

Research Article

# The Effectiveness of Using Podcasts to Improve English Listening Skills of First-Year Students at Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment

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## Abstract

This study explored the effectiveness of podcasts in enhancing English listening comprehension among first-year university students in Vietnam. A quasi-experimental design was employed with 60 participants divided into control and experimental groups. While the control group engaged in traditional listening activities using textbook-based materials, the experimental group practiced listening through curated podcast content over an eight-week period. Pre- and post-tests were administered to assess gains in listening proficiency. The results indicated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's performance. Qualitative feedback gathered from reflective journals further supported these findings, revealing increased learner autonomy, motivation, and engagement with authentic language input. The study underscores the pedagogical value of integrating podcasts into language instruction, especially in contexts with limited access to native speaker interaction and authentic materials. Recommendations for instructional practice and future research are discussed

## Keywords

Podcast-based learning, English listening comprehension, A2 Key (KET), EFL learners, first-year students

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, technology-enhanced language instruction has gained momentum, particularly in response to the growing need for authentic input and learner-centered methodologies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Listening comprehension remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners to master, especially in educational environments where exposure to natural spoken English is limited (Vandergrift, 2007). In Vietnamese universities, listening instruction often relies heavily on textbooks and

scripted audio materials, which may not fully reflect the complexity and variety of real-life communication. As a result, many students experience difficulties with comprehension, speech rate, and unfamiliar accents when encountering authentic English outside the classroom.

Podcasts, defined as digitally delivered, episodic audio programs, offer a promising solution. They provide learners with access to unscripted, natural language spoken by native

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speakers across diverse contexts. Their flexibility, accessibility, and thematic variety make them appealing for out-of-class language exposure (Hasan & Hoon, 2013). While a growing body of research supports the pedagogical use of podcasts in EFL contexts, most studies focus on vocabulary development or general engagement rather than targeted listening comprehension. Moreover, limited empirical research has been conducted in the Vietnamese higher education context, where technological integration remains inconsistent.

This study aims to fill that gap by examining the effectiveness of podcast-based instruction on improving English listening comprehension among first-year university students at Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment. Specifically, it compares learning outcomes between students exposed to podcasts over a ten-week period and those receiving conventional instruction. The study also explores learner perceptions of podcasts through a post-intervention survey. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical value of podcasts and contribute to the growing body of literature on technology integration in EFL instruction.

To achieve these goals, the study addresses the following research questions:

- To what extent does podcast-based instruction improve listening comprehension among A2-level EFL students compared to traditional textbook-based instruction?
- What challenges do students face when engaging with podcasts in a listening-focused learning environment?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Role of Listening Comprehension in EFL

In the landscape of English language education, listening has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental component of language proficiency. It is not merely a passive activity but a dynamic, interpretative process that plays a pivotal role in communication and learning. Hasan (2000) characterizes listening as “a two-way interaction between the listener and the audio text,” emphasizing that listeners actively construct meaning by engaging with spoken input rather than simply receiving it. Rubin and Thompson (1994) further underscore

its complexity, identifying listening as the most challenging language skill to master, despite accounting for up to 60% of a person’s daily communication time. This challenge becomes particularly pronounced in non-native English-speaking contexts such as Vietnam, where learners have limited access to authentic spoken English in their everyday environments.

Listening is foundational to human interaction, enabling individuals to decode, process, and respond to auditory messages effectively. As Rost (2011) posits, listening is “a multifaceted, active process that entails interpreting spoken language in real time, drawing on linguistic proficiency, cognitive abilities, and contextual awareness to construct meaning.” This definition not only differentiates listening from the passive act of hearing but also situates it as a deliberate and interpretive cognitive activity. Wolvin and Coakley (1996) lend empirical weight to its significance, estimating that listening comprises approximately 45% of daily communication, followed by speaking (25%), reading (15%), and writing (10%). This hierarchy demonstrates the central role of listening in educational, professional, and interpersonal contexts.

Furthermore, listening is not a monolithic skill but an integration of several interdependent sub-skills. These include recognizing phonetic cues, understanding vocabulary, interpreting syntactic structures, and drawing inferences from context. Brown (2006) articulates that “effective listening involves segmenting the continuous flow of speech into meaningful chunks, decoding them based on linguistic rules, and integrating them into a coherent understanding of the speaker’s intent” (p. 12). For second-language (L2) learners, this process is particularly daunting due to the transient nature of spoken input. Unlike written text, spoken language does not afford opportunities for re-reading or pausing, demanding real-time cognitive engagement and immediate interpretation.

In educational settings, listening often serves as a gateway skill for acquiring knowledge. Learners must rely on lectures, discussions, and audio-based resources to comprehend and internalize content, making listening a key medium of instruction. The skill's complexity and its embeddedness in broader educational practices underscore its importance in both language acquisition and pedagogy.

A crucial aspect of listening proficiency involves the interplay of different types of knowledge. Rost (2011) identifies two key categories: schematic knowledge and systemic knowledge. Schematic knowledge refers to the listener’s familiarity with the topic, which provides a cognitive framework for anticipating and interpreting new information. For example, a student familiar with the Vietnam War may

better understand a podcast referencing the Tet Offensive, as prior knowledge facilitates meaning-making. In contrast, systemic knowledge pertains to the mastery of the language system itself including phonology, syntax, and semantics which enables accurate decoding and processing of spoken language. For instance, a listener who understands that English questions often invert subject-verb order (e.g., “Are you ready?”) will find it easier to follow spontaneous dialogue.

Rivers (2006) describes listening as an inventive process, one that requires the transformation of raw auditory input sounds, word sequences, and intonation patterns into coherent and meaningful language. This perspective likens listening to a culinary process: just as a successful meal depends on combining ingredients in the right proportions, effective listening depends on the accurate assimilation and interpretation of spoken components to yield understanding.

