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Pop Culture Intersections

The Impact of Podcasts in Education

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## 1. Introduction

If music is inspiration and radio is theater for the mind, then podcasts are the exploration of the human intellect. In today's world, anyone with the necessary technology can create and consume voice media. Whether it is using popular platforms such as Apple Music, Spotify or Google Play, it is undeniable that voice media plays a vital role in impacting our leisurely time and entertainment decisions. Whether it's music, podcasts, or radio, on-demand voice media has removed the barriers of scheduled and live voice entertainment. People are now listening to what they want, anytime they want, and however often they want. Modern voice media has reshaped how people are consuming entertainment in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Podcasts have had a rapid rise in popularity in recent years. In 2014, there were 7 billion total Apple podcast downloads, 10.5 billion in 2016, 13.7 billion in 2018, and in March of 2018 Apple Podcasts jumped to 50 billion total podcast downloads and streams (Locker, 2018, p. 1). Locker (2018), also reveals that podcasts now cover over 155 countries, with at least 525,000 active podcast shows and more than 18.5 million episodes (Locker, 2018, p. 1). People are listening, and the growth is continuing. Due to the minimum technology requirements, the accessibility and availability of podcasts is widespread. We can listen to podcasts when commuting, exercising, or working. By the same token, podcast creation has never been easier, and everyone is allowed to participate. It is only natural that such a widely available and trending form of voice media would spread outside of entertainment.

Although voice media has positively impacted how we are able to consume media, voice media has long carried the stigma of solely being a form of entertainment by the public. The idea that voice media is thought of as merely amusement or a pastime, leads the public to overlook any of its other values. The subject of voice media has been widely discussed in the digital

technology field, with scholars detailing its development and rise in popularity over time. However, many articles have not adequately addressed of how voice media can resolve social issues. For this article, the focus will be on the impact of voice media, specifically podcasts in education.

This begs the question, what is a podcast in this modern day and age? For this article, the term podcast will be defined as a digital audio file created and then uploaded to an online platform to share with others (Phillips, 2017, p. 159). All studies and information cited in this article will have been published after the year 2010, ensuring the relevancy and accuracy of data. Classroom environments will range from kindergarten through twelfth grade as well as higher education. Students with this level of education, as well as humanities and language classes. There are also no confines on age, race or location of the studied participants. This article will also reveal any previous misconceptions between podcasts and its use in an educational setting.

The objective of this article to present evidence from various researchers and first-hand experiences that precisely demonstrate the positive impact podcasts have in education. When properly implemented, podcasts can improve several aspects of education. First, podcasts can act as an innovative teaching resource for teachers to design new classroom activities. Second, there are various learning benefits podcasts have upon students both inside and outside the classroom to aid in the learning process. Lastly, podcasts can improve teacher candidate readiness and preparation. Ultimately, by examining voice media in education, we can further understand how podcasts are a digital learning tool with practical value in classroom environments.

## 2. Background

The incorporation of technology in education is not new. “In the latter part of the 1970s, the very first computer was integrated into schools” (Ourict.co.uk, 2018, p. 1). Technology has played a role in teaching and learning for now nearly 40 years. Classrooms now have more tools and are able to incorporate ways of learning outside of the age-old textbook dominant curriculum. Having various digital tools and technology as part of the classroom environment is the new norm. Teachers can teach the same content in various ways, and students are able to experience difference types of learning methods. This is able to help students determine how they learn the most efficiently and shows teachers how they should be structuring their curriculum. In addition to teaching the course content, multimedia tools also teach students the technological skills that are necessary to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For instance, forms of multimedia in classrooms include PowerPoint presentations, in-class videos, digital images and graphs. Being adept at understanding these forms of technology, as well as learning how to operate them is a lifelong skill that is developed through multimedia use.

The United States Department of Education states that “technology infuses schoolroom environments with digital learning tools” (Ed.gov, 2018). One form of technology that is beginning to infuse classroom environments are podcasts. At one point in time, using PowerPoint presentations and class videos must have seemed foreign to both students and teachers alike. When considering incorporating podcasts in education, it is wise to know that schools already have the knowledge and experience with implementing technology as a part of learning. Just like PowerPoint presentations and class videos, podcasts can be used as a digital learning tool. If the current education system is having success with implementing other forms of

technology as digital learning tools, there is little reason to suggest that podcasts would not serve as just as good of a learning tool.

