CRITERIA FOR SELECTING ENGLISH PODCASTS FOR UPPER GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract: This article analyzes the criteria for selecting English podcasts for upper grade students (grades 1011). The role of podcasts in modern language education, their didactic potential, and their suitability to the age characteristics of upper grade students are highlighted. The article develops linguistic, methodological, technical, and content criteria for selecting podcasts and substantiates their practical significance. The author also provides recommendations for selecting podcasts from platforms such as «BBC Learning English», «VOA Learning English», and «ELLLO».

Keywords: podcast, selection criteria, upper grade students, English language, audio materials, authentic materials, language competence

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada yuqori sinf o'quvchilari (1011sinflar) uchun ingliz tilidagi podkastlarni tanlash mezonlari tahlil qilingan. Zamonaviy til ta'limida podkastlarning o'rni, ularning didaktik imkoniyatlari va yuqori sinf o'quvchilarining yosh xususiyatlariga mosligi masalalari yoritilgan. Maqolada podkastlarni tanlashning lingvistik, metodik, texnik va mazmuniy mezonlari ishlab chiqilgan hamda ularning amaliy ahamiyati asoslab berilgan. Shuningdek, muallif tomonidan «BBC Learning English», «VOA Learning English» va «ELLLO» kabi platformalardagi podkastlarni tanlash bo'yicha tavsiyalar berilgan.

Kalit so'zlar : podkast, tanlash mezonlari, yuqori sinf o'quvchilari, ingliz tili, audio materiallar, autentik materiallar, til kompetensiyasi

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируются критерии отбора англоязычных подкастов для учащихся старших классов (1011 классы). Освещены роль подкастов в современном языковом образовании, их дидактические возможности и соответствие возрастным особенностям учащихся старших классов. В статье разработаны лингвистические, методические, технические и содержательные критерии отбора подкастов и обоснована их практическая значимость. Также автором даны рекомендации

по отбору подкастов на таких платформах, как «BBC Learning English», «VOA Learning English» и «ELLLO».

Ключевые слова: подкаст, критерии отбора, учащиеся старших классов, английский язык, аудиоматериалы, аутентичные материалы, языковая компетенция

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary educational landscape, podcasts have emerged as a valuable resource for English language teaching, particularly for developing listening comprehension and speaking skills. Upper grade students (grades 10 11) represent a specific target group with unique characteristics: they possess intermediate to advanced language proficiency, have developed cognitive abilities, and are preparing for higher education or professional careers. For these students, podcasts offer authentic language input, expose them to diverse topics and accents, and support autonomous learning [1].

Recent research has demonstrated that integrating authentic audio podcasts into the learning process enhances motivation, improves comprehension, and contributes to the systematic development of English language competence among high school students [2]. However, the effectiveness of podcast based instruction largely depends on the appropriate selection of materials. With thousands of podcasts available on various platforms, teachers and students face the challenge of choosing podcasts that are linguistically appropriate, methodologically sound, and engaging for upper grade learners [3].

The problem of selecting suitable podcasts has been addressed by several researchers. Podosynnikova and Panchenko [2] determined specific criteria for selecting authentic audio podcasts for developing students' grammatical competence, with «BBC Learning English Podcasts» selected within the thematic scope of the Grade 10 curriculum. Woldemariam [4] presented selection and evaluation criteria for intermediate level audio podcasts from three online platforms (ELLLO, BBC, and British Council). Constantine [5] emphasized two key concepts in choosing podcasts: relevance and transferability.

This article aims to develop a comprehensive set of criteria for selecting English podcasts for upper grade students, based on theoretical foundations and practical considerations. The criteria are organized into four categories: linguistic criteria, methodological criteria, technical criteria, and content criteria. Additionally, recommendations for implementing these criteria in educational practice are provided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of audio materials in language teaching has a long history, but podcasts represent a new generation of resources with unique features. According to research, podcasts differ from traditional audio materials in their accessibility, authenticity, and variety, allowing learners to access up-to-date content on diverse topics and listen at their own pace [6].

Several researchers have investigated the criteria for selecting materials for language teaching. Studies indicate that when selecting podcasts, educators must consider two fundamental concepts: relevance and transferability. When a topic is relevant, it holds the attention of the learner and increases motivation. If students feel that the content is relevant, there is a strong possibility that what is learned can be applied to other situations whether at school or out in the real world [5].