In sum, listening is a cognitively rich, interpretive act that forms the bedrock of language competence. It integrates linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, and real-time processing skills to allow individuals to make sense of auditory input. For language learners, particularly in EFL contexts, cultivating strong listening abilities is essential not only as a communicative skill in itself but also as a foundation for the development of other language domains. As such, understanding the nature of listening and how it can be effectively taught and learned is of paramount importance in second language pedagogy.

## 2.2. Common Activities and Strategies for Enhancing English Listening Skills

A considerable body of research has emphasized the importance of strategy use in developing English listening proficiency. Effective listening does not solely depend on language input or exposure but also on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies learners employ to process and internalize spoken language. Early foundational work by Rubin (1975) identified several characteristics of successful language learners, including their attention to language patterns, analytical orientation, tolerance for ambiguity, and willingness to take risks in making informed guesses. These strategies enabled learners to navigate unfamiliar linguistic input more effectively.

Building on this foundation, Chamot, Küpper, and Impink-Hernandez (1988) found that effective language learners utilized a broader repertoire of strategies, engaged in more purposeful and goal-oriented behaviors, and leveraged both

linguistic and background knowledge to support comprehension. Their findings underscore the importance of learner autonomy and strategic decision-making in enhancing language acquisition.

In a study focusing on learner differences, Mangubhai (1991) demonstrated that highly proficient learners reported greater use of memory-related strategies, such as repetition and association, compared to less proficient learners. In contrast, lower-level learners tended to rely more heavily on translation-based strategies and engaged less in active practice. Similarly, Griffiths (2003) observed significant variation in strategy use across proficiency levels. More advanced students reported initiating conversations in English, engaging in extensive reading for pleasure, identifying recurring language patterns, and utilizing cognates more frequently than their lower-proficiency counterparts. These findings collectively suggest that strategic behavior is closely linked to language development.

In Southeast Asian contexts, particularly Thailand, research has further elaborated on the use of listening strategies among EFL learners. Piamsai (2005), employing Oxford’s (1990) classification of learning strategies, examined the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies by Thai university students during listening assessments. The results revealed that high-proficiency students employed both categories of strategies significantly more often than their lower-proficiency peers. Pawapatcharodom (2007), using a similar framework, also reported moderate use of strategies among Thai university students, with variability based on individual proficiency levels and exposure to English instruction.

Additional insights were provided by a study conducted at Naresuan University International College (NUIC), which focused on students’ strategic behavior when listening to academic lectures. The findings indicated that first-year learners frequently struggled with English-language instruction. Moreover, a negative correlation was observed between proficiency levels and the use of translation strategies suggesting that less proficient students over-relied on L1 translation, which often impeded real-time comprehension. The study also noted that learners’ strategy use was limited and inconsistent, supporting earlier findings by Pawapatcharodom (2007) on the challenges of fostering strategic competence.

Beyond cognitive strategies, metacognitive awareness has also emerged as a critical factor in listening development. Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari (2006) conducted a seminal study on metacognitive strategies in

listening, highlighting practices such as prediction, monitoring, evaluating, and problem-solving. These strategies enable learners to become more self-regulated and reflective listeners. In particular, learners who engage in metacognitive planning and self-evaluation are better equipped to manage comprehension difficulties and adapt their strategies accordingly.

Piamsai (2005) further corroborated these findings through interviews and observational data, demonstrating that high-proficiency learners made more strategic and contextually appropriate choices, including rule-application, note-taking, and listening preparation, rather than defaulting to translation. These studies collectively underscore the relationship between strategic competence and successful listening, although strategy effectiveness may vary depending on learner context, instructional design, and individual cognitive differences.

Despite the growing emphasis on strategy-based instruction, it is noteworthy that listening strategies remain less extensively studied than reading strategies in second language research. Given the real-time demands of listening comprehension and its reliance on both linguistic and contextual cues, further empirical work is warranted to understand how learners can be supported in developing flexible, transferable listening strategies. Integrating strategy training into the curriculum—especially for learners in EFL contexts with limited access to authentic spoken English—may be essential for fostering listening proficiency.

### 2.3. The Use of Podcasts in Enhancing English Listening Comprehension

Podcasts, as a form of digital audio media, have emerged as a significant tool in modern language education, particularly in developing listening comprehension skills. As defined by O'Bryan (2008), podcasts originated in 2004 and were initially perceived as online audio blogs or a means of digital audio publishing. The term itself combining "iPod" and "broadcasting" has evolved to encompass a wide range of digital platforms that support the automatic downloading and playback of audio files, independent of specific hardware such as iPods. These files are typically downloaded to MP3 players, mobile devices, or accessed through computers, and are regularly updated through web syndication technologies. The use of voice as the primary medium renders podcasts especially engaging, enabling them to establish an immediate connection with listeners.

The flexibility of podcasts has revolutionized the way learners

interact with English-language materials. They allow students to learn at their own pace, in a self-directed manner, and across various learning environments. As such, podcasts are widely recognized for promoting learner autonomy and providing consistent exposure to authentic, structured, and thematically organized audio content (O'Bryan, 2008). This makes them particularly suitable for developing higher-order listening and critical thinking skills.

One of the core benefits of podcast-based learning is the opportunity for repeated exposure. Chang and Read (2006) emphasized that repeated listening allows learners to focus on specific linguistic details, reinforce prior learning, and gradually improve overall comprehension. This is particularly relevant to high school and university students who often need multiple exposures to unfamiliar vocabulary or fast-paced speech in order to fully understand native-level content.

Furthermore, motivation and engagement two essential components of language learning are also positively influenced by the use of podcasts. Richards (2006) found that when students are given the freedom to choose podcast topics aligned with their personal interests, their intrinsic motivation to practice listening significantly increases. This contrasts sharply with more traditional listening exercises, which may lack relevance or appeal to learners' preferences.

In terms of language authenticity, podcasts offer exposure to real-world English through interviews, spontaneous conversations, and topic-specific discussions. Vandergrift (2007) pointed out that such exposure helps learners become familiar with varied accents, colloquial expressions, and natural discourse structures—key components for developing fluent and adaptable listening skills. Rost (2013) also highlighted that the diversity of content available in podcast form allows teachers and learners to tailor listening input to specific linguistic goals and thematic areas, thereby enhancing engagement.

