DEVELOPING A2 LEARNERS' LISTENING SKILLS WITH INTERACTIVE PODCASTING AND REAL-WORLD AUDIO TASKS

Pattayeva Nargiza Muhammadjon qizi
Student of the English philology faculty
Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Keywords: listening comprehension, A2 level, podcasts, authentic audio, task-based learning, metacognitive instruction, CEFR

Abstract

Listening is the most difficult skill for many elementary learners because speech is fast, transient and unrepeatable in real life. This article examines how interactive podcasting and real-world audio tasks can develop the listening skills of A2 (CEFR) learners. It answers three methodological questions: **what** to teach (listening sub-skills, language and strategies appropriate for A2), **who** to teach (the profile and needs of A2 learners) and **how** to teach (a staged, task-based, metacognitive procedure supported by podcast materials). The study follows the IMRAD structure: Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion. A six-week instructional design is proposed, with instruments for measuring gains in comprehension, strategy use and motivation. The article concludes that short, graded, interactive audio tasks combined with explicit strategy instruction offer a practical and motivating route to better listening at A2.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and problem

Listening is often called the "Cinderella skill" of language teaching: it is used constantly in real communication but is frequently taught only as a testing activity (Field, 2008). Learners hear a recording, answer questions and are told whether they were right, yet they are rarely shown *how* to listen. At the A2 level this problem is acute. According to the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), an A2 listener can understand phrases and high-frequency vocabulary related to areas of

immediate relevance, and can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages when speech is slow and clearly articulated. Real-world audio rarely meets these conditions, so learners feel a gap between classroom listening and life outside it.

Common A2 difficulties include speech rate, unfamiliar vocabulary, difficulty segmenting words in connected speech, limited working memory for processing long stretches, and anxiety (Goh, 2000; Rost, 2011). Traditional coursebook audio is often scripted, slow and unnatural, which does little to prepare learners for authentic input.

1.2 Podcasts and real-world audio

Podcasts are on-demand, repeatable, portable and available on almost any topic. For teachers they offer authentic or semi-authentic models of speech; for learners they provide autonomy, since they can listen anywhere, replay segments and choose topics that interest them. Interactivity can be added through pre-, while- and post-listening tasks, shared playlists, voice messages, learner-produced podcasts and online discussion. Real-world audio tasks, such as understanding a station announcement, a voicemail, a weather forecast, a short interview or a service call, connect listening to real purposes, which is central to task-based language teaching (Willis & Willis, 2007; Ellis, 2003).

1.3 Theoretical framework

Three ideas underpin this study.

Comprehensible input and noticing. Learners need input slightly beyond their current level, together with opportunities to notice language features (Krashen, 1985; Field, 2008).

Metacognitive instruction. Teaching learners to plan, monitor and evaluate their listening improves comprehension and reduces anxiety (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010).

Multimedia and cognitive load. Information is processed best when its amount and presentation respect working-memory limits, which argues for short segments, visuals and repetition (Mayer, 2009).

1.4 Aim and research questions

The aim is to describe and evaluate a methodology for developing A2 listening through interactive podcasting and real-world audio tasks. The article is organised around three methodological questions:

RQ1 (What to teach?) Which listening sub-skills, language and strategies should be targeted at A2?

RQ2 (Who to teach?) What characteristics and needs of A2 learners should shape the design?

RQ3 (How to teach?) Which procedures, tasks and materials best develop A2 listening, and how can progress be measured?

2. Methods

2.1 Design

The study uses a classroom action-research design with a pre-test/post-test structure, followed by a short delayed check. It is intended to be replicable in a typical school, university language course or private language centre. The intervention lasts six weeks, with two 45-minute listening lessons per week plus 10–15 minutes of independent podcast listening between lessons.

2.2 Participants (who to teach)

The target group is adolescent or adult learners at CEFR A2, ideally 15–25 per class. Placement is confirmed through a short diagnostic test or an institutional placement result. Teachers should gather the following learner profile data at the start:

Age and context: school pupils, university students or working adults; each group brings different interests and available time.

Prior experience: how much listening practice they have had, and whether they have ever listened to authentic audio.

Technology access: smartphone, headphones, data or Wi-Fi.

Affective factors: listening anxiety, motivation and confidence, measured by a brief questionnaire.

Needs: travel, study, work, social media, everyday services.

A2 learners are typically able to handle familiar topics and simple sentences but depend heavily on bottom-up decoding. They often listen word by word, panic when they miss a word, and rarely use context. These features define the instructional focus: build decoding fluency, teach top-down strategies, and lower anxiety through success-oriented tasks.

2.3 Content (what to teach)

The content is organised into three strands.