In the context of upper grade students, psychological and age-related characteristics must be carefully considered. Podosynnikova and Panchenko [2] emphasize that understanding these characteristics is essential for effective podcast selection. Students at this level benefit from materials that challenge their cognitive abilities and connect to their real-world interests.

Research by Woldemariam [4] examined listening difficulties faced by EFL/ESL learners, noting that learners have difficulty in listening either on the speakers' accent, speed, topic, the length of the texts, or other problems. The study concluded that listening to audio podcasts through repetition helps learners solve such problems and improve listening skills independently. The author evaluated podcasts from ELLLO, BBC, and British Council, finding that ELLLO provides very good audio podcasts for teaching and learning English in EFL/ESL contexts.

A study involving 26 intermediate ESL learners at an American university revealed that students and their teachers both preferred podcasts that had interesting topics, natural speed, and clear pronunciation [7]. These findings provide empirical support for specific selection criteria.

Ningrum and Panggabean [8] conducted a systematic literature review on using podcasts to develop listening comprehension among EFL university students. Their findings revealed three key benefits of podcast implementation: provision of authentic and varied listening materials, flexible accessibility for anytime anywhere learning, and effective integration with metacognitive strategies.

Research has also explored podcast selection for specific educational levels. A study on forming English grammatical competence of 10th grade students using authentic audio podcasts

proposed a subsystem of exercises and an algorithm for working with authentic audio podcasts [2]. The researchers selected «BBC Learning English Podcasts» within the thematic scope of the Grade 10 curriculum.

The theoretical foundation for podcast selection is rooted in second language acquisition theories, particularly Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly beyond their current level [9]. This principle is essential when selecting podcasts for upper grade students.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a theoretical analysis of existing literature on podcast selection and language teaching methodology. The study synthesizes findings from second language acquisition theory, educational technology research, and pedagogical practice to develop a comprehensive set of criteria. The criteria are organized into categories based on their focus: linguistic, methodological, technical, and content. Each criterion is explained and justified with reference to theoretical foundations and practical considerations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Classification of Podcasts for Educational Purposes

Podcasts can be classified according to various criteria for educational purposes. Based on content type, there are educational podcasts specifically designed for language learning (e.g., BBC Learning English, VOA Learning English, ELLLO), authentic podcasts created for native speakers but useful for advanced learners, and learner generated podcasts created by students as part of project work [2].

By language level, podcasts range from beginner level with slower speech rate and simplified vocabulary to intermediate level with natural speech rate and advanced level with authentic speech and complex content. By format, podcasts include monologue (single speaker), interview (conversations between host and guest), dialogue (discussions between two or more speakers), and storytelling (narratives and stories) [4].

Linguistic Criteria

Linguistic criteria focus on the language features of podcasts and their suitability for upper grade students' proficiency levels.

1. Vocabulary Level. Podcasts selected for upper grade students should contain vocabulary that is challenging yet comprehensible. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis [9], optimal input should be slightly above the learners' current level (i+1). For upper grade students, podcasts should include both familiar vocabulary and new lexical items that can be

understood through context. Research indicates that corpus based vocabulary analysis of English podcasts can help ensure appropriate vocabulary selection [10].

2. Speech Rate. Speech rate is a critical factor in listening comprehension. Research indicates that speech rate significantly affects comprehension, particularly for intermediate learners [7]. For upper grade students, podcasts with natural speech rates are generally appropriate, but teachers should consider that students prefer podcasts with natural speed that allows for comprehension [7]. Podcasts that offer variable speed options are particularly useful as they allow students to adjust the rate according to their needs.

3. Pronunciation and Accent. Exposure to various accents prepares students for real world communication. Upper grade students should be exposed to both standard accents (e.g., Received Pronunciation, General American) and regional varieties. Research confirms that students prefer podcasts with clear pronunciation [7]. Podcasts with clear pronunciation and minimal background noise are preferable for comprehension. Repeated exposure to different accents develops phonological flexibility.

4. Grammatical Complexity. The grammatical structures used in podcasts should be appropriate for the learners' level. Podosynnikova and Panchenko [2] emphasize that authentic audio podcasts can effectively develop grammatical competence when selected with appropriate grammatical complexity. Upper grade students typically have knowledge of most grammatical structures but may need exposure to complex sentence patterns in authentic contexts.

Methodological Criteria

Methodological criteria address how podcasts can be effectively integrated into the teaching and learning process.