In addition to repeated exposure and content customization, podcasts support flexible and personalized learning. Field (2008) underlined that the ability to pause, rewind, or replay audio content fosters better retention of vocabulary and helps learners to perceive nuanced features of spoken English, such as intonation, stress, and rhythm. Rubin (1994) further argued that such flexibility enables learners to adjust difficulty levels and select appropriate materials, empowering them to take control of their own learning process.

Podcasts also integrate well with multimodal learning

approaches. Most educational podcasts are accompanied by supplementary materials such as transcripts, vocabulary lists, and even visual cues, which enhance comprehension and cater to diverse learning styles. This multimodality reinforces both listening and reading skills simultaneously. The interactive features of many podcast platforms—such as embedded comments, discussion boards, and collaborative forums—promote peer learning and reflection. Gardner (1994) emphasized the importance of such collaborative interactions in building critical thinking and deeper understanding through discussion.

Finally, podcasts represent a practical implementation of multimedia language learning. According to Warschauer (2000), the use of multimedia resources, including podcasts, is essential for promoting authentic language exposure and interactive learning. The digital nature of podcasts enables learners to engage with English listening content beyond the confines of the traditional classroom, thereby increasing their exposure to different accents, speaking speeds, and situational contexts. This extended engagement fosters adaptability and listening fluency, which are indispensable in real-life communication.

In summary, podcasts provide a dynamic, engaging, and flexible approach to language learning that aligns with contemporary pedagogical priorities. Their ability to deliver authentic content, support self-paced learning, and integrate with multimodal resources makes them a powerful tool for enhancing English listening comprehension in both secondary and tertiary educational contexts.

#### **2.4. Benefits of Using Podcasts in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) for Developing English Listening Skills**

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has significantly reshaped the landscape of language education, offering learners increased opportunities for self-directed learning, timely feedback, and engagement with authentic language use. Among the core competencies in language acquisition, listening comprehension is particularly complex, as it requires decoding spoken language in real time while also interpreting contextual cues, tone, stress, and intonation patterns.

Warschauer (2000) argues that CALL environments facilitate listening development through the integration of multimedia resources, interactive formats, and authentic language input. Such digital affordances enable learners to practice listening

skills beyond the traditional classroom context, thereby increasing exposure to a wider variety of speaking rates, accents, and real-life communication scenarios. This expanded input cultivates listening adaptability and fluency, both of which are critical to communicative competence.

Within the framework of CALL, podcasts represent a powerful modality for enhancing listening skills due to their inherent authenticity and accessibility. Vandergrift (2007) emphasizes that listening to unscripted spoken language as found in interviews, dialogues, and casual discussions helps learners internalize natural rhythm, pronunciation, and colloquial expressions. Thornbury (2005) also supports this view, contending that exposure to real-world speech through podcasts bridges the gap between controlled classroom input and the unpredictable nature of everyday communication.

The repetitive and interactive nature of podcast use fosters the development of crucial listening strategies. As learners navigate audio content, they actively employ strategies such as prediction, contextual inference, keyword recognition, and selective attention. Vandergrift (2007) notes that repeated engagement with podcast material enhances learners' ability to detect discourse markers, segment speech effectively, and infer meaning even in the presence of unfamiliar vocabulary or rapid delivery. Over time, these cognitive strategies become automatic, resulting in more efficient and accurate comprehension.

Another substantial benefit of using podcasts in language learning is the capacity for repeated listening. Field (2008) asserts that listening to the same material multiple times supports learners in consolidating vocabulary knowledge, acquiring syntactic structures, and refining their phonological awareness. This is especially beneficial for learners facing challenges such as fast speech, unfamiliar pronunciation, or complex sentence patterns. Rost (2013) further highlights that repeated listening allows learners to review difficult sections, clarify misunderstandings, and strengthen their decoding and inferencing abilities.

Beyond linguistic development, podcasts play a pivotal role in fostering learner motivation and autonomy. Gardner (1994) stresses that motivation is heightened when learning materials are engaging and aligned with individual interests. Podcasts cater to this need by offering a wide range of content areas including entertainment, science, culture, and current affairs that learners can select based on personal preference. This element of choice transforms passive listening into an active, self-regulated learning process that boosts attention, enjoyment, and long-term commitment.

Flexibility is another advantage inherent in podcast-based listening. As Vandergrift (2007) observes, podcasts allow learners to access listening materials at any time and from any location, thus facilitating autonomous learning. Learners can personalize their experience by choosing podcasts that match their proficiency level and focus on specific areas of improvement. Whether used by beginners to develop foundational listening or by advanced learners to refine comprehension of native speech, podcasts represent a scalable and adaptable learning resource.

In conclusion, podcasts within the CALL framework offer a comprehensive approach to listening comprehension development. They provide authentic exposure, support strategic learning through repetition, enhance motivation through personalized content, and empower learners with flexible, autonomous practice. These benefits collectively reinforce the role of podcasts as an effective and learner-centered tool for advancing listening proficiency in English as a foreign language.

## 2.5. Challenges Students Face in Podcast-Based Listening Practice

Despite the growing popularity of podcasts as a pedagogical tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly at the high school level, their integration into classroom practices presents several notable challenges. Although podcasts offer learners authentic input, flexibility, and learner autonomy, they also introduce difficulties that may hinder students' engagement and listening comprehension.

One significant obstacle lies in the overwhelming volume of podcast content available online. As Herrington and Herrington (2006) note, the vast array of uncurated materials can make it challenging for students—especially those with lower proficiency identify resources appropriate to their language level and interests. This lack of guidance often leads to frustration and disengagement. Therefore, educators play a crucial role in curating suitable materials and scaffolding the selection process to ensure alignment with learners' needs and curricular goals.