Strand A: Listening sub-skills (aligned with CEFR A2 descriptors)

Listening for gist (the main topic of a short message)

Listening for specific information (numbers, times, prices, names, places)

Following simple instructions and directions

Understanding the speaker's purpose and attitude in simple terms (agreeing, inviting, complaining)

Recognising common discourse markers (first, then, but, so, because)

Strand B: Language and decoding

High-frequency vocabulary in topics such as daily routines, shopping, travel, health, hobbies and work

Connected-speech features: weak forms, linking, contractions, reductions (e.g. *want to* → *wanna* for recognition only)

Stress and intonation signalling key information and questions

Numbers, dates and times, which are frequent sources of error

Strand C: Strategies and autonomy

Cognitive: predicting, inferring from context, using visuals, note-taking with keywords

Metacognitive: planning before listening, monitoring comprehension, evaluating and setting goals (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012)

Socio-affective: coping with unknown words, staying calm, asking for repetition

Digital literacy: choosing a podcast, using speed controls, subtitles or transcripts, and subscribing to a feed

2.4 Materials

Materials come from three sources.

Learner-level podcasts created for English learners with slowed or graded speech (for example, short episodes of 2–5 minutes).

Authentic, adapted real-world audio: voicemails, announcements, weather reports, short radio segments and customer-service recordings, selected for clear speech and manageable length, and supported by tasks that make them accessible.

Teacher- and learner-made recordings: simple audio produced for the class, such as a teacher's voice message or a learner interview.

Selection criteria: length of 1–4 minutes per segment, a clear speaker, familiar topic, at least 90% of vocabulary recognisable or inferable (a text-coverage rule of thumb), and an interesting or useful purpose. Each text receives a difficulty rating for speech rate, vocabulary and density of information.

2.5 Procedure (how to teach)

Each lesson follows a three-phase listening cycle adapted from Field (2008) and Vandergrift & Goh (2012), with a podcast or real-world audio extract at its centre.

Phase 1: Pre-listening (10 minutes)

Activate schema through a picture, a question or a quick discussion.

Pre-teach 4–6 key words that block comprehension but cannot be inferred.

Set a clear purpose ("You are looking for the time of the train").

Learners predict what they will hear and plan how they will listen.

Phase 2: While-listening (20 minutes)

First listening: gist task (e.g. choose the topic, match speaker and situation).

Second listening: detail task (e.g. fill in a form, complete a schedule, tick items).

Pair check: learners compare answers and discuss where they were unsure.

Third listening, targeted: the teacher plays selected segments, with the transcript used only at this stage, so learners can see how what they heard matches what was said.

Phase 3: Post-listening (15 minutes)

Decoding focus: noticing connected speech or numbers in the transcript, with short dictation of problem phrases.

Reflection: a metacognitive question set (What helped me? What was hard? What will I try next time?).

Interactive extension: a real-world response task.

2.6 Interactive and real-world task types

The following tasks make podcasting interactive and connect listening with authentic purposes.

Voicemail and message tasks: listen to a voicemail and write or record a reply.

Information-gap listening: two groups hear different parts of an announcement and share information to complete a task.

Podcast listening logs: each learner listens to a chosen 3-minute episode weekly and shares a one-sentence summary and one new word on a class discussion board.

Listen-and-do tasks: follow directions on a map, follow a recipe, complete an online form.

Podcast jigsaw: learners listen to different short episodes on one theme, then report to each other.

Learner-created mini-podcasts (Weeks 5–6): pairs record a 60–90 second episode, such as "my weekend" or "a place in my city", and peers answer comprehension questions about it. This links listening to speaking and gives a real audience.

Ask-and-answer voice notes: learners send audio questions to classmates, who must listen and respond.

2.7 Six-week plan

Week	Theme	Focus	Main audio and task
1	Daily life	Gist; numbers and times	Learner-level podcast; schedule completion
2	Shopping and services	Specific information; prices	Shop announcements; shopping list task
3	Travel and transport	Instructions; sequence markers	Station announcements; route map task
4	Messages and plans	Purpose and attitude; connected speech	Voicemails; reply-by-voice task
5	Hobbies and free time	Extended gist; note-taking	Short interviews; podcast jigsaw
6	My own podcast	Consolidation; reflection	Learner mini-podcasts; peer questions

2.8 Instruments and data collection

Listening pre-test and post-test: parallel A2-level tests (e.g. 20 items covering gist, detail and instructions), with a delayed post-test after four weeks.

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ): a validated instrument by Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghodtari (2006), administered before and after.

Motivation and anxiety survey: a short five-point Likert questionnaire.

Learner listening logs and reflections: weekly, qualitative data.

Teacher observation notes and a short focus-group interview.

2.9 Data analysis

Test scores are compared using a paired-samples t-test (or the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for small or non-normal samples), with effect sizes reported. Questionnaire data are analysed descriptively. Logs and interviews are coded thematically. Ethical practice includes informed consent, anonymised data and the right to withdraw.

3. Results

Note: the figures below are a reporting template. They should be replaced with the data collected in your own classroom; no results are claimed here.

3.1 Listening performance (RQ3)

Measure	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Delayed post-test M (SD)	Significance and effect size
Total score (/20)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	p = [ ], d = [ ]
Gist items	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Specific-information items	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Instruction items	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

The expected pattern, based on earlier research on strategy-based instruction (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010), is a gain in total score, with the largest gains in gist and specific-information items, and some retention at the delayed test.

3.2 Strategy use and awareness (RQ1)

Report changes in MALQ factors: planning and evaluation, directed attention, person knowledge, mental translation and problem solving. A decrease in mental translation, alongside an increase in planning and evaluation, would indicate a shift from word-by-word decoding to meaning-focused listening.

3.3 Learner perceptions (RQ2)

Summarise motivation and anxiety scores, and the main themes from logs and interviews (for example: *autonomy*, *relevance of topics*, *confidence with real speech*, *difficulty of speed*). Quote short, anonymised learner comments to illustrate each theme.

4. Discussion

4.1 What to teach

The design suggests that at A2 the most productive content is a focused combination of sub-skills (gist and specific information), decoding support (numbers, connected speech, key vocabulary) and strategies. Teaching language alone is not sufficient; learners also need to know how to approach a listening text. Aligning content with CEFR descriptors keeps expectations realistic: the goal is not to understand everything, but to extract the information needed for a real purpose.

4.2 Who to teach

A2 learners are not a homogeneous group. Differences in age, access to technology, confidence and learning goals affect how tasks should be chosen.

Adolescents may respond to music, vlogs and entertainment-style podcasts; adults often prefer work, travel and service situations. Learners with higher anxiety benefit from success-oriented tasks, pair checking and repeated listening. Teachers should also account for digital inequality by providing downloadable audio and in-class listening options. Treating learners as active partners, who choose episodes and set goals, supports autonomy and long-term habits.

4.3 How to teach

Several methodological principles emerge.

Teach listening, not just test it. The listening cycle, with repeated and purposeful listening and a post-listening focus on how the message was decoded, moves learners beyond answer-checking (Field, 2008).

Grade the task, not only the text. Authentic audio can be used at A2 if the task is simple, such as finding a time or a price, so learners succeed with real speech.

Keep it short and repeatable. One- to four-minute segments respect working-memory limits (Mayer, 2009) and allow several purposeful listenings.

Make it interactive. Responding to a voicemail, completing an information-gap task or producing a mini-podcast turns passive listening into communication and provides authentic audiences.

Build metacognition into every lesson. Brief planning and reflection questions help learners understand their own difficulties and build transferable strategies.

Extend learning beyond the classroom. Weekly listening logs and podcast subscriptions turn the classroom into a springboard for independent practice.

4.4 Challenges and limitations

Several practical issues should be acknowledged: finding suitable authentic audio takes teacher time; copyright and licensing must be respected (use openly licensed or freely accessible material and link rather than copy); and some learners lack devices or quiet space for independent listening. The design also has methodological limits: small classroom samples, no control group in a simple pre-

post design and the short duration of six weeks. Future studies should compare podcast-based instruction with traditional coursebook listening, examine long-term retention and test different podcast formats.

4.5 Practical recommendations

Start each lesson with a clear, real-world purpose for listening.

Use no more than three listenings per segment, each with a different task.

Teach and revisit two or three strategies at a time rather than many at once.

Let learners choose some podcast episodes to increase ownership.

Include learner-produced audio so that listening and speaking reinforce each other.

Record progress in a simple portfolio or log so that learners can see improvement.

5. Conclusion

Developing A2 learners' listening requires more than playing recordings and checking answers. An effective approach defines **what** to teach (sub-skills, decoding and strategies at a realistic level), recognises **who** is being taught (learners with specific needs, technology access and affective profiles) and uses **how** to teach in a staged, task-based and metacognitive way. Interactive podcasting and real-world audio tasks provide the authenticity, flexibility and learner autonomy that coursebook audio alone often lacks. With carefully selected short audio, simple purposeful tasks and regular reflection, A2 learners can develop the skills and confidence needed to cope with real-world listening.

References

Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume.* Council of Europe Publishing.

Field, J. (2008). *Listening in the language classroom.* Cambridge University Press.

Mayer, R. E. (2009). *Multimedia learning* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford University Press.