asmae and Sana (2024), listening has been “overshadowed” (p. 1) by the instruction of grammar, writing and speaking, when this skill is core in EFL classes for a correct process of language acquisition.

As the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) reshapes the landscape of education, it has become essential for educators to embrace these tools to enhance the learning experience. However, this requires continuous training for all educational stakeholders to maximize its benefits (Tomczyk et al., 2019). Their incorporation has led to changes in teaching methodologies and posed challenges for educators, who must incorporate these technological resources into their daily practices as a response to the challenges presented by education in the digital age. The use of ICT in the teaching and learning process allows students to have unlimited access to new sources of information as a means of generating knowledge, where the educator becomes a guide and facilitator who promotes a critical approach to these tools, enabling meaningful learning (Poveda-Pineda & Cifuentes-Medina, 2020).

An effective methodology for teaching foreign languages views education and learning as a social, interactive, and communicative process focused on the comprehensive and holistic development of students. In a collaborative and supportive environment, students work together on tasks that meet their needs, promoting cooperation and socialization to reach their maximum potential and experience lasting changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and thinking. According to Kim and Burkhauser (2022), educators should not only cover content related to different subjects, but help learner create meaning connection in-between so that they can reach meaning knowledge while reading. It is crucial to implement specific didactic techniques for teaching foreign languages with the aim of guiding students to use the English language effectively. In this regard, it is pertinent to mention the American linguist, Stephen Krashen, whose theory, known as the Monitor

Model, was proposed in the 1970s and explains how individuals acquire a second language, focusing on five hypotheses: the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Martínez-Paredes et al., 2020). Among these five, Krashen emphasizes the significance of comprehensible input for second language acquisition, which is based on the idea that, for effective acquisition, students must be exposed to language that is understandable yet also presents a certain level of challenge. When this theory is applied to the development of listening skills, it implies that students should have access to audio materials in the language they are learning that are comprehensible to them, meaning they can understand the majority of the content; at the same time, these materials should present an appropriate level of difficulty to promote growth and improvement in listening comprehension (Ellis, et al., 1994).

When students listen to podcasts in the target language, they benefit from enhanced listening comprehension. Exposure to authentic language, including various accents, speech rhythms, and intonations, helps them become more familiar with natural language use. This practice improves their ability to understand the language in everyday contexts. Research indicates that incorporating podcasts into educational settings boosts listening skills by providing learners with authentic language input (Abdulrahman et al., 2018; Gonulal, 2022; Azizi et al., 2022; Chaves-Yuste & De-la Peña, 2023). Additionally, podcasts offer a wide variety of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions in context, which helps students acquire new vocabulary and enrich their lexicon naturally. Furthermore, by listening to podcasts, students can observe and learn how grammatical structures and linguistic patterns are used in real situations, allowing them to become familiar with grammar in a contextualized and natural way (Saeedakhtar et al., 2021). Furthermore, podcasts enable students to practice the pronunciation and intonation (Oanh et al., 2022) of the target language, as they can imitate the speech models provided in the episodes. This contributes to improving their ability to speak with fluency and naturalness.

In this context, it is essential to consider that the use of podcasts in developing listening comprehension should be complemented with other activities, such as practicing oral conversations, reading, and writing. In addition, students can apply strategies such as taking notes during listening, repeating segments, engaging in comprehension exercises, and discussing the content with other students or teachers to make the most of the listening experience (Siegel, 2022).

Podcasts have been utilized as a tool to help develop listening comprehension in a more relaxed and autonomous manner (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). In this context, studies conducted by Ortiz and Paredes (2020) conclude that the application of podcasts during English classes contributed to improving students' listening comprehension. By utilizing this tool at their convenience and having the choice to listen to as many times as they wished, students experienced a sense of security and confidence, thereby they strengthen their listening comprehension skills. On the other hand, Ortega (2019), Culqui et al. (2021), and Harahap (2020) agree with the preceding authors and additionally state that podcasts not only developed students' listening skills but also their oral skills, as their pronunciation underwent a positive change, evolving into a more native-like pronunciation due to the use of this tool, which significantly motivated students to continue learning. However, Culqui et al. (2021) and Ghanizadeh (2020) add that the benefits of this tool will only become evident if teachers are trained or possess technological skills, as well as the ability to consciously select the material to be used and create a dynamic classroom environment. This will guide and encourage learners to achieve the objectives set in the teaching and learning process,

for which education professionals must undergo continuous training to stay at the forefront of progress and social development.