Another limitation of podcast-based instruction is the absence of immediate, face-to-face interaction. Unlike traditional classroom settings, where students can seek real-time clarification, podcast-based listening is inherently one-way. Learners may find it difficult to address comprehension gaps or misunderstand unfamiliar language structures without

direct support. As Burston (2015) suggests, this drawback can be mitigated by integrating podcasts into broader Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) frameworks that include interactive elements such as online forums, peer discussion groups, or digital quizzes mechanisms that foster reflective learning and peer scaffolding.

Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of podcasts in improving listening comprehension. For instance, a study conducted among 60 Indonesian high school students demonstrated significant gains in post-test scores among those who engaged in podcast-based learning compared to those who followed traditional methods. Participants also reported increased motivation, citing the authenticity and variety of podcast content as key factors in sustaining interest and promoting meaningful learning experiences.

Further supporting this, university-level research has shown a consistent rise in listening test performance from a mean of 36.3 to 63.3 after students incorporated podcasts into their learning routines. These findings suggest that podcasts can lead to long-term improvements in listening fluency, particularly when learners are exposed to recurring audio input and reflective practice.

Nevertheless, students often encounter initial comprehension difficulties when listening to podcasts, especially when facing unfamiliar accents, rapid speech, or abstract topics. These challenges are particularly pronounced among EFL learners in non-native environments, who may have limited exposure to spoken English outside the classroom. To overcome these barriers, continuous exposure to diverse listening materials and scaffolded instruction are essential. Podcasts, by offering repeated access to authentic speech across a range of contexts, provide an ideal platform for such exposure.

Another persistent challenge is related to technological access. Not all students may have reliable access to digital devices or high-speed internet, particularly in under-resourced or rural school settings. Such disparities can result in unequal learning opportunities and restrict the effectiveness of podcast-based pedagogy. Ensuring equitable access to the necessary technological infrastructure is therefore critical to fostering inclusive learning environments and supporting all learners' development.

In sum, while podcasts are a powerful tool for enhancing English listening skills, their successful implementation requires careful instructional planning, appropriate scaffolding, and systemic support to address issues of content

overload, feedback limitations, learner comprehension, and digital accessibility.

## 2.6. Previous studies

A substantial body of research, both internationally and within Vietnam, has investigated the role of podcasts in improving English listening comprehension. Internationally, Flowerdew and Miller (2005) explored listening comprehension among 150 ESL students in UK universities, using a mixed-method approach that included classroom observation, interviews, and pre/post-tests. Their findings indicated a 15% improvement in comprehension when students were exposed to authentic academic audio materials, with those previewing topics in advance outperforming peers by 20%, highlighting the value of top-down processing. Vandergrift (2012) synthesized 50 studies in a meta-analysis across Canada, the US, and Europe, emphasizing the role of metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating. He found that learners trained in these skills outperformed control groups by 18%, and in one Canadian study, podcast use with reflective prompts improved listening scores by 20%. Hasan and Hoon (2013), in a 10-week study involving 120 Malaysian university students, found a 25% increase in vocabulary acquisition and a 30% gain in fluency through frequent engagement with ESL podcasts, with learners noting the motivating influence of authentic and humorous content. Similarly, Gilmore (2007) examined the impact of authentic audio (e.g., BBC Radio 4) on 100 Japanese EFL learners and found a 22% improvement in recognizing connected speech features, compared to just 10% in a group using scripted dialogues, concluding that podcasts prepare learners for real-life interactions. Richards (2015), studying 80 Australian ESL learners over a year, demonstrated that regular podcast exposure (15 hours/month) led to an 18% reduction in response time to comprehension questions, attributing improvements to the development of automaticity through repetition. In the Vietnamese context, Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen (2020) surveyed 200 non-English majors at Hanoi University of Industry and found that students struggled with vocabulary, cultural references, and fast speech; a three-month intervention using familiar-topic podcasts led to a 15% comprehension improvement. Ton Nu Xuan Phuong (2018) conducted a four-week pilot study with 150 students at the University of Danang, using podcasts played at 0.75x speed, which improved understanding by 18%, suggesting podcast adaptability suits challenging classroom acoustics. Pham Thi Hong Nhung (2021) compared high school students in Ho Chi Minh City using Luke's English Podcast versus textbook CDs, finding a 20% improvement in the podcast group versus only 8% in the control, emphasizing reduced anxiety and increased learner autonomy. Le Thi Mai (2019) addressed access issues

in rural Thai Nguyen University, where 80% of students lacked native-speaker input; mobile-based podcast use over four months led to a 17% gain in accuracy, with learners preferring short, portable content. Tran Van Nam (2022), working with 60 English majors at Vietnam National University, showed a 23% improvement in identifying main ideas and supporting details through academic podcasts like TED Talks, with 70% of learners favoring post-listening discussions. Collectively, these studies fall into two categories: those focusing on learner attitudes or instructional processes, and those evidencing actual gains in listening proficiency. However, most prior work centers on university students or younger learners, with limited focus on high school populations, particularly in rural Vietnamese settings. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by examining the effectiveness of podcast-based instruction in enhancing listening skills among high school students in underserved areas of Vietnam.

## 2.7. Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on podcasts in EFL learning, there remains a significant gap in empirical research conducted in Southeast Asian contexts, particularly Vietnam. While recent studies (e.g., Tran & Nguyen, 2021; Le & Vu, 2024) provide valuable insights into learner attitudes and short-term gains, few have adopted a robust, quasi-experimental design over an extended period. Moreover, there is limited research that systematically compares traditional textbook-based listening instruction with podcast-based instruction, especially for learners at the A2–B1 proficiency level.

Additionally, many studies overlook contextual variables that influence podcast effectiveness, such as learner familiarity with content, quality of audio materials, digital access, and the degree of pedagogical scaffolding provided. The voices of university learners in under-resourced or less digitally equipped regions also remain underrepresented in existing scholarship.