1. Length and Duration. The length of podcast episodes should be appropriate for classroom use and students' attention span. Research suggests that for high school students, episodes of 515 minutes are suitable for classroom use, while longer episodes can be assigned for homework [4]. Woldemariam [4] notes that BBC's "6 Minute English" is specifically designed with optimal length for language learners.

2. Structure and Organization. Well-structured podcasts with clear introductions, main content, and conclusions facilitate comprehension. Podcasts that segment content into manageable parts or include summaries help students follow the argument and retain information. This structure supports metacognitive strategy development by helping students predict content, monitor comprehension, and evaluate understanding [8].

3. Availability of Support Materials. Podcasts that provide transcripts, vocabulary lists, or comprehension questions enhance learning. Transcripts allow students to check their understanding, analyze language features, and develop reading skills in conjunction with listening. Educational podcasts like BBC Learning English, VOA Learning English, and ELLLO provide comprehensive support materials designed specifically for language learners [4].

4. Task Potential. Podcasts should lend themselves to meaningful prelisting, while listening, and post listening tasks. Prelisting tasks might include vocabulary preview or prediction activities; while listening tasks could involve notetaking or comprehension checks; post listening tasks might include discussions, summaries, or creative projects [2]. Podosynnikova and Panchenko [2] propose a subsystem of exercises and an algorithm for working with authentic audio podcasts aimed at fostering English language competence.

5. Level of Difficulty. Podcasts should be selected based on students' current proficiency level. For upper grade students, a range of difficulty levels should be available to accommodate individual differences. Teachers can use a progression from simplified educational podcasts to authentic podcasts as students' skills develop [4].

Technical Criteria

Technical criteria consider the practical aspects of accessing and using podcasts.

1. Audio Quality. High-quality audio with clear sound and minimal background noise is essential for comprehension. Poor audio quality can frustrate learners and impede understanding, even when content is appropriate. Podcasts produced by professional organizations (e.g., BBC, VOA, ELLLO) typically maintain high production standards [4].

2. Accessibility. Podcasts should be easily accessible through platforms that students can use. Popular platforms include Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and specialized educational platforms. The ability to download episodes for offline listening is particularly important in contexts with limited internet access [8].

3. Currency and Updates. Podcasts that are regularly updated provide ongoing material for listening practice. Current content also increases relevance and motivation. Teachers should consider whether a podcast series is active and how frequently new episodes are released [2].

4. Cost. Free podcasts are preferable for educational use, as they eliminate financial barriers. Most educational podcasts are free, though some may offer premium content. Teachers should verify that selected podcasts are freely accessible to all students [4].

Content Criteria

Content criteria focus on the topics and themes of podcasts and their relevance to upper grade students.

1. Relevance to Students' Interests. Podcast topics should align with the interests of upper grade students, including technology, science, culture, career development, education, and social issues. When students are interested in the content, they are more motivated to listen and engage with the material [5]. Constantine [5] emphasizes that relevance is perhaps the most important factor, as it holds the attention of the learner and increases motivation.

2. Transferability. The concept of transferability refers to whether what is learned can be applied to other situations whether at school or out in the real world. Constantine [5] notes that relevance and transferability are often connected. Podcasts with high transferability allow students to apply knowledge and skills gained to real world contexts.

3. Age Appropriateness. Content should be suitable for adolescents and young adults, avoiding themes that are too childish or too mature. Upper grade students appreciate content that treats them as emerging adults and addresses issues relevant to their lives [2].

4. Cultural Appropriateness. Podcasts should be selected with consideration of cultural values and norms. While exposure to different cultures is valuable, content should not conflict with local cultural values. Teachers should preview podcasts to ensure cultural appropriateness [4].

5. Educational Value. Podcasts should have clear educational value, whether in terms of language learning, content knowledge, or skill development. Podcasts that combine language learning with subject content are particularly valuable for developing cognitive academic language proficiency [2].

Evaluation of Major Podcast Platforms

Based on the criteria outlined above, the following evaluation of major podcast platforms for upper grade students is provided:

BBC Learning English. BBC Learning English offers podcasts specifically designed for language learners, including the popular "6 Minute English" series. These podcasts feature clear pronunciation (British accent), natural speech rate, appropriate length (6 minutes), and excellent support materials including transcripts and vocabulary explanations. The content covers a wide range of topics relevant to upper grade students [2][4].