This research project aimed to enhance listening skills among eighth-grade basic education students, recognizing the importance of language instruction and the integration of technological resources in the classroom. In this context, podcasts were employed as a tool to improve students' listening comprehension. As an accessible resource offering a diverse range of information, podcasts foster meaningful learning when used under the teacher's guidance (Poveda-Pineda & Cifuentes-Medina, 2020).

Podcasts are digital online collections of audio recordings, which are available for download and playback at any time. Podcasts are very popular for its entertaining and convenient (Ramírez, 2024) use while enhancing the role of English learner in their aim of acquiring the target language. This research supports the role of podcasts in fostering flexibility and learner engagement in language acquisition (Chaves & De la Peña, 2023; Vazquez et al., 2020).

METHOD

The methodology adopted was quantitative. The quantitative approach enables the measurement of phenomena such as weight, height, mass, hemoglobin levels, intelligence quotient, among others. The measurement of these phenomena is carried out through statistical techniques that allow for the collection of data for subsequent analysis and explanation (Sánchez, 2018). Accordingly, the current research sought to measure the impact of podcast usage on the development of listening skills in the English language among eighth-grade students in basic general education. Subsequently, the objective was to describe and explain the effect of this technological tool on the development of listening skills within the population selected for the study.

To pursue this goal, a quasi-experimental design was implemented. Under this design, participants are not selected through randomization but rather are chosen based on predetermined criteria prior to the investigation. As Hughes et al. (2018) and Jennings et al. (2017) explain, quasi-experimental designs allow for the exploration of causal relationships between variables even when random assignment is not feasible. These designs help assess the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable, although they lack some controls typical of randomized experimental designs, such as a fully randomized control group (Kang et al., 2016). Consequently, the results may be influenced by external factors that are not accounted for during the study, which is why some researchers classify them as partial-control studies. However, these designs remain valuable for applied research in education and other fields, where randomization is often impractical or unethical. Despite their limitations, quasi-experiments provide flexibility and practical insights into real-world dynamics that experimental designs may not capture as effectively (Jennings et al., 2017; Hughes et al., 2018).

The study was conducted directly with a pre-established group of eighth-grade students from general basic education. This is also a descriptive-correlational study as its primary aim was to examine the relationship between the use of podcasts in English language learning and to analyze the effect of this technological tool on the development of listening skills in eighth-grade students over a period of twelve weeks. The purpose of the study was to provide data to support the hypothesis formulated regarding the subject. The sample in this research included all students from three different sections of eighth-grade general basic education, comprising a total of 72 female participants aged between 12 and

13. To ensure the ethical integrity of the research, signed consent was obtained in advance from the parents or legal guardians of the participants, as well as from the principal of the institution.

The study identified two types of variables based on the research problem and the proposed solution aligned with the study's general objective. The dependent variable was the development of listening skills, assessed following the integration of podcasts as a technological tool. The independent variable was the use of podcasts, specifically designed to enhance students' listening comprehension skills through targeted activities. To proceed with data collection, a pre-test was administered to the entire sample to identify the students' English language proficiency level. This pre-test utilized the Education First Standard English Test (EF SET), which evaluates students' reading and listening comprehension skills. The assessment is conducted online, with results presented on a scale from 0 to 100 points.

The evaluation implemented to directly measure listening comprehension skills was a test designed to assess the level of development in this area among students. The questions were derived from the PET-B1 exam, which is one of the assessments endorsed by the University of Cambridge. This exam evaluates applicants' English proficiency in communicative contexts that require a certain command of the language, demonstrating the ability to use vocabulary, grammar, and expressions according to the minimum standards required for this level ([Cambridge PET-B1 Preliminary for Schools, 2019-2022](#)). For this research, only the listening component was used, consisting of a total of 38 questions. This number allowed for a wide range of items to verify the different scores achieved by students both before and after the application of the podcast, which facilitated the drawing of final conclusions. The 38 questions were sourced from the "PET B1 Listening, Cambridge English: Preliminary Test, Part 1, Part 2, and Part 4 Free Practice Tests, Free Exercises" available on englishaula.com.

Based on the students' proficiency levels, as indicated by the results obtained from the pre-test, a subsequent evaluation was administered that specifically measured listening comprehension skills. This was immediately followed by the intervention involving the use of the technological resource, podcasts. The intervention lasted for a duration of twelve weeks, corresponding to the planning period for two didactic units, with two sessions per week, each lasting 45 minutes.