This study addresses these gaps by implementing a ten-week podcast-based intervention and comparing its impact on listening comprehension with traditional methods. Furthermore, it includes qualitative data from student reflections to provide a holistic view of learners' experiences and preferences regarding podcast-enhanced instruction.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design to examine the effectiveness of podcast-based instruction on the listening comprehension of first-year English-major students. The design involved two intact classes: one experimental group receiving podcast-enhanced listening instruction and one control group taught with conventional textbook-based listening practice. This approach allowed for a real-classroom comparison while maintaining reasonable control over instructional variables.

The study was conducted over ten weeks during the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. Both groups were taught by the same instructor to control for teacher-related variables, and both followed a similar lesson structure across sessions.

### 3.2. Participants

Participants were 60 first-year students majoring in English at Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment. The university assigned students to two existing classes based on administrative scheduling, resulting in 30 students per group.

All participants were at A2–B1 level of English proficiency, as determined by their national entrance scores and a researcher-designed listening diagnostic test administered prior to the study. None of the students had been previously exposed to podcast-based language instruction. Informed consent was obtained from all students, and ethical considerations were addressed in line with institutional guidelines.

### 3.3. Instruments

Three primary instruments were employed in this study:

#### Listening Comprehension Tests:

A pre-test and post-test were developed by the researcher to evaluate participants' listening comprehension before and after the intervention. Each test included 20 multiple-choice questions based on short conversations and monologues adapted from real-life topics appropriate for A2-level learners. Items assessed listening for gist, specific information, and inference. Both tests were piloted with 20 students of similar background to ensure reliability and content validity. Each

correct answer was awarded 0.5 points, resulting in a maximum score of 10 points.

#### Instructional Materials:

Control Group: Used *New Cutting Edge: Pre-Intermediate* (Pearson Longman) as the primary source of listening material. The audio recordings were scripted and accompanied by comprehension tasks in the textbook.

Experimental Group: Received weekly listening input through authentic podcast episodes (5–7 minutes), selected from educational sources such as *Eillo.org*, *BBC Learning English*, and *The English We Speak*. Topics were selected to align thematically with textbook units to ensure comparable content coverage between groups.

#### Student Feedback Questionnaire:

A 10-item post-treatment questionnaire was administered to the experimental group to gauge their perceptions of podcast-based learning. The instrument included Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, focusing on perceived usefulness, motivation, challenges, and preferences for future instruction.

### 3.4. Procedure

The intervention was carried out over ten weeks, with each group attending two sessions per week, each lasting 50 minutes (for a total of 1,000 instructional minutes per group). Both groups followed a three-phase lesson model: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening. The key difference lay in the type of listening material used.

#### Week 1:

All students completed the pre-test under supervised classroom conditions. The test measured baseline listening comprehension performance.

#### Weeks 2–9:

Instruction was delivered as follows:

#### Experimental Group:

- Pre-listening (10–15 minutes): The teacher introduced the

podcast topic, elicited background knowledge, pre-taught essential vocabulary, and set listening objectives.

- While-listening (20 minutes): Students listened to each episode twice. The first listen focused on general comprehension; the second involved specific tasks (e.g., gap-filling, sequencing, matching, or note-taking).

- Post-listening (15–20 minutes): Students discussed answers in pairs/groups, completed follow-up summaries, and reflected on comprehension strategies. They were encouraged to re-listen to the episode at home via their smartphones.

#### Control Group:

- Pre-listening (10 minutes): The teacher introduced the topic using the textbook prompts and pre-taught vocabulary.

- While-listening (20 minutes): Students listened to scripted textbook recordings and completed comprehension and vocabulary exercises in the workbook.

- Post-listening (15–20 minutes): Class feedback, vocabulary practice, and textbook-based grammar review were conducted.

#### Week 10:

Both groups completed the post-test under similar conditions as the pre-test. The experimental group also completed the student questionnaire in the final session.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0.

- Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed to examine listening performance trends within each group.

- Paired-samples t-tests were used to compare pre- and post-test scores within groups.

- An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine between-group differences in gain scores.

- Cohen's d was calculated to assess effect size and practical significance.

- Qualitative data from the questionnaire's open-ended items were analyzed thematically, identifying key perceptions and common challenges reported by students.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative findings. The results are organized into four sub-sections: (1) pre-test and post-test scores, (2) between-group comparison using inferential statistics, (3) students' learning experiences through podcasts, and (4) challenges encountered during podcast-based learning.

### 4.1. Pre-test and Post-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups

To evaluate students' listening improvement, both the experimental and control groups undertook a 20-question listening test designed in alignment with the Pre-Intermediate level of the New Cutting Edge syllabus. The test was administered before and after the 10-week treatment, with each attempt scored out of 10 points. The descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Scores**

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	Mean Gain
Experimental Group	30	5.87	1.55	7.62	1.23	+1.75
Control Group	30	5.78	1.43	6.43	1.25	+0.65

The initial results reveal no statistically significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test (Mean = 5.87 vs. 5.78). However, after the 10-week intervention, the experimental group showed a substantial gain of 1.75 points ( $\approx 30\%$  improvement), compared to only 0.65 points ( $\approx 11\%$  improvement) for the control group.

This disparity highlights that podcast-based instruction not only enhances listening skills more effectively but also does so within a relatively short instructional period. The decrease in standard deviation for the experimental group from 1.55 to 1.23 also indicates greater score consistency, suggesting even the weaker students benefited significantly from the podcast-

based approach.

## 4.2. Inferential Statistics: Between-Group Comparison

To evaluate the effectiveness of podcast-based instruction on students' listening comprehension, an independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the post-test scores between the experimental group and the control group after the 10-week intervention.

As shown in Table 2, the control group had a mean increase of 0.75 points from pre-test ( $M = 5.34$ ) to post-test ( $M = 6.09$ ), while the experimental group showed a greater improvement of 1.48 points, rising from a pre-test mean of 5.36 to a post-test mean of 7.01. The t-statistic for the control group was -6.61 ( $p < 0.001$ ), and for the experimental group, -8.94 ( $p < 0.001$ ), both indicating statistically significant gains.

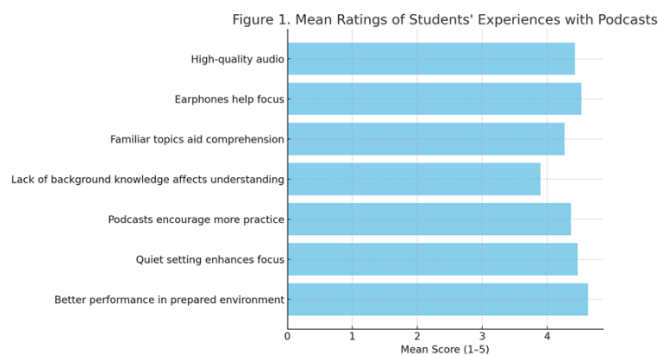
**Table 2. Independent Samples t-test for Post-test Scores**

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference	t-statistic	p-value	Statistical Significance
Control	5.34	6.09	+0.75	-6.61	0.00000007	Significant ( $p < 0.05$ )
Experimental	5.36	7.01	+1.48	-8.94	0.00000000006	Significant ( $p < 0.05$ )

These findings suggest that both groups benefited from their respective instructional methods, but the experimental group demonstrated significantly greater gains. The results confirm that the use of podcasts as a supplementary listening tool had a highly positive impact on learners' listening comprehension. Furthermore, the magnitude of improvement observed in the experimental group supports the practical relevance of integrating podcast-based materials into English language instruction, particularly for enhancing listening proficiency.

## 4.3. Students' Experiences After Practicing Listening through Podcasts

To provide a visual summary of students' perceived experiences, the following figure illustrates the mean scores derived from their responses to seven key statements regarding podcast use. Each statement reflects a critical aspect of the listening experience, such as sound quality, topic familiarity, learning environment, and motivation. The figure enables clearer insight into which factors most significantly influenced student engagement and perceived learning success.



To understand learners' perceptions of the podcast-based listening approach, a structured Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of seven items was administered to 30 students from the experimental group. Each item was rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data obtained revealed overwhelmingly positive responses, with all mean scores ranging from 3.90 to 4.63 and standard deviations generally below 0.70, indicating high levels of consensus among respondents.

The highest-rated item was "I performed better in listening tasks when podcasts were used in a well-prepared learning environment," which received a mean score of 4.63. A total of 23 out of 30 students (76.7%) strongly agreed with this statement, and another five agreed, indicating that nearly all students believed that podcasts were most effective when integrated into a structured and supportive classroom setting. Similarly, the statement "Listening with earphones helped me stay more focused" was also strongly endorsed ( $M = 4.53$ ), with 21 students selecting "strongly agree." These findings highlight that both environmental and technical factors—such as quiet surroundings and use of headphones significantly enhanced student engagement and concentration during podcast-based listening tasks.

Another item, "High-quality audio made it easier for me to follow podcast content," received a high mean score of 4.43. This suggests that the clarity of sound and pronunciation significantly supported comprehension, especially for learners unaccustomed to native-speaker speed and accent variation. The importance of content familiarity was also emphasized, as reflected in the mean score of 4.27 for the statement "Familiar topics contributed significantly to my overall comprehension." Seventeen students strongly agreed, while only one disagreed, demonstrating that content relevance played a critical role in students' listening confidence.

Interestingly, the statement "A lack of background knowledge negatively affected my ability to understand podcast content" received the lowest mean score (3.90), yet still indicated a moderate level of agreement. This suggests that while podcasts are generally accessible, certain topics posed

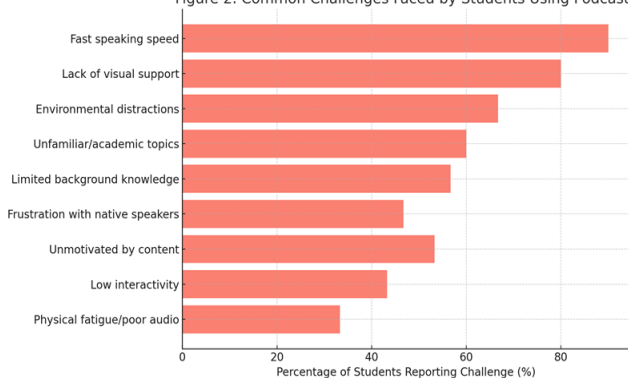
challenges for students without sufficient prior knowledge, leading to difficulties in inferencing and retention. Nonetheless, this did not significantly hinder overall motivation, as demonstrated by the response to the statement “Listening to podcasts encouraged me to spend more time practicing English listening,” which received a mean score of 4.37. Twenty students strongly agreed, and only one disagreed, reflecting increased learner autonomy and commitment to practice beyond the classroom.

The cumulative results indicate that students were highly receptive to the podcast-based method and perceived it as a valuable supplement to traditional classroom instruction. The combination of authentic input, flexible replay, and topic familiarity appeared to foster both comprehension and intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the data suggests that external conditions such as setting and audio quality play an essential mediating role, implying that the effectiveness of podcast listening is not solely dependent on content but also on how it is delivered and experienced.

#### 4.4. Challenges Faced While Using Podcasts

In addition to their positive experiences, students reported a range of challenges encountered during the intervention. These difficulties, presented in the figure below, represent both cognitive and environmental barriers that impacted their ability to fully benefit from podcast-based listening practice. The distribution of responses provides insight into areas that educators should address to optimize the use of podcasts in language learning contexts.

Figure 2. Common Challenges Faced by Students Using Podcasts



To provide a balanced view of the podcast learning experience, students were also asked to report challenges they encountered during the 10-week period. Responses were collected through a checklist format, allowing students to select multiple difficulties that applied to them. The data revealed several recurring issues that, although did not

undermine the overall success of the podcast-based approach, provided valuable insight into necessary pedagogical adjustments.

The most commonly cited challenge was the fast pace of native speakers, selected by 27 out of 30 students, accounting for 90% of the sample. This aligns with previous studies in second language acquisition, which have noted that students often struggle with real-time processing of authentic speech, particularly when lacking exposure to spontaneous and unscripted language. The second most frequent concern, chosen by 24 students (80%), was the absence of visual or written support. This highlights the learners’ reliance on multimodal cues such as subtitles or facial expressions, which are often missing in audio-only formats like podcasts.

