

# Podcasts as a Teaching Tool

A Qualitative Study on Upper Secondary Teachers' Podcast-Use in the Swedish EFL Classroom to Teach Listening Comprehension

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## Abstract

Due to increasing digitalization in educational settings as well as in society, requirements and demands on schools, teachers, and pedagogical tools have changed. One digital tool that has influenced the field of education is podcasting. There is a multitude of international research on podcasting for language teaching and listening comprehension, but there is a gap regarding a Swedish perspective. This study aims to decrease that gap by interviewing Swedish EFL teachers about their attitudes, perceptions, and approaches regarding podcast-use in the EFL classroom. In this qualitative study, five upper secondary Swedish EFL teachers participated, and the empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The results show that Swedish teachers have a positive attitude towards podcast-use for teaching listening comprehension and a desire to learn more about their pedagogical potential. Furthermore, the results indicate that teachers use podcasts to improve listening comprehension, to increase motivation, and to add practical aspects in language learning; moreover, pedagogical approaches and challenges podcasts can pose were presented. Lastly, a discussion analyzing the participants' answers in comparison with the previous research is concluded and pedagogical implications are made.

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# 1 Introduction

Even though podcasting is not a new technology or invention, all the benefits podcasts may provide when incorporated into learning are still being investigated and discovered (Palenque, 2016). The Swedish Internet Foundation (Internetstiftelsen, 2021) states that one internet medium which has increased during the year of 2020 is podcast streaming, and further, that the audience segment that has consumed them the most are lower secondary and upper secondary students (Internetstiftelsen, 2021). In addition, Spotify (2021) ranks education among its most popular genres and mentions that podcasts are a source of entertainment, news, and knowledge.

Today's classroom is highly digitalized; this has affected the foundation of how teaching and learning is structured, and it has led to the Swedish school system requiring a certain level of digital competence amidst its teachers. Language learning, and more specifically English as a foreign language (EFL), is no exception to this development. Here too, the objective of helping students to become proficient language users is recommended by incorporating digital tools (Skolverket, 2018). Already in 2017, the Swedish government ratified and confirmed a strategy for a digitalization of the school system to strengthen students' digital competence (Utbildningsdepartementen, 2017). Shortly thereafter, the first steps were taken, and the curriculum was revised. This was executed to ensure that digital tools would be implemented and become a natural part in everyday school life and to highlight the attributes of digital competence in educational contexts. Furthermore, Skolverket (2018) claims that all students should be given the opportunity to develop their abilities in using digital technology. The conditions for implementing digital tools into everyday teaching are in place. According to Skolverket (2019), statistics show that already in 2015 roughly every student in upper secondary school in Sweden had a computer at their disposal. This insinuates that even if students do not own a cell phone or computer of their own, they can still take part in teaching involving digital tools.

Evidently, there appears to be a desire from both the Swedish Government and the Swedish curriculum to implement digitalization within the educational system, assuming that teachers are willing to utilize digital tools but also have the necessary knowledge to do so. Conversely, the curriculum does not present any clear and straightforward guidelines on how to incorporate digitalization in teaching. Instead, it is up to the teachers to individually interpret and to evaluate to what extent and degree one wants to and can incorporate digital

tools. Therefore, a contribution to discover and investigate how teachers view and use specific digital tools, like podcasts, could be of interest.

Language teaching is generally categorized into the four skills of speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Even though a general pedagogical and didactic approach is to teach the skills in combination, there are also valid arguments for teaching them in isolation (Paran, 2012). Out of the four skills, listening comprehension is often regarded by researchers, teachers, and students as one of the most complicated and difficult skills to teach and to learn (Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015). Nonetheless, Sejdiu (2018) claims that to master languages, listening comprehension plays a fundamental role as it is regarded as a crucial language skill intertwined with the other skills. Kavaliauskienė (2008) states that listening plays an important role in day-to-day communication, but that the skill is often overlooked by teachers and curriculums. She further states “[...] that about forty percent of our daily communication is spent on listening (p. 1)”.

An array of international studies has investigated the effects of podcasts on language learning and listening comprehension. These studies have contributed to the discussion surrounding this topic and found valid and reliable data through different research methods and approaches. Once the collection of relevant studies for this project was completed and reviewed, a gap was found and presented itself. There appears to be a void representing a Swedish educational and pedagogical perspective. Against this background, the aim of this project is to explore the use of podcasts as a learning tool for listening comprehension in the Swedish EFL classroom. The study has two research questions:

- 1) What attitudes and perceptions do upper secondary Swedish EFL teachers have towards podcasts as a learning tool for listening comprehension?
- 2) How and why are upper secondary Swedish EFL teachers using podcasts in their teaching?

The paper is outlined as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background. Section 3 provides information about previous research which will be the basis for the analysis of the results. In section 4 the research method will be described accompanied by information about the process. Section 5 discusses the results of the study. The discussion and pedagogical implications will be presented in section 6. Section 7 will state the study’s conclusion.