Although I will be emphasizing on the benefits of podcasts in education, it is important to acknowledge the possible negative effects podcasts can have for students and teachers in a classroom environment. One prevalent opinion is that podcasts will be misused by students and teachers. The idea suggests that teachers may use podcasts to replace lectures and established curriculum, while students would start to neglect class materials and rely solely on podcasts. Another prevailing opinion is that podcasts have minimal impact on learning gains and performance. The article, *Lecture Capture Podcasts: differential student use and performance in a large introductory course*, states that podcasts are associated with “little increase in performance.....do not increase learning gains” (Williams, Aguilar-Roca, & O’Dowd, 2016, p. 1). With this article, I want to show that this is not the case. The goal is not to have podcasts replace textbooks and quizzes, but rather to serve as a supplement in learning. Podcasts do provide students with learning gains and numerous other benefits. In this article I will explore three key ideas: podcasts as an effective teaching resource, podcasts as a practical learning tool and podcasts assisting teacher preparation.

### **3. Analysis 1: Podcasts as a Teaching Resource**

Podcasts provide teachers with the ability to grow podcast usage, and new classroom activities to improve a student’s learning experience. A common belief is that because teachers have not been using podcasts in their classrooms, trying to implement them would create difficulties within the classroom environment. However, evidence shows that teachers have been

using podcasts as a learning resource at an increasing rate. For instance, the website “Teacher Pay Teachers (where teachers can purchase lesson plans from each other) saw an increase in downloads of plans related to podcasts in 2014 and 2015” (Fehennig, 2017, p. 31). The increase shows that teachers are using and becoming more aware of the technology. If teachers were having negative experiences with podcasts, the number of downloads would have remained the same or decreased. Looking back at the yearly overall podcast downloads, it is reasonable to assume that there would be an increase in downloads of podcast related lesson plans for the following years.

Sustainable yearly growth requires positive faculty feedback towards the use of podcasts as well as multimedia learning tools. One teacher commented that “the incorporation of multimedia tools within the learning environment enhances both student performance and teaching practices. To this end, the learning environment and teaching practices work in Tandem” (Salas & Moller, 2015, p. 76). Having the positive feedback from teachers encourages the usage of multimedia tools and podcasts in classrooms. The benefits one teacher finds with using podcasts may spread to others through word of mouth, and gradually become more widely accepted and used in certain schools and school districts.

One example of a popular interactive podcasts being used in classroom is The Walking Classroom. The Walking Classroom “combines brisk twenty-minute walks, together as a class, with listening to custom-written podcasts for kids on a preloaded audio device” (Fehennig, 2017, p. 31). Students commonly fall bored or tired in the classroom, which diminish the returns of both teaching and learning. The Walking Classroom podcast forces the children to interact with each other as a class, learn whilst being active and enjoy a positive and upbeat audio learning experience. Teachers who have used this podcast have found that “students return to the

classroom in better moods, more focused, and more likely to participate in discussions” (Fehennig, 2017, p. 31). Teachers are able to learn from The Walking Classroom and begin designing their own auditory walking program designed specifically for each class and the course content. All of these improvements lead to a classroom environment that is more conducive to learning and is an example of how an activity can improve a student’s overall classroom experience.

Another example of how podcasts can be a teaching resource is how Danielle Vandenberg, head teacher of English at Ambarvale High School used author podcasts in her English class. Author podcasts are a series of podcast that Vandenberg created. To have more engaging resources for her students, author podcasts feature authors that students encountered in classroom reading and their own reading (Vandenberg, 2018, p. 54). This allows the students to engage more with the texts they are reading. Additionally, in English classrooms, students are expected compose lengthy essays analyzing book text and discussing the purpose and intent of the author (Vandenberg, 2018, p. 54). I believe that Vandenberg has found a way to help students immensely in the process. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we had access to an author’s thoughts and it didn’t cost us a thing?” (Vandenberg, 2018, p. 54). Vandenberg found and created podcasts with authors of the texts her students were analyzing, to provide the insight of the author. When analyzing text, there is nothing more useful than being able to get inside an author’s head and see things from their perspective.