Environmental distractions also posed a significant barrier, with 20 students (66.7%) reporting that noise or crowded surroundings reduced their ability to focus. This indicates the importance of context in podcast consumption; while podcasts offer flexibility, their effectiveness diminishes in suboptimal listening environments. A slightly smaller, though still notable, proportion of students (60%) stated that unfamiliar or overly academic topics impeded their understanding. This concern overlapped with another response selected by 56.7% of students, indicating that limited background knowledge made it difficult to follow certain episodes. These results support the interpretation from Section 4.3 that comprehension difficulties often stem from a disconnect between the students’ prior knowledge and the podcast content.

Regarding affective factors, 46.7% of students admitted feeling stressed or frustrated when unable to understand native speakers, and 53.3% stated they lost motivation when the content did not align with their personal interests. Thirteen students (43.3%) also noted that podcasts felt less interactive compared to other learning tools, suggesting that while podcasts are rich in content, they may fall short in fostering real-time engagement or dialogue. Lastly, physical challenges such as fatigue or poor audio quality were reported by 33.3% of the students, indicating the need for careful management of listening duration and equipment.

Together, these findings paint a nuanced picture of the podcast learning experience. While students overwhelmingly appreciated the benefits of using podcasts, their responses revealed that effective podcast-based instruction requires more than simply playing audio files. Instead, educators must be mindful of factors such as content selection, learning context, student preparedness, and support materials. Careful

integration of podcasts with pre- and post-listening activities, environmental control, and learner training in listening strategies can help mitigate these challenges and maximize the potential of podcasts as a transformative tool for English listening development.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of podcasts as a tool for enhancing English listening comprehension among first-year university students. The quantitative findings, supported by student self-assessments and post-treatment survey data, revealed significant improvement in listening performance within the experimental group compared to the control group, particularly after a 10-week structured intervention.

One of the most striking outcomes was the overwhelmingly positive response to podcast-based listening tasks. The high mean scores for items related to learning environment ( $M = 4.63$ ), focus with earphones ( $M = 4.53$ ), and audio clarity ( $M = 4.43$ ) align with prior research emphasizing the importance of auditory input quality and environmental conditions (Rost, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). These factors appear to contribute directly to learners' sustained concentration and perceived comprehension success.

The emphasis on topic familiarity as a facilitator of comprehension ( $M = 4.27$ ) supports schema theory, which posits that understanding new input is easier when it can be connected to existing knowledge structures (Anderson, 1994). Students who reported better performance with familiar podcast content likely benefited from reduced cognitive load and increased prediction accuracy during listening. Conversely, the relatively lower score for the statement regarding lack of background knowledge ( $M = 3.90$ ) suggests that while podcasts are generally accessible, their effectiveness may be limited when students are confronted with unfamiliar or abstract content. This finding supports previous studies that advocate for pre-listening scaffolding and background-building activities (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Furthermore, students' expressed motivation to continue using podcasts for independent practice ( $M = 4.37$ ) highlights the potential of this medium to support autonomous learning. The portability and accessibility of podcasts enable learners to engage with authentic English input outside the classroom, reinforcing theories of extensive listening and learner autonomy (Renandya & Farrell, 2011).

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also uncovered several challenges. The most prominent was the fast pace of native speech, which affected 90% of participants. This issue is consistent with the findings of Field (2008), who noted that real-time listening remains a persistent challenge, especially when learners are exposed to unmodified native input. The absence of visual support (80%) and environmental distractions (66.7%) further underlines the need for careful instructional design when implementing podcast-based materials.

Another noteworthy challenge involved mismatched content interests or complexity levels, which led to reduced motivation and comprehension difficulties. These findings suggest that while podcasts provide authentic exposure, educators must remain selective in choosing materials that are level-appropriate, engaging, and pedagogically supported.

In summary, the discussion indicates that podcasts are a promising tool for improving English listening skills when implemented thoughtfully. Their success is not solely determined by content but by the interplay between learner readiness, topic selection, listening environment, and instructional scaffolding. These results provide a valuable foundation for formulating evidence-based strategies in future curriculum design.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrated that podcast-based instruction has a significant and positive impact on students' English listening comprehension. Compared to traditional textbook-driven methods, the podcast-integrated approach provided learners with authentic, engaging, and flexible input, leading to improved performance in post-intervention assessments. Students reported increased motivation, better focus, and greater autonomy in their learning process. However, several challenges were also identified, including difficulty with fast speech, lack of visual support, and environmental distractions.

Based on these findings, the following pedagogical recommendations are proposed to optimize podcast use in EFL listening instruction:

First, customization of podcast content to match students' proficiency levels is essential. For lower-level learners, this could include simplified language, reduced speech rate, and slower delivery of key points. Advanced learners, on the other hand, can benefit from authentic, native-speed audio to build real-world comprehension skills.

Second, multimodal support such as transcripts, glossaries, or subtitles should be incorporated where possible. These aids bridge the gap between audio input and comprehension, particularly for students unfamiliar with native pronunciation or new vocabulary.

Third, topic relevance and learner interest must be prioritized. Podcasts that connect with students' personal experiences, hobbies, academic fields, or cultural contexts tend to foster deeper engagement and improve retention. Educators should involve students in selecting themes or provide a diverse range of options.

Fourth, environmental and technical conditions should be optimized. Teachers and institutions should encourage students to listen in quiet, distraction-free settings using quality headphones. Providing access to podcasts on multiple platforms or offline may also support more consistent practice.

Fifth, pedagogical scaffolding is vital. Pre-listening tasks to activate background knowledge, while-listening guides (e.g., comprehension questions), and post-listening discussions or reflections can help learners process and internalize the material more effectively.

Finally, personalization and learner autonomy should be promoted. Encouraging students to choose their own podcast episodes, set listening goals, or reflect on their listening habits can build long-term motivation and foster self-directed learning.