## 2 Theoretical Background

This section will define themes and give background information relevant to this study. Firstly, podcasts and how they can be used in education and for pedagogical purposes will be disclosed (2.1). Next, listening comprehension, what it implies and its intricacies, will be defined (2.2). Lastly, parts of the Swedish curriculum will be highlighted as it provides information about requirements teachers face when teaching listening and incorporating digital tools (2.3).

### 2.1 Defining Podcasts and Their Use in Education

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2022) defines a podcast as “a program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the internet”. The term itself originated from merging the words *iPod* and *broadcast* together (McLoughlin, Chan, & Lee, 2007). Abdous, Camarena, and Facer (2009) express that podcast technology is based on the grounds of Really Simple Syndication (RSS). This means, in other words, that audio files are downloaded automatically by subscription. RSS has contributed to a transformation from manual and static file handling to a process which has become dynamic and automated.

Podcasts can also be used for educational purposes. Cross (2014) mentions three categories of podcasts which are aimed at target audiences or, from a pedagogical perspective, proficiency levels. He explains these categories to be authentic podcasts for L1 users; semi-authentic podcasts with customized content for L2 users, and non-authentic podcasts specifically made for L2 users to help them learn. Specific to semi-authentic and non-authentic podcasts is that they usually provide transcripts, links, and other aids for the learner, that are directly connected to the chosen episode and the topic it refers to.

Yugsán-Gómez, Mejía-Gavilánez, Hidalgo-Montesinos, and Rosero-Morales (2019) state that podcasts have influenced the field of education considerably and that specially produced podcasts as an instructional method have gained popularity. Moreover, they claim that podcasts have made their way into a variety of academic disciplines, proving their legitimacy for educational settings. Kay (2012) categorizes the types of educational podcasts as follows. There are lecture-based podcasts containing an entire lecture or lesson; enhanced video podcasts consisting of power-point slides accompanied by audio explanation; and supplementary podcasts, which add information and material to strengthen students' understanding. Furthermore, Kay (2012) acknowledges that podcasts have gained interest for

the development and improvement of listening comprehension. This, according to Kay (2012), is due to the variety of content podcasts can provide. Furthermore, Yugsán-Gómez et al. (2019) also explain the possibility of teacher- or student-produced podcasts. According to them, all that is needed is a device to record an mp3-file, a virtual space to host the file, a blog, and topics and ideas to talk about. This can further imagination, creativity, and organizing skills combined with language learning. These student-produced podcasts can be created cooperatively to promote teamwork, can function as homework or project assignments, can be used to develop peer assessment, and to record various podcast formats.

## 2.2 Teaching Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is a language feature that adds to the internalization of language rules and helps to facilitate other language skills (Vandergrift, 1997). Some might view listening as a passive skill set; it is, nonetheless, an active and rather complex process of interpreting what learners are hearing and how they can connect the heard message with already stored knowledge (Vandergrift, 1999). The act of listening is an interactive process of understanding, perceiving, and recognizing the aural input (Vandergrift, 2002) and, according to Rost (2002), a means for completing communication.

Vandergrift (2004) claims that listening is a skill that is unobservable, and therefore, it is considered the least explicit language skill out of the four language skills. Moreover, English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) learners often find listening comprehension to be the most difficult skill to master and to learn (Graham, 2003; Rahimi and Soleymani, 2015). There does not seem to be any clear evidence as to why listening appears to be a demanding skill to learn, but it has been reported that it may lie in the complex nature of processing oral and aural input in different linguistic and cognitive ways. These are, e.g., phonological and lexical characteristics (Flowerdew, 1994), invisible word barriers (Weber & Cutler, 2006), words showing a reduced form (Ito, 2001), and random pauses, intonational patterns, and false starts (Gilmore, 2007). Additionally, Hasan and Hoon (2012) state that listening involves reconstructing what is heard in the listener's mind while, simultaneously, integrating it with constructive, interpretive, and receptive cognitive features. However, learners can also have difficulty with learning listening due other reasons. To some learners, the challenge may be found in a limitation of their processing skill (Buck, 2001), not being able to control or comprehend the rate of speech (Osada, 2004), or an insufficient knowledge of general topics, vocabulary, and dialects or accents (Buck, 2001).



## 2.3 The Swedish Curriculum and Digital Tools

To better understand why digital tools, like podcasts, can be used to teach listening comprehension, it is important to mention the Swedish curriculum and its guidelines and requirements for teachers. As mentioned in Section 1, the Swedish Government (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017) revised the curriculum to include digitalization as a constant feature in schools' educational assignment. The following statements are a selection of formulations included in the revised and adapted curriculum.

Skolverket (2018) claims that in today's digital society it is the schools' duty to help students to develop their digital competence. Schools should teach students how technology and digitalization affect both society and the individuals within it. Moreover, students should be given the opportunity to develop their abilities to use digital technology inside and outside of the classroom; additionally, they ought to be taught how to critically evaluate and responsibly use this technology. These steps should further stimulate and develop their ability to see possibilities, understand risks, and evaluate information during their time at school but also for their upcoming higher education and/or professional careers (Skolverket, 2018).

Since teachers ought to incorporate digital tools in their teaching, it is also important to understand what is required of teachers when teaching the receptive skill of listening. In the Swