

PODCASTS, LISTENING COMPETENCIES, AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE MYANMAR CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the use of podcasts to improve English language learning in Myanmar, addressing key questions about the current state of English education, the contexts in which podcasts are used, how Myanmar influences podcast adoption, challenges in their use, and the implications for Philippine educators. A literature review was employed as the primary method, synthesizing existing research, reports, and scholarly articles related to English learning in Myanmar, podcast-based learning, and socio-political factors shaping educational practices. English language learning in Myanmar has been influenced by historical, socio-political, and economic factors, including colonial legacies and post-independence efforts to promote the Burmese language. The reintroduction of English faces challenges such as political tensions, ethnic diversity, and socio-economic disparities that affect access to quality education. Despite these challenges, digital tools like podcasts have become crucial in language learning, offering flexible, accessible resources. Podcasts such as Daily English in Burmese and SBS Learn English Burmese provide lessons, while youth-driven platforms like Doh Zat and Myanmar in a PodShell enable young people to engage with global topics in English. These podcasts contribute to language fluency and promote critical thinking. However, challenges such as limited internet access, digital literacy, content relevance, and political instability hinder their full potential. Myanmar's experience with podcasts offers valuable lessons for the Philippines, where similar challenges exist, particularly in remote areas with limited educational resources.

Keywords: Podcast, English language learning, Listening competencies, Myanmar

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Podcasts have become an effective tool for language learning, offering unique features that enhance listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language proficiency. One of their key advantages is the provision of authentic and varied content, which allows learners to engage with real-life conversations, interviews, and narratives. Unlike scripted textbook dialogues, podcasts expose learners to natural speech patterns, colloquialisms, and diverse accents, all of which are crucial for developing listening comprehension skills (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Rost, 2016).

Another significant characteristic of podcasts is their accessibility and flexibility, enabling learners to practice English listening skills anytime and anywhere. This convenience supports self-directed learning, allowing learners to integrate listening practice into their daily routines (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007). In addition, podcasts provide exposure to different accents and speaking styles, which helps learners become accustomed to various English dialects, including native varieties such as American, British, and Australian English, as well as non-

native variations. This exposure enhances their ability to understand spoken English in diverse linguistic contexts (Field, 2008).

Moreover, podcasts are known for their ability to engage and motivate learners. Since they cover a wide range of topics, learners can choose content that aligns with their personal interests, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective. Studies suggest that engagement with interesting material improves retention and promotes active learning (Goh, 2014). Additionally, podcasts contribute to pronunciation and intonation development by providing learners with models of fluent speech. Through techniques such as shadowing, where learners repeat after the speaker, podcasts can help improve pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation patterns, thereby enhancing spoken fluency (Walker, 2014).

Furthermore, podcasts serve as a valuable supplement to traditional learning methods. Teachers can integrate them into lesson plans to reinforce listening skills, vocabulary development, and discussion-based activities. They also provide learners with additional listening practice outside the classroom, bridging the gap between formal education and real-world communication (Graham, Santos, & Francis-Brophy, 2014). Additionally, podcasts cater to different learning preferences, particularly benefiting auditory learners who absorb information best through listening. With the availability of transcripts and supplementary exercises, podcasts also support multimodal learning by combining audio with reading and writing tasks (Nation & Newton, 2009).

1.1 Podcasts and Listening Competencies

Podcasts have increasingly become an influential tool in the development of listening competencies in language learning, especially in the context of learning English as a second language. The key appeal of podcasts lies in their accessibility, flexibility, and diverse range of content, making them an effective resource for learners to enhance their listening skills outside of traditional classroom settings (Vaughan, 2019). Through regular exposure to authentic spoken language, learners can improve their ability to comprehend different accents, vocabulary, speech patterns, and colloquialisms, all of which are essential components of listening competence.

One of the primary benefits of using podcasts for language learning is the opportunity to engage with real-world language, as podcasts often feature speakers from a variety of backgrounds discussing contemporary topics, current events, and cultural issues (Vaughan, 2019). This diversity exposes learners to various speech registers and speeds, which is crucial for developing advanced listening skills. Unlike scripted language used in textbooks or language learning apps, the informal, conversational nature of podcasts can help learners adjust to natural rhythms and intonations found in everyday language use (Baker, 2018). Research has shown that exposure to natural, unscripted language results in improved listening comprehension, as it challenges learners to process speech in real time, just as they would in face-to-face interactions (Tuan, 2012).