In conclusion, podcasts are not a one-size-fits-all solution but a versatile and powerful tool when implemented with thoughtful pedagogical strategies. By addressing learners' cognitive, emotional, and contextual needs, podcasts can become a cornerstone of modern language instruction—bridging classroom limitations and real-world language exposure.

## 7. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study reaffirm the pedagogical benefits of podcast integration into English listening instruction for EFL learners. Notably, the podcast-based intervention significantly improved the listening comprehension skills of first-year students in the experimental group compared to the control group. This outcome aligns with prior studies (e.g., Hasan &

Tan, 2013; Hammershaug, 2019) that underscore the potential of podcasts in enhancing language acquisition through authentic, engaging input.

From a theoretical perspective, the results can be interpreted through the lens of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which posits that learners acquire language most effectively when exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level ( $i+1$ ). Podcasts, with their varied and context-rich content, provide precisely such input, especially when paired with appropriate scaffolding. Furthermore, dual coding theory (Clark & Paivio, 1991) helps explain the enhanced retention observed among learners who accessed auditory input in structured settings, suggesting that combining verbal and contextual cues improves comprehension.

The sociocultural theory of Lantolf (2000) is also relevant, highlighting the role of social interaction and contextualized learning in language development. Podcasts, especially when integrated with collaborative tasks, can foster interaction and negotiation of meaning even within asynchronous learning contexts. However, the current study also reveals that learner motivation and comprehension are moderated by several contextual factors such as familiarity with topic, quality of audio, and environmental distractions suggesting the need for adaptive pedagogical design.

To strengthen global relevance, future research should investigate how podcast-based learning impacts different learner populations, including those in less digitally equipped or multilingual contexts. Comparative studies across Southeast Asia, for instance, could identify regional nuances in how learners perceive and benefit from audio-based learning tools. Moreover, longitudinal designs could shed light on sustained effects beyond the immediate post-test phase.

Pedagogically, this study encourages educators to move beyond passive listening tasks and adopt an interactive podcast-based model, integrating pre-listening activities, guided reflection, and post-listening assessments. Teachers must also consider learner training in metacognitive strategies to enhance focus and autonomy. Ultimately, podcast integration, when grounded in sound theoretical foundations and adapted to learner context, can serve as a transformative approach in the EFL listening classroom.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A. Student Feedback Questionnaire

#### Section 1: Personal Information

##### Item Options

##### 1. Gender:

Male       Female       Other

##### 2. Age:

18       19       Other: \_\_\_\_\_

##### 3. Place of Residence:

Urban Area       Rural Area

##### 4. Frequency of Podcast Use Prior to the Study:

Never       Occasionally       Frequently

#### Section 2: Students' Experiences After Practicing Listening through Podcasts

Instructions: Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

(1 = Strongly Disagree      5 = Strongly Agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. High-quality audio (e.g., clear pronunciation, balanced volume) makes it easier to follow podcast content.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Listening to podcasts with headphones or earphones helps me stay more focused.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Familiarity with the podcast topic contributes significantly to my comprehension.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. A lack of background knowledge negatively affects my	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ability to understand podcast content.					
5. Listening to podcasts encourages me to spend more time practicing English listening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. An organized and quiet learning setting improves my focus during podcast listening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I perform better in listening tasks when podcasts are used in a well-prepared learning environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Section 3: Challenges Faced While Using Podcasts**

Please tick (✓) the difficulties you have encountered (multiple answers allowed):

Statements	✓
I cannot understand podcasts when the speaker talks too fast.	
I struggle to understand podcasts without visual or written support.	
I find it hard to focus when the topic is unfamiliar or too academic.	
Limited background knowledge makes it difficult to follow certain podcast topics.	
External distractions (e.g., noise, crowded spaces) reduce my ability to focus.	
I feel stressed or frustrated when I cannot understand native speakers.	
I lose motivation when podcast content does not match my interests.	
I sometimes find podcasts unengaging or less interactive than other learning tools.	
Physical issues such as poor audio quality or fatigue affect my listening experience.	
Other (please specify): .....	

**Appendix B. Sample Week 1 Handout**

**Transcript (Simplified for A2 Learners)**

Title: Doing Nothing

Neil: Hello! Today we talk about doing... nothing!

Beth: That’s right! Doing nothing can be good. Sometimes we just sit, relax, and think.

Neil: But isn’t doing nothing lazy?

Beth: Not really. Even animals do nothing a lot! Lions sleep almost 20 hours a day.

Neil: Really?

Beth: Yes! And ants – hard workers – sometimes 40% of them are not doing anything.

Neil: So... doing nothing is not bad?

Beth: No! It helps our brains relax. When we feel bored, we can think of new ideas.

Neil: Interesting. So next time I sit and rest, I’ll say I’m helping my brain!

**Sample Listening Comprehension Activities (A2 Level)**

**Part A: Fill in the Blanks (Use the transcript)**

Complete the sentences with 1–2 missing words.

Doing nothing can be \_\_\_\_\_.

Lions can sleep up to \_\_\_\_\_ hours a day.

Ants are often seen as hard \_\_\_\_\_.

Sometimes 40% of ants are not doing \_\_\_\_\_.

Doing nothing helps our \_\_\_\_\_ relax.

**Part B: True or False**

Decide if the statements are true (T) or false (F).

- Neil thinks doing nothing is always lazy.
- Beth says lions are very active all day.
- Ants sometimes do nothing.
- Boredom can help people think of new ideas.
- Doing nothing never helps the brain.

**Part C: Multiple Choice**

Choose the best answer.

- Who says doing nothing is good?
  - Neil
  - Beth
  - The ants
- Why do people need to do nothing sometimes?
  - To get bored
  - To help their brain
  - To sleep
- What do lions usually do during the day?
  - Hunt
  - Run
  - Sleep
- How many ants in a colony may be inactive?
  - 10%
  - 40%
  - 70%
- What happens when people are bored?
  - They sleep
  - They think of new ideas
  - They get lazy