During the project work, the podcasts were selected by teachers from various subjects, who chose the podcasts based on the content to be taught. Thus, podcasts related to natural sciences, language and literature, and social studies were selected. Additionally, podcasts addressing themes of friendship were included to reinforce values such as solidarity. An audio segment on how to be a good friend and the importance of listening was also incorporated to promote respect for others' feelings, among other topics. Students listened to the podcasts at home and completed summaries and other activities both individually and in groups to present as assignments for various subjects. This approach enabled them to apply the knowledge acquired in diverse academic contexts, reinforcing the learning experience. At the conclusion of the podcast intervention, the listening comprehension evaluation was administered again to the entire population, providing a means to assess the impact of podcasts on the development of listening skills.

To analyze the results and determine whether there was an improvement in the development of listening skills following the podcast intervention, comparative tables were created using Excel. Statistical tests were applied, including the Kolmogorov-Smirnov

normality test, the two-tailed Mann-Whitney U test, and the paired t-test. These statistical methods facilitated a thorough examination of the data, allowing for a clear assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention on students' listening comprehension.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the pre-test was to assess the English language proficiency levels of all students. It is important to note that the competency levels in English established by the EF SET are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and are governed by the following nomenclature and scoring system.

Level A1: This level encompasses a score range of 1 to 30 out of 100, representing a basic knowledge of the language, which includes everyday expressions and simple words and phrases related to daily routines.

Level A2: With a score ranging from 31 to 40 points, this level indicates a broader understanding of topics related to preferences, family, and personality.

Level B1: Scoring between 41 and 50 points demonstrates comprehension of the main ideas from television programs and topics related to school, work, or leisure activities.

Level B2: For this level, with a score from 51 to 60 points, it is expected that the individual can comprehend extended speeches, television programs concerning current events, and even dialogues from movies.

The C1 level, with a score ranging from 61 to 70 points, reflects a more nuanced ability to comprehend extensive spoken discourse, regardless of its structural clarity. According to [Goh and Vandergrift \(2021\)](#), learners at this level not only demonstrate a robust understanding of the main ideas but also manage to infer meaning from context and handle diverse accents and styles of speech. This proficiency enables them to engage critically with complex topics and discussions.

At the highest proficiency level, C2, characterized by a score between 71 and 100 points, individuals possess an exceptional command of the language. They can effortlessly understand spoken discourse delivered at a native speaker's pace. The analysis of the results obtained from the pre-test revealed the following: 53 students, accounting for 74% of the population, were placed at the A1 level of English proficiency, indicating a basic understanding of the language that includes everyday expressions, simple words, and phrases related to daily routines.

Fifteen percent of the participants achieved an A2 level, meaning that 11 students demonstrated a greater comprehension of topics related to preferences, family, and personality. Eight percent of the population reached a B1 level, which reflects an understanding of the main ideas from spoken discourse, such as television programs and topics related to school, work, or leisure. Finally, 3% of the participants, or 2 students, attained a B2 level, indicating their ability to comprehend extended discourse, including current events on television and speeches from films.

To analyze the results of the listening comprehension exam, the number of correct answers provided by each student was taken into account. From this, a cross multiplication was used to determine the final score, establishing a range between 0 to 10 points, with 38 correct answers equating to a score of ten points; as the number of correct answers decreased, so did the score. The results were as follows: Out of the 38 questions, 49 students answered fewer than half correctly, representing 68% of the students who failed to

understand even half of what they heard; in contrast, only 23 students, or 32%, demonstrated the ability to comprehend more than half of the spoken discourse.

However, after conducting the intervention with the podcast, it was observed that 55 students answered more than half of the questions correctly during the evaluation, indicating that 77% of the population was able to comprehend what they heard, compared to the 32% who had this ability before the podcast intervention. This implies that the population's listening comprehension skills improved by 45%. Moreover, the results from the post-test of the EF-SET assessment showed that, following the podcast intervention, the percentage of students at the A1 level decreased by 39%, dropping from 53 students (74%) to 25 students (35%) who now remain at a beginner level. Conversely, the percentage of those reaching an A2 level increased from 15% to 24%, meaning that 6 additional students achieved this level after the podcast intervention.

The number of students who attained a B1 level rose from 6 to 19, reflecting an increase from 8% to 19% of students at this level. Additionally, those placed at the B2 level grew from 2 students to 7, indicating a 7% increase compared to the initial percentage. Finally, four students reached the C1 level concerning their English language skills, representing 5% of the students who achieved this level due to the podcast intervention, suggesting a much more precise listening comprehension regarding extended discourse. The statistical analysis of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test of the results from the evaluation aimed at measuring the development of listening skills indicated that the values were normally distributed; thus, the paired t-test was used for analysis.