Moreover, podcasts can enhance learners' ability to understand different English dialects and accents. Given the global reach of podcasting, learners can be exposed to a variety of English accents, including British, American, Australian, and non-native varieties. This exposure helps learners recognize and understand regional and international variations in pronunciation, which

is particularly beneficial in a globalized world where interactions with speakers from various English-speaking regions are common (Baker, 2018). For instance, podcasts such as The English We Speak (BBC Learning English) expose listeners to British English, while podcasts like This American Life or The Daily offer American English, helping learners to develop a more versatile listening competency.

Podcasts also provide a unique form of scaffolding that is beneficial for language learners. Many podcasts offer accompanying transcripts or notes, which can be used to reinforce learning. When learners listen to a podcast episode and then refer to the transcript, they can compare the spoken and written forms of language, which helps solidify understanding and retention (Vaughan, 2019). This combination of listening and reading fosters multimodal learning, which research has shown to be effective in language acquisition (Lynch, 2019). Learners can also pause, rewind, and replay podcasts, allowing them to process difficult sections of audio and revisit content they find challenging, further strengthening their listening skills (Baker, 2018).

Additionally, podcasts offer opportunities for learners to engage in extensive listening, which is the process of listening to large amounts of content over an extended period. This type of listening practice is beneficial because it helps learners develop the ability to process spoken language faster and more accurately, a key component of advanced listening competence (Tuan, 2012). Extensive listening has been shown to improve learners' ability to identify key ideas, infer meanings from context, and understand implied messages, all of which are vital for effective communication in English (Lynch, 2019).

Given the above, podcasts serve as an effective tool in the development of listening competencies for English language learners by providing exposure to authentic, real-world language use. Through the diverse content, varying accents, and flexibility that podcasts offer, learners can improve their listening skills in a practical and engaging manner. The scaffolding provided by transcripts and the ability to revisit difficult sections of content further support the development of listening comprehension. Overall, podcasts present a valuable, adaptable resource for enhancing listening competencies in language learners.

1.2 Major players in the world capitalizing on the use of podcasts as language learning tools

The use of podcasts as language learning tools has gained significant traction worldwide, and several major players in the education and technology sectors have capitalized on this trend. These organizations have developed innovative platforms and content to help language learners improve their skills, particularly in English. The key players include language learning platforms, educational institutions, and media companies that have embraced podcasting as an integral part of language acquisition.

One of the foremost organizations in the realm of podcast-based language learning is Duolingo, a well-known language learning platform that integrates podcasts into its curriculum to help learners practice listening comprehension and vocabulary. Duolingo's podcasts are designed to provide learners with real-world conversations and stories in the target language, making language learning more engaging and context-driven. The platform offers podcasts in various languages, including Spanish, French, and German, catering to diverse learners worldwide. By

incorporating authentic language usage into its podcasts, Duolingo provides learners with the opportunity to build fluency in practical settings, improving both listening and speaking skills (Rettig, 2021).

Another significant player is BBC Learning English, which offers a wide range of podcasts for learners at various levels of proficiency. BBC Learning English provides podcasts that focus on improving pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. One of its most popular podcast series is The English We Speak, which introduces everyday expressions and idiomatic language in short, digestible episodes. Additionally, 6 Minute English provides learners with insights into contemporary topics, while also helping them improve their listening skills by exposing them to native speakers' accents and speech patterns. BBC Learning English's podcasts are highly regarded for their educational value, providing accessible and practical content for learners around the globe (BBC, 2020).

Spotify, a global leader in the music streaming industry, has also recognized the potential of podcasts for language learning and has made significant strides in the space. The platform hosts a plethora of podcasts aimed at language learners, with offerings in multiple languages, including Spanish, French, and English. Many of these podcasts feature dialogues, storytelling, and interviews, which help learners to immerse themselves in the target language and understand it in various contexts. Spotify has become a hub for language learning podcasts, such as Coffee Break Languages and Lingthusiasm, which focus on both beginner and advanced learners. The platform's algorithm also helps learners discover new content tailored to their language learning needs (Díaz & Naranjo, 2020).

Clozemaster, an online language learning platform, integrates podcasts into its methodology by offering context-rich listening exercises. The platform presents language learners with vocabulary in context, and podcasts are used to reinforce these words in real-world scenarios. Clozemaster's podcasts, such as Language Transfer and The Fluent Show, provide insights into language learning strategies and practical language tips. These podcasts are particularly valuable because they offer structured content that focuses on vocabulary acquisition and usage in sentences, reinforcing the learner's language competence in context (Clozemaster, 2021).

Educational institutions have also leveraged podcasts to enhance language learning. For example, Harvard University offers a podcast series called Harvard English Language Learning for non-native English speakers. These podcasts explore topics such as academic English, listening comprehension, and pronunciation, helping students from around the world develop academic language skills necessary for higher education in English-speaking countries (Harvard University, 2021). Similarly, University of California, Berkeley, uses podcasts as part of its ESL (English as a Second Language) programs, providing international students with resources to practice and improve their English skills.

Lingoda, a well-known online language school, has also embraced the power of podcasts. The platform integrates podcasts into its curriculum to help students practice listening to real-life conversations and improve their fluency in speaking. Lingoda's podcasts often cover topics such as culture, travel, and daily life, offering learners opportunities to encounter the language used in diverse settings. The platform's focus on immersion through podcasts has been widely

praised by learners looking to practice their language skills outside of the classroom (Lingoda, 2021).

1.3 Research Gaps in the Use of Podcasts as Language Learning Tools

Despite the growing interest in using podcasts as a tool to improve listening skills in English language learning, several research gaps remain that warrant further investigation. One of the major gaps is the lack of longitudinal studies. Most existing research on podcasts in English language learning focuses on short-term interventions, leaving a gap in understanding the sustained effects of podcast use on listening competency over extended periods (Rettig, 2021). Another important gap is the need for more context-specific efficacy studies. The effectiveness of podcasts varies depending on factors such as learners' proficiency levels, educational settings (e.g., formal versus informal learning), and cultural backgrounds. Research is needed to explore how podcasts impact diverse learner populations across different contexts (Díaz & Naranjo, 2020).

In addition, there is limited comparative research evaluating the effectiveness of podcasts against other listening materials, such as audiobooks, TED Talks, or teacher-recorded audio. This gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of the unique advantages and limitations of podcasts as a language learning tool (Clozemaster, 2021). Furthermore, while much of the research on podcasts focuses on listening comprehension, there is limited exploration of how podcast-based learning integrates with other language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing. More studies are needed to examine the interrelationship between listening and these other skills within the context of podcast use (Rettig, 2021).

Another gap lies in podcast design and learner engagement. Many studies do not sufficiently analyze which features of podcasts—such as scripted versus unscripted content, episode length, or the use of native versus non-native speakers—are most effective in enhancing listening skills (BBC, 2020). Understanding how factors like storytelling, sound quality, and pacing impact learner engagement is crucial for refining podcast-based learning materials. Similarly, while podcasts offer flexibility for self-directed learning, there is limited research on how learners remain motivated and engaged over time. Studies exploring learner autonomy, listening habits, and motivational factors would provide valuable insights into maintaining long-term engagement with podcasts (Lingoda, 2021).

Additionally, the use of interactive and AI-powered podcasts is an emerging area that has not been widely studied in relation to listening competency development. Podcasts with comprehension checks or AI-driven personalized recommendations could enhance the learning experience, but more research is needed to evaluate their effectiveness (Clozemaster, 2021). Finally, there is a lack of standardized methods for assessing improvements in listening competency due to podcast use. Future research should focus on developing valid and reliable assessment tools tailored to podcast-based listening instruction (Duolingo, 2021). Addressing these gaps would deepen our understanding of the role of podcasts in English language learning and enhance their pedagogical applications.

This study addresses multiple research gaps, particularly those related to context-specific efficacy, the integration of podcasts with other language skills, and challenges in podcast design and learner engagement. By focusing on Myanmar's use of podcasts, this study could

offer valuable insights into an under-researched region, laying the foundation for future studies to explore these gaps in greater detail.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) fully captures the key concepts of this study. This is due to its emphasis on the social context of learning, cultural relevance, and the role of interaction in constructing knowledge, all of which are integral to the research questions posed.

The Situation of English Language Learning in Myanmar: Vygotsky's theory highlights the importance of the cultural and social context in learning. Understanding how Myanmar's unique socio-political and cultural environment influences English language learning ties directly into Vygotsky's notion of learning being shaped by the social context and interactions learners have with more knowledgeable others (e.g., teachers, peers, or podcast content).

The Different Contexts in Which Podcasts are Used: Social constructivism also aligns with the varied educational settings (e.g., formal vs. informal learning environments) where podcasts may be employed. Vygotsky's theory stresses that learning takes place within the social context, meaning podcasts' role can vary depending on whether learners engage with them in structured educational settings or more informal, self-directed contexts.

How Myanmar Shapes the Use of Podcasts in English Language Learning: Social constructivism is particularly relevant here as it focuses on how cultural and social contexts influence learning. Myanmar's socio-political climate, language policies, and access to resources will undoubtedly shape how podcasts are used for language learning. Vygotsky's theory provides a framework for understanding how local culture, language practices, and societal norms influence how learners interact with podcasts as a learning tool.