VOA Learning English. VOA Learning English provides podcasts with American English pronunciation, slightly slower speech rate suitable for intermediate learners, and news

based content that connects to real world events. Support materials include transcripts and vocabulary definitions [4].

ELLLO (English Listening Lesson Library Online). ELLLO offers a extensive collection of audio podcasts with diverse accents, including both native and nonnative speakers. Woldemariam [4] found that ELLLO provides very good audio podcasts for teaching and learning English in EFL/ESL contexts, with materials that teachers can use directly without adapting the listening texts.

Summary of Selection Criteria

The following criteria should be considered when selecting English podcasts for upper grade students:

Category	Key Criteria	Considerations for Upper-Grade Students
Linguistic	Vocabulary Level Speech Rate Pronunciation Grammatical Complexity	i+1 principle, academic vocabulary Natural speed with clear delivery [7] Clear, preferably standard accents Range of structures for competence development [2]
Methodological	Length Structure Task Potential	5-15 minutes for classroom use [4] Clear organization with support materials Suitable for pre/while/post listening activities [2]
Technical	Audio Quality Accessibility Currency	Professional production standards Free access, download options [8] Regular updates with current content
Content	Relevance Transferability Age Appropriateness	Aligned with student interests and curriculum [5] Applicable to real-world contexts [5] Suitable for adolescent learners [2]

Based on the criteria developed above, the following recommendations are proposed for selecting and using podcasts with upper grade students:

1. Conduct a Needs Analysis. Before selecting podcasts, teachers should assess students' language proficiency, interests, and learning goals. This can be done through questionnaires, interviews, or informal discussions. Understanding students' needs ensures that selected podcasts are relevant and appropriate [5].

2. Use a Structured Selection Process. Teachers should apply the criteria systematically when evaluating potential podcasts. Podosynnikova and Panchenko [2] recommend selecting podcasts within the thematic scope of the curriculum, as they did with «BBC Learning English Podcasts» for Grade 10.

3. Combine Multiple Platforms. Drawing from different podcast platforms provides exposure to various accents, topics, and formats. Research suggests that ELLLO, BBC, and British Council podcasts each have unique strengths for different purposes [4].

4. Develop Accompanying Materials. For selected podcasts, teachers should develop or identify support materials, including vocabulary previews, comprehension questions, discussion prompts, and extension activities. These materials enhance learning and ensure pedagogical value [2].

5. Implement the Three Stage Framework. Podcast based instruction should follow prelisting, while listening, and post listening stages. Prelisting tasks might include activating prior knowledge and preaching vocabulary; while listening tasks could involve comprehension checks; post listening tasks might include discussions and creative projects [2][5].

6. Evaluate and Revise. Teachers should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of selected podcasts through student feedback, comprehension checks, and observation. Based on evaluation, the podcast selection can be revised and improved.

CONCLUSION

Selecting appropriate podcasts for upper grade students requires careful consideration of multiple criteria. This article has developed a comprehensive framework of linguistic, methodological, technical, and content criteria that address the specific needs of this learner group. Linguistic criteria ensure that podcasts provide comprehensible input with appropriate vocabulary, speech rate, pronunciation, and grammatical complexity. Methodological criteria address how podcasts can be effectively integrated into teaching and learning through appropriate length, structure, support materials, and task potential. Technical criteria consider practical aspects of access and use, including audio quality, accessibility, currency, and cost.

Content criteria ensure that podcasts are relevant, transferable, age appropriate, culturally suitable, and educationally valuable.

The evaluation of major podcast platforms reveals that BBC Learning English, VOA Learning English, and ELLLO each offer unique advantages for upper grade students. BBC Learning English provides excellent British English content with ideal length and support materials; VOA Learning English offers American English with slightly slower speech rates suitable for intermediate learners; ELLLO provides diverse accents and extensive listening materials that teachers can use directly.

The practical recommendations provided offer guidance for implementing these criteria in educational practice, including conducting needs analysis, using structured selection processes, combining multiple platforms, developing accompanying materials, implementing the three stage framework, and evaluating effectiveness.

In the context of Karakalpakstan and Uzbekistan, where English language teaching is undergoing significant development, these criteria can guide teachers in integrating podcasts effectively into their practice. As podcast technology continues to evolve and the range of available podcasts expands, ongoing attention to selection criteria will remain essential for optimizing podcast based language learning for upper grade students.

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