Table 1. EF-SET exam results before and after the use of podcasts
(U Mann-Whitney valor p =0,0003)

| | Media | Desviacion Estadistica | Valor Maximo | Valor Minimo |
|-----------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Pre-test | 29.19 | 9.03 | 57 | 18 |
| Post-test | 35.49 | 13.17 | 80 | 18 |

After using the Mann-Whitney U test to determine whether there was a significant difference in the EF-SET assessment results regarding the development of listening comprehension in English after the application of the podcasts, a p-value of 0.0003 was found, indicating a significant difference in skill development. The mean of the pre-test was 29.19 (SD = 9.03), while the mean of the post-test was 35.49 (SD = 13.17), with maximum values of 57 for the pre-test and 80 for the post-test, and the minimum scores for both tests coinciding at a score of 18.

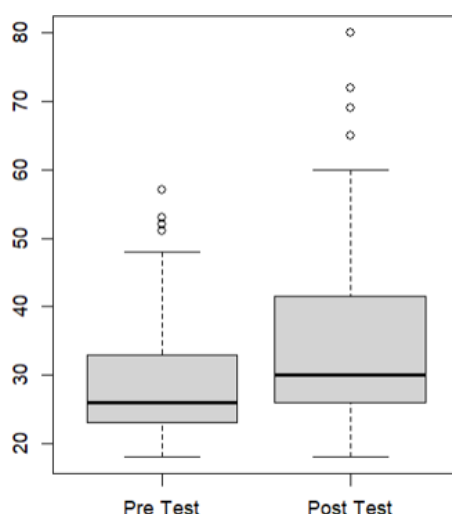


Figure 1. Mann-Whitney whisker's chart

Table 2. Descriptive Chart of Results
(t pareada valor $p = 2.2e-16$)

| | Media | Desviacion Estadistica | Valor Maximo | Valor Minimo |
|-----------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Pre-test | 17.24 | 5.79 | 29 | 1 |
| Post-test | 23.62 | 5.76 | 35 | 9 |

Listening comprehension exam results before and after the use of podcasts

The results from the paired t-test yielded a p-value of $2.2e-16$, which is much lower than the significance level of 0.05, suggesting a significant difference in listening comprehension in English before and after the application of the podcasts. The mean of the pre-test was 17.24 (SD = 5.79), while the mean of the post-test was 23.62 (SD = 5.76). It was noted that the standard deviations were similar in both tests, with maximum values of 29 and 35, and minimum values of 1 and 9 for the respective scores of both evaluations. Based on the results obtained from inferential statistics, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted, stating that the application of podcasts improves students' listening skills in the English subject. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test of the EF-SET results indicated that the data do not follow a normal distribution, so the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was employed for further analysis.

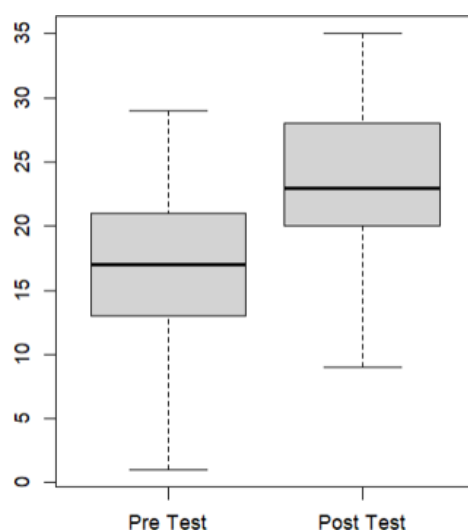


Figure 2. Listening comprehension exam results before and after the use of podcasts

Discussion

Teaching English in basic education is essential for students' linguistic development and their future academic and professional endeavors. In this context, the use of effective pedagogical tools and methods can significantly impact language learning. The objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using podcasts in the development of listening skills in English among eighth-grade general basic education students. The results obtained demonstrated a significant difference favoring the use of podcasts as a learning tool to enhance listening comprehension among students. The outcomes of the Mann-Whitney U test and the paired t-test indicated that the application of podcasts in English classes significantly contributed to improving the students' listening comprehension skills. This finding aligns with previous studies conducted by [Ortiz and Paredes \(2020\)](#) and [Ghanizadeh \(2020\)](#) who also found that the application of podcasts in English classes significantly improves students' listening comprehension skills.

Similarly, [Phillips \(2017\)](#) highlighted that podcasts serve as an excellent educational resource for language learning, becoming the preferred tool for millions seeking an economical and accessible method to continue learning or enhancing their knowledge. Research indicates that the incorporation of podcasts into English instruction can significantly enhance students' listening comprehension skills. [Cameron \(2020\)](#) supports this notion by emphasizing that podcasts provide an accessible and engaging platform for language learning, enabling students to decode, interpret, and connect spoken language to their existing knowledge base. This process facilitates a deeper understanding of the material. Moreover, the integration of technology in educational methodologies has positively transformed the learning landscape. [González Enríquez et al. \(2023\)](#) highlight that studies show podcasting is an effective pedagogical tool, allowing students to take control of their learning. This method boosts student motivation and engagement by promoting collaborative learning environments that inspire creativity and critical thinking.

As highlighted by [Zarzycka \(2023\)](#), the incorporation of podcasts in the curriculum not only improves listening skills but also promotes interactive learning, allowing students to engage more deeply with the material. Similarly, [Hovious et al. \(2022\)](#) discuss how

educational podcasts facilitate a flexible learning atmosphere that caters to diverse learning styles, ultimately encouraging active participation among learners. The evidence suggests that utilizing podcasts in language education can lead to significant improvements in student outcomes, making it a valuable resource for fostering autonomous learning.

However, it is crucial to emphasize that the effectiveness of using podcasts largely depends on the teacher's ability to utilize the tool appropriately and plan the lesson carefully. As noted by Culqui et al. (2021) and Ghanizadeh (2020), their research conclusions indicate that the benefits of this tool will become apparent only if educators are adequately trained or possess technological skills, enabling them to consciously select the material used to create a dynamic classroom environment that encourages student engagement in the learning process. Similar findings were reported by Abdulrahman et al. (2018) in their quasi-experimental study, which demonstrated that podcasts had a positive impact on the listening comprehension of English learners. Nevertheless, the success of this tool hinges on the technological competence of educators.

These discoveries align with those reported by Prasetya and Nuraeni (2021), who found that utilizing podcasts in learning activities enhances students' oral expression capabilities. The reasoning behind this is that the more students listen, the more new vocabulary they acquire, which boosts their confidence to speak in English, whether with peers or in groups, or whenever they need to use it as a means of oral communication. In this research, this aspect was emphasized by utilizing podcasts not only individually but also in pairs, which facilitated the development of communication competencies across three dimensions: productive skills, interactive skills, and receptive skills, alongside the assessment of reading comprehension and fluency.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the use of technology in English language teaching has positively impacted the development of listening comprehension skills. Podcasts have proven to be a practical and effective tool for students, allowing them to listen to topics of interest at any time and place, thereby providing opportunities to practice and refine their listening skills in their leisure time. Consequently, English teachers should consider implementing podcasts as a new resource in their teaching practices, incorporating this tool into their lesson plans to promote autonomous and flexible learning. The benefits and ease of use of podcasts are numerous, as students can listen to them as often as they wish and can find podcasts available on nearly any subject. This aligns with findings from several studies that emphasize the importance of integrating technology into language education to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Abdulrahman et al., 2018; Prasetya & Nuraeni, 2021). By leveraging podcasts, educators can create dynamic and interactive learning environments that cater to diverse learning needs.

From the results obtained, the main finding of this research indicates that podcasts not only improve listening skills but also enhance all four macro language skills, as evidenced by the two-tailed Mann-Whitney U test. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential effects of quantitative research on the language learning process, including factors such as the physical environment, emotional state of the students, and student attendance. Thus, it is recommended to conduct studies with larger populations and to consider mixed-method research that addresses students' interests and motivations regarding podcast topics. Additionally, researchers should take into account the individual characteristics and needs of students with educational requirements, allowing for the

application of podcasts with curricular adaptations aimed at ensuring an effective learning experience for all learners and promoting inclusion.

Based on the experience gained from implementing podcasts, it is advised that educators remain updated and trained in the use of technology to effectively integrate podcasts into their teaching processes and enhance their instructional methods. This aligns with the recommendations of various studies that emphasize the necessity for teachers to develop their technological competencies to facilitate successful educational practices (Culqui et al., 2021; Ghanizadeh, 2020).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author 1 prepared the statistics, collected the data and analyzed the results provided by the data. Author 2, supervised the process during the intervention, proofread the manuscript and worked on the theoretical framework of the research.

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