Other uses of podcasts in the classroom include the ability to provide ideas to students for related materials. Podcast hosts will often mention other resources they have encountered, or reiterating information and facts they read from another source. This can encourage students to gain insight into different texts and gain additional knowledge to a certain subject or hobby. In



addition to its use as a teaching resource, a goal of podcasts is to serve as another learning resource. How well it is used as a teaching tool has a direct effect on its ability and success as a learning tool. As mentioned in this paragraph, podcasts have found success among many teachers as a teaching resource. If teachers are having success implementing podcasts, that can only mean students are also having success with podcasts and are reaping the benefits.

#### **4. Analysis 2: Podcasts as a Learning Resource**

Students who can use podcasts as a learning resource experience the benefits of audio learning, experience aspects of podcasting technology and encourages learning outside of the classroom.

One area where podcasts usage is increasing is in school classrooms. Audio learning plays an incremental role in learning for young people. For instance, “when words are spoken aloud, children can understand ideas that are two to three grade levels higher than their normal reading level” (FeHennig, 2017, p. 30). Listening to podcasts is a way for students to experience the benefits of audio learning. Whether it is in the form of reading an article while listening, or just a standalone listening activity, students are able to receive these benefits. People, especially children, enjoy watching the same television or reading the same book repeatedly. According to FeHennig (2017), podcasts make it easy to listen to the same episode over and over again, and allow kids to learn something new each time, fitting into existing routines such as drives to school and bedtime stories (Fehennig, 2017, p. 31). Vandenberg (2018) found “close listening of good podcasts reveal reveals the importance of logical and coherent thinking processes of structing an argument. Podcasts therefore enhance students’ writing and provide insights that

assist in analyzing texts” (Vandenberg, 2018, p. 54). This shows yet another benefit of audio learning.

This begs the question, are lectures alone sufficient for learning the required material? It is widely acknowledged that exposing students to content in a one-off lecture is not enough to enable them to conceptualize and deeply understand the concepts taught (Gachago, Livingston, & Ivala, 2016, p. 859). Popova, Kirschner & Joiner (2014) found that podcasts “help bridge the conceptual distance between new and prior knowledge, better understand topics in lectures and stimulate thinking more deeply about the lecture’s content and the possible applications of the subjects of the lecture” (Popova, Kirschner & Joiner, 2014, p. 330).

Furthermore, The University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa found that “regular recordings of difficult, content-heavy lectures were perceived as the most effective use of podcasting” (Gachago, Livingston, & Ivala, 2016, p. 859). This finding presents three different ideas. The first idea is that the reach of podcasts is not limited to just first world countries, the accessibility of podcast is worldwide. Second, podcasts are being used by students who are older and in higher education. Third, The University of Technology in Cape Town experimented with podcast and found the best way to implement it for their students and curriculum. Not all schools and students have to use podcasts in the same way. Teachers and students can choose to use podcasts of various lengths, involving various activities to find the best fit for their exact environment.

Moreover, children in elementary schools are beginning to create their own podcasts, also called “kidcasts” (Felde & Rogers, 2017, p. 9). Whether is it creating them alone, or creating them with friends and classmates, these students are learning and developing new skills. By creating podcasts, students learn the skills surrounding the recording, editing, publishing. They

are also able to practice their speaking abilities, discuss topics they are interested in, and learn in a brand-new way. Additionally, this leads to learning outside of the classroom environment. Children are able to create podcast for school curriculum purposes, as well as for themselves. One of the goals of teachers is to instill in students the love and desire for learning. Podcasts are doing just that. In the process of listening to various podcasts outside of the classroom, students open themselves to millions of hours of content. From listening, they are able to find some patterns and themes to podcasts they enjoy, and possibly include it in their own podcasts. Learning to create podcasts also require the technological understanding of various recording and publishing applications. Not to mention, students are undergoing the same type of creativity writers go through when they are trying to create original content. The technological and mental skills developed through this process is lifelong. Without allowing kids the opportunity to create podcasts, they would not be exposed to any of it and would fall behind those who were.

Lastly, As teachers are the ones implementing podcasts and responsible for a students' overall learning, it is essential that students are getting the most well-prepared teachers available. Podcasts have a way of improving that likelihood.

### **5. Analysis 3: Podcasts and Teacher Preparation**

Implementing podcasts as part of teacher candidate training courses leads to more prepared teachers. Teacher preparation is an essential part of producing the best possible educators. Teacher education instruction is often conducted through text heavy or text only material. However, even teacher preparation courses have started to experiment with podcasts as an additional learning resource.