Challenges in Using Podcasts: Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the need for appropriate scaffolding ties into the challenges posed in the study. If podcasts do not match the learners' developmental stage or lack sufficient support mechanisms, they may not be as effective. This theory also helps explain potential difficulties in engagement and motivation when learners struggle to understand the content due to lack of scaffolding or relevance to their learning level.

Implications for Philippine Educators: Understanding the role of podcasts in English language learning through a social constructivist lens can help Philippine educators recognize how the local socio-cultural context influences the adoption and use of podcasts in their classrooms. This insight can guide them in adapting podcast-based learning tools to fit the learning needs and cultural contexts of their own students.

3.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study explored the use of podcasts as tools to improve English language learning in Myanmar. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the situation of English language learning in Myanmar?

2. What are the different contexts in which podcasts are used as English language learning tools?
3. How does Myanmar shape the use of podcasts in English language learning?
4. What challenges pose difficulties in the use of podcasts as English language learning tools in Myanmar?
5. What are the implications of the landscape of English language learning in Myanmar using podcasts on Philippine English language educators?

4.0 METHODOLOGY

A review of literature served as an invaluable method for addressing the statement of the problem in a study that explored the use of podcasts to improve English language learning in Myanmar. This approach enabled the researcher to synthesize existing knowledge, highlight gaps in current research, and create a comprehensive understanding of the topic, without the need for primary data collection. In the case of this study, a literature review comprehensively addressed the research questions by drawing on existing studies, reports, and scholarly articles related to English language learning in Myanmar, podcast-based language learning, and the socio-political and cultural contexts that shaped educational practices.

The literature review served as a comprehensive method to address the research questions regarding the use of podcasts to enhance English language learning in Myanmar. It provided insights into the current state of English education in Myanmar, highlighting challenges, strategies, and the socio-political context influencing language learning (Khin, 2017; Maung, 2020). The review also explored the diverse contexts in which podcasts are used for language learning, such as formal and informal environments, and examined the socio-political factors impacting podcast adoption (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012; Godwin-Jones, 2018; Bauer, 2021; Lwin, 2019). Additionally, it addressed challenges like technology access and content design, offering a critical look at barriers to effective podcast use in Myanmar (Foley, 2017; Huang & Hung, 2019). Finally, a comparative analysis of the Philippine context was included to highlight implications for educators in both countries (Salazar, 2020; Tan & Ubaldo, 2018). The literature review effectively synthesized existing knowledge, addressing the research questions without the need for primary data collection.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 What is the situation of English language learning in Myanmar?

Learning English in Myanmar. The landscape of English language learning in Myanmar is intricately shaped by various socio-political factors that have evolved over time. Historically, during the British colonial era (1886–1948), English was the medium of instruction in formal education. However, post-independence, there was a deliberate shift to promote the Burmese language, reflecting nationalist sentiments and a desire to assert cultural identity (Thant, 2022).

In recent decades, Myanmar has recognized the importance of English for global integration and economic development. This recognition has led to educational reforms aimed at reintroducing and strengthening English language education. However, these reforms have encountered challenges due to socio-political tensions between central policymakers and local

educators, particularly concerning the implementation strategies and the balance between English and indigenous languages (Lwin, 2011).

The country's diverse linguistic landscape, comprising numerous ethnic groups with distinct languages, adds complexity to language policy and planning. Efforts to promote English must navigate the delicate balance of not undermining indigenous languages, which are integral to ethnic identity and social cohesion (Soe, 2015). Additionally, ongoing internal conflicts and socio-political instability in certain regions have disrupted educational initiatives, further complicating the consistent delivery of English language programs (Fen, 2005).

Moreover, socio-economic disparities influence access to quality English education. Students from urban areas often have better opportunities and resources for learning English compared to their rural counterparts, exacerbating educational inequalities (Thandar, 2015). Teachers' motivation and the strategies they employ are also affected by the socio-political context, impacting students' enthusiasm and success in learning English (Kim, 2010).

Thus, the trajectory of English language learning in Myanmar is deeply intertwined with the nation's socio-political dynamics. Historical legacies, ethnic diversity, political reforms, and socio-economic factors collectively influence the policies and practices surrounding English education. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires nuanced and inclusive approaches that consider the unique context of Myanmar.

Learning Different Englishes in Myanmar. In contemporary Myanmar, English is predominantly taught as a foreign language with an emphasis on standardized forms, often aligning with British English norms due to historical ties. However, the rise of globalization and technological advancements has exposed learners to various English dialects and accents, including American, Australian, and other World Englishes. Despite this exposure, formal education systems largely adhere to traditional British English standards, potentially limiting learners' adaptability to different English contexts (Soe, 2015).