In an experimental trial, a teacher candidate preparation course created two groups of learners. One group of teacher candidates were given specific podcasts in addition to the course text, while the other group received text-only instruction. At the end of the teacher instruction course, both groups were tested on knowledge and application, and were also asked about motivation. The results revealed that the participants who had podcasts supplemented in their instruction scored significantly higher on the knowledge and application assessments and claimed to feel more motivated than those who received text-only training (Kennedy et al., 2016, p. 303). While increased motivation is a positive aspect, the impact is difficult to pinpoint and measure. However, the effects of teacher candidates having greater knowledge and application of skills are immense. A teacher with greater knowledge regarding the subject material has a better ability to help students learn. Additionally, with better application skills, they also can become better teachers. Whether it is class activities, dealing with classroom troubles, they will have a greater ability to deal with classroom scenarios. The students are the ones who get to reap the rewards of a more prepared teacher. Students are provided with the best teacher they could receive and get a higher quality of learning and education. A common suggestion is to have podcasts to replace current teacher instruction. However, that is a misconception and not the purpose of podcasts in this scenario. The purpose of podcasts is to “offer learners a supplement to existing instruction and a way to receive high quality instruction beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom” (Kennedy et al., 2016, p. 304). Clearly, podcasts are a tool and not a substitute for other methods of learning.

Moreover, another qualitative study done on ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher candidates displayed similar positive effects. Having podcasts implemented resulted in improved teacher candidate attitudes and perceptions, language teaching ability,

familiarity with instructional technology and overall professional development (Kim & King 2011, p. 5). Additionally Kim and King (2011), found that while the findings on this study are not measured through numbers and statistics, the findings explore the researcher's field notes, discussions, and emails of the candidates thoughts throughout the training program (Kim & King 2011, p. 10). When asked about how the incorporation of podcasts as part of the learning program affected her, one teacher candidate revealed her experience. "I'm not afraid to try the new technology, I'm not afraid to – I just think it's incredible. We really learned so much more" (Kim & King 2011, p. 12). By gaining more experience with instructional technology in the form of podcasts, teacher candidates are able to learn more and come out of their instruction courses with more knowledge.

Not all teachers are as well-adapted to this digital age as students. When discussing the digital age and her experience of having podcasts as part of her education instruction, teacher candidate Vera described that "I think it's really important for us to advance with [the digital age] and strive to understand it better" (Kim & King 2011, p. 13). Providing teacher candidates with the ability to experience these digital learning tools is just as valuable as having students experience them. Teachers get to familiarize themselves with an innovative technology, and experience first-hand the benefits and shortcomings of podcasts in a learning environment. By implementing podcasts as part of teacher instruction programs, not only did the candidates become more proficient in the actual curriculum, they also were able to learn a new aspect of teaching and pedagogy. They are able to acquire another teaching method to apply into their classrooms, thus developing a new skill in the process.

## 6. Conclusion

To summarize, this article has examined the various benefits podcasts can bring to education and classroom environments. A goal of this article is to shed more light on the subject and begin to create a conversation among students, teachers and faculty. Implementing a change in any standardized system is difficult, however change can be beneficial, and the rewards would be well worth any struggle. The success of implementing podcasts will depend on how well teachers and students are able to incorporate it as part of the class curriculum. However, support from school boards, superintendents and faculty is instrumental in assuring its use and growth throughout schools.

With the ongoing growth of podcast creation and consumption, podcasts can no longer be ignored by anyone in this digital age. Schools need to begin acknowledging and taking advantage of this digital learning tool. Despite the risk of podcasts becoming pure entertainment, a distraction, and providing no learning benefits. There is now significant data that suggests otherwise. Podcasts not only allow teachers to create new classroom assignments and activities, they equip students with a digital learning tool, and create more prepared teachers. This is not to include certain positive unmeasurable effects podcasts can have upon students. Both students and teachers benefit from this digital tool. If teachers are teaching with the most up to date textbooks, and students are learning the most up to date information, why should they not be using the most up to date technology? Students in this modern era deserve the best of a 21<sup>st</sup> century education, implementing podcasts in classroom environments is a first step toward that direction.

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