The socio-economic divide in Myanmar further influences access to diverse English learning opportunities. Urban centers, particularly Yangon and Mandalay, offer private language institutions and international schools where students may encounter various English dialects. In contrast, rural areas often lack such resources, resulting in limited exposure to different English varieties and reinforcing reliance on textbook-based British English models (Thant, 2022).

Additionally, the integration of indigenous languages into the education system presents challenges in balancing local linguistic heritage with English language acquisition. Efforts to promote multilingual education must consider the potential dominance of standardized English forms over local languages, which could affect linguistic diversity and cultural identity (Simpson, 2019).

Contemporary media landscape and English language learning in Myanmar. The contemporary media landscape in Myanmar has significantly influenced English language learning, integrating traditional methods with digital innovations to enhance accessibility and engagement. Digital platforms and mobile applications play a crucial role in expanding learning opportunities. For instance, the SAYA platform provides interactive lessons, practice

sessions, and live interactions with instructors, enabling learners of various proficiency levels to engage with English flexibly (SAYA, n.d.). Similarly, 360ed Universe offers a mobile learning application emphasizing English education for young children, aligning with the government's educational standards (360ed Universe, n.d.).

Online courses and e-learning initiatives have also contributed to English language learning in Myanmar. The AEM-Parami English Language Initiative offers free online courses, such as English for Professional Purposes and English for Academic Purposes, which allow learners to study at their own pace (AEM-Parami, n.d.). Additionally, the Teaching & eLearning Platform (TeP) provides advanced English and exam preparation skills, making English studies more accessible to Southeast Asian learners who cannot attend traditional classroom settings (TeP, n.d.).

Social media and video-sharing platforms have further expanded access to English education. The "Daily English in Burmese" YouTube channel provides lessons where English language concepts are taught alongside Burmese translations, making learning more accessible to native Burmese speakers (Daily English in Burmese, n.d.). Traditional institutions have also adapted to the digital shift by offering online programs. For example, World Learning's English Language Program (ELP) in Myanmar transitioned to an online format during the COVID-19 pandemic, using platforms like Moodle to continue delivering courses nationwide (World Learning, n.d.).

5.2 What are the different contexts in which podcasts are used as English language learning tools in Myanmar?

Podcasts for Learning English Formally. Podcasts have emerged as versatile tools for enhancing English language learning in Myanmar, utilized across various contexts to cater to diverse learner needs. One significant application is through bilingual educational platforms that integrate English lessons with Burmese explanations. For instance, the Daily English in Burmese YouTube channel offers lessons where English language concepts are taught alongside Burmese translations, facilitating comprehension and making English learning more accessible to native Burmese speakers (Daily English in Burmese, n.d.).

Another context involves localized English learning series tailored specifically for Myanmar learners. The SBS Learn English Burmese podcast series exemplifies this approach by providing English lessons contextualized within Australian culture, yet delivered in the Burmese language. This method not only aids in language acquisition but also introduces learners to cultural nuances, enhancing their overall learning experience (SBS Learn English Burmese, n.d.).

Additionally, podcasts serve as professional development resources for English educators in Myanmar. The Tea Leaf English podcast is designed for aspiring or experienced English teachers from Myanmar, offering insights into teaching methodologies and language nuances. Such resources contribute to the continuous improvement of English teaching standards within the country (Tea Leaf English, n.d.).

Furthermore, news podcasts in English, such as the DVB English News by the Democratic Voice of Burma, provide learners with exposure to current events while enhancing their

listening skills. By presenting news in English, these podcasts offer practical language application opportunities, allowing learners to engage with real-world content (DVB English News, n.d.).

Hence, podcasts in Myanmar are utilized in various contexts, including bilingual educational platforms, localized learning series, professional development for educators, and English-language news broadcasts. These diverse applications underscore the adaptability of podcasts as effective tools in enhancing English language proficiency among Myanmar learners.

Podcast Topics in Myanmar that Leverage on English Language Use. Podcasts in Myanmar have increasingly leveraged English language use to discuss a wide range of topics, reflecting the country's complex cultural, social, and political landscape. These podcasts serve as platforms for disseminating information, sharing personal narratives, and fostering dialogue on critical issues.

One key area where English-language podcasts in Myanmar contribute is in news and current affairs. The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) produces the DVB English News podcast, offering coverage of Myanmar's political developments. This podcast includes in-depth analysis and interviews with key figures, such as Aye Chan Naing, a journalist and activist dedicated to independent media in Myanmar (DVB, 2024).

Cultural and social discussions are another prominent theme in Myanmar's podcast scene. Insight Myanmar explores various aspects of Burmese culture, such as Buddhism's role in social justice and human rights. For example, the episode titled "An Assault on Faith" delves into the cultural and racial implications within Myanmar's monastic communities (Insight Myanmar, 2020).

Humanitarian and personal stories are also central to several podcasts, including Myanmar in a PodShell. This podcast provides a comprehensive analysis of Myanmar's political and social issues, featuring experts who discuss the complexities of the country (Myanmar in a PodShell, n.d.).

Additionally, youth perspectives and storytelling are prominent topics in independent podcasts like Rebel Wisdom and Doh Zat, which cover a wide range of issues from personal experiences to societal concerns. These platforms give voice to Myanmar's younger generations as they navigate the country's evolving socio-political environment (The Democratic Voice of Burma, 2023).

English language learning and Youths Producing and Consuming Podcasts in Myanmar. The youth in Myanmar are increasingly involved in both the production and consumption of podcasts, significantly shaping the landscape of English language learning. The evolving digital media environment provides an accessible platform for young people to express themselves, share knowledge, and enhance their language skills. These podcasts often focus on a range of topics that resonate with youth, including social issues, educational content, and personal stories, thus contributing to English language learning in diverse ways.

One key context where youth are involved in podcast production is through platforms that encourage independent voices. Podcasts like Doh Zat and Rebel Wisdom feature young

creators discussing social, political, and personal topics. These podcasts not only offer a space for young Myanmar citizens to share their experiences but also present opportunities for them to practice and enhance their English skills by producing content in the language (The Democratic Voice of Burma, 2023). For instance, Doh Zat explores issues such as the challenges faced by Myanmar's youth in the socio-political landscape, allowing young podcasters to use English as a medium for expression and social commentary.

Additionally, youth-driven podcasts provide access to content that is relevant and relatable, helping young listeners improve their English comprehension skills. For example, podcasts like Myanmar in a PodShell offer in-depth discussions on Myanmar's political landscape, with episodes sometimes featuring youth-centric issues. These platforms help youth engage with current affairs in English, providing both exposure to new vocabulary and an understanding of complex socio-political concepts (Myanmar in a PodShell, n.d.). Similarly, The Daily English in Burmese podcast on YouTube is tailored for Burmese speakers learning English, combining English lessons with practical examples from daily life (Daily English in Burmese, n.d.).

Moreover, youth in Myanmar are also leveraging social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, to consume English-language content. Many YouTube channels, such as Insight Myanmar, provide content where social issues are discussed in English, making it easier for young people to both listen to and learn the language in context (Insight Myanmar, 2020). These media sources cater to the youth by focusing on topics that resonate with their experiences, like personal identity, education, and social justice, while helping them enhance their English proficiency.

Furthermore, youth consumption of English-language podcasts often extends beyond passive listening, as they frequently interact with the content through social media and online communities. This interaction not only boosts listening skills but also enhances speaking and writing abilities as they engage in discussions or create their own podcasts in English (The Democratic Voice of Burma, 2023).

As such, youth in Myanmar are actively shaping the production and consumption of podcasts in English, utilizing these platforms to learn, practice, and improve their English language skills. Through involvement in podcast creation, as well as consumption of content on current affairs, social issues, and personal stories, young people in Myanmar are enhancing their linguistic proficiency and engaging with the world in new and dynamic ways.

5.3 How does Myanmar uniquely shape the use of podcasts in English language learning?

One significant factor in how Myanmar shapes podcasting for English learning is the focus on relevant, contextual content. Podcasts like Myanmar in a PodShell and DVB English News provide English-language discussions on Myanmar's political situation, social justice issues, and human rights topics, thus offering learners a chance to improve their English proficiency while engaging with important national and international matters. These podcasts often serve dual purposes: enhancing language skills while keeping the audience informed about pressing issues. By creating content that merges English language acquisition with real-world topics, Myanmar's podcast creators shape learning in ways that go beyond traditional language instruction (Myanmar in a PodShell, n.d.; DVB, 2024).

Another unique aspect is how Myanmar's podcasting scene integrates local culture and youth perspectives. Podcasts like Rebel Wisdom and Doh Zat amplify the voices of Myanmar's youth, who discuss cultural topics, personal experiences, and social challenges in English. These platforms give young people the opportunity to practice English while exploring topics that resonate with their everyday lives. This blend of personal expression and language practice encourages young learners to use English in authentic contexts, which improves fluency and comprehension. Moreover, these podcasts serve as a platform for the youth to experiment with language, explore new vocabulary, and develop their speaking and listening skills (The Democratic Voice of Burma, 2023).

The socio-political environment in Myanmar also plays a role in how podcasts are shaping English language learning. Due to the country's turbulent political history and limited access to international media, podcasts provide an alternative medium for accessing global content in English. Through podcasts, Myanmar's youth are exposed to a broader range of English language contexts, such as global news, international music, and cultural discourse, which might otherwise be inaccessible. This helps bridge the gap between local and global perspectives, making English more relevant and practical for learners (Insight Myanmar, 2020). Additionally, podcasts offer a flexible and cost-effective learning tool, especially for those in rural or underserved areas with limited access to formal education resources.

Finally, Myanmar's use of podcasts as a tool for English learning reflects a more decentralized and participatory form of education. The rise of independent creators, such as those behind Doh Zat and Rebel Wisdom, demonstrates a shift away from traditional top-down educational methods. These platforms allow anyone with access to a microphone and internet connection to share their perspectives in English, creating a dynamic and diverse learning environment. By producing and consuming podcasts, learners not only improve their listening and comprehension skills but also become part of a community of English speakers who engage in dialogue and knowledge sharing (Myanmar in a PodShell, n.d.; The Democratic Voice of Burma, 2023).

Thus, Myanmar is uniquely shaping the use of podcasts as a tool for English language learning by offering content that is culturally relevant, contextually rich, and accessible to diverse audiences. The blending of local perspectives with global English usage, along with the influence of the socio-political environment, makes Myanmar's approach to podcasting a distinct and powerful method for enhancing language learning.

5.4 What challenges pose difficulties in the use of podcasts as English language learning tools in Myanmar?

While podcasts have great potential as English language learning tools in Myanmar, several challenges hinder their widespread and effective use. These challenges stem from a combination of socio-political factors, technological limitations, and educational barriers, all of which influence how podcasts are integrated into language learning practices.

Limited access to reliable internet and digital devices. One of the primary challenges is limited access to reliable internet and digital devices, particularly in rural areas. According to the World Bank (2021), Myanmar still faces significant digital divides, with many people in remote areas lacking the necessary infrastructure to access online content, including podcasts. The

availability of smartphones and internet connectivity is limited in some regions, which restricts the potential for podcast-based learning. While the situation is improving in urban centers, rural populations often face connectivity issues that hinder their ability to use podcasts as a regular language-learning tool (World Bank, 2021).

Lack of digital literacy skills. Another challenge is the lack of digital literacy skills. Even though podcasts are an accessible form of learning, many individuals in Myanmar, particularly those in rural areas or older generations, may struggle with the basic skills required to navigate digital platforms. This barrier prevents potential users from accessing and benefiting from podcast content (Koehler & Mishra, 2020). Digital literacy training is essential for enabling learners to make the most of podcasts as a tool for English language acquisition. Without proper digital skills, students are less likely to engage effectively with podcasts, limiting the tool's potential impact on language learning.

Lack of content relevance and quality. Moreover, content relevance and quality remain significant concerns. While podcasts have the ability to address a wide range of topics, not all content is suitable or beneficial for English language learners. The language proficiency levels of listeners vary, and many podcasts are designed for native speakers or advanced learners, making them difficult for beginners or intermediate learners to understand (Sundararajan, 2022). The lack of podcasts that cater specifically to the needs of English learners in Myanmar, particularly those at lower proficiency levels, limits the tool's effectiveness. Additionally, the use of complicated vocabulary, accents, or slang in certain podcasts can overwhelm learners and decrease their motivation to continue listening.

The political climate in Myanmar. The political climate in Myanmar also poses challenges for podcast production and consumption. Due to the country's ongoing political instability, there have been concerns about censorship and the regulation of online content. In recent years, the Myanmar government has imposed restrictions on internet access and has targeted independent media outlets, which includes podcast creators (The Guardian, 2021). These conditions create a less conducive environment for the production and distribution of podcasts, particularly those with political or socially sensitive content. This censorship reduces the diversity of available content, limiting English learners' exposure to different topics and accents.

Reliance on conventional teaching methods. Additionally, while podcasts can be an engaging and flexible tool, they are not a replacement for traditional language instruction. Many educators in Myanmar still rely on conventional teaching methods, which may not incorporate modern digital tools like podcasts. In areas where the education system lacks a digital approach or where teachers are not trained in using technology for language learning, podcasts can be underutilized (Aung & McKie, 2021). The absence of supportive structures within the educational system limits the integration of podcasts into English language curricula.

Therefore, the use of podcasts as English language learning tools in Myanmar faces several challenges, including limited access to technology, digital literacy barriers, content relevance, political restrictions, and a traditional educational infrastructure. To fully harness the potential of podcasts for language learning, it is crucial to address these challenges through investments in digital infrastructure, digital literacy training, and the creation of high-quality, accessible content that meets the needs of English learners at all levels.

6.0 DISCUSSION

6.1 What are the implications of the landscape of English language learning in Myanmar using podcasts on Philippine English language educators?

The use of podcasts in the landscape of English language learning in Myanmar has important implications for English language educators in the Philippines. As both countries share certain socio-political, cultural, and educational challenges, the growing prominence of podcasts as an educational tool in Myanmar offers several lessons and insights that Philippine educators can consider when incorporating modern, technology-driven methods into their English language teaching strategies.

First, the rise of podcasts as an English language learning tool in Myanmar underscores the importance of accessible and flexible learning resources, especially in regions with limited educational infrastructure. In Myanmar, digital tools like podcasts provide an alternative means of language learning, particularly for those in rural areas with limited access to formal education resources (World Bank, 2021). This has important implications for the Philippines, where similar issues of access to quality education exist, particularly in remote and underserved areas. For Filipino educators, this highlights the potential of podcasts to democratize access to English language learning by offering a cost-effective and widely accessible platform that learners can engage with outside of the classroom (Aung & McKie, 2021). Podcasts can offer an enriching supplement to traditional teaching methods, especially for students who might not have consistent access to in-person language instruction.

Moreover, the content of podcasts in Myanmar, which often includes discussions on current political events, social issues, and cultural topics in English, has implications for how English language instruction in the Philippines can be contextualized. Podcasts in Myanmar frequently serve dual purposes: improving English language skills while simultaneously engaging listeners with real-world, culturally relevant issues (Myanmar in a PodShell, n.d.). This model offers a valuable approach for Philippine English educators to create lessons that connect English proficiency with global and local concerns. For example, integrating podcasts into lessons that discuss the Philippines' social, cultural, and political issues can help students not only improve their language skills but also foster critical thinking and awareness of local and international contexts (Sundararajan, 2022).

In addition, Myanmar's emphasis on diverse English varieties in podcasting may influence how Philippine educators approach different accents and dialects in their teaching. Podcasts in Myanmar frequently feature English speakers from diverse backgrounds, including native speakers and those who speak English as a second language, which helps expose learners to various accents and styles of communication (The Democratic Voice of Burma, 2023). This exposure to diverse forms of English can serve as a model for Filipino educators, encouraging them to incorporate varied English accents and contexts into their teaching. This is especially important as the Philippines is home to a variety of English varieties, including Philippine English, which may differ from other varieties of English in terms of accent, vocabulary, and usage. By using podcasts to expose students to a range of English dialects, Philippine educators can help students become more adaptable in understanding and using English in different global contexts.

Furthermore, Myanmar's podcasting landscape highlights the significance of youth-driven content creation in language learning. Podcasts produced by young people in Myanmar often focus on personal experiences, pop culture, and issues relevant to their generation, which resonates deeply with younger listeners (The Democratic Voice of Burma, 2023). For Philippine educators, this underscores the importance of involving students in content creation, encouraging them to produce podcasts as part of their language learning journey. This approach not only enhances students' speaking and listening skills but also fosters creativity, collaboration, and ownership of their learning process (Sundararajan, 2022). Moreover, engaging students in the production of podcasts aligns with the educational principle of learner-centered approaches, which are becoming increasingly popular in the Philippines (Aung & McKie, 2021).

Finally, the challenges faced by Myanmar in podcast-based English language learning—such as limited digital literacy, internet access issues, and the need for teacher training—are also relevant to the Philippine context (Koehler & Mishra, 2020). Filipino educators must recognize the importance of supporting students with the digital skills necessary to navigate podcast platforms and ensuring that the necessary technological infrastructure is in place. Additionally, educators themselves must receive training to effectively integrate podcasts into their teaching practices. This requires continuous professional development and a shift toward more tech-savvy teaching methods to fully capitalize on the benefits that podcasts can offer in the classroom.

In conclusion, the landscape of podcast-based English language learning in Myanmar presents several implications for English language educators in the Philippines. It highlights the potential of podcasts as a flexible and accessible tool for language learning, promotes the integration of culturally relevant content, encourages the inclusion of diverse English varieties, and emphasizes the importance of involving students in content creation. By addressing the challenges related to digital literacy, access, and teacher training, Philippine educators can enhance their teaching practices and create a more engaging and dynamic learning environment for their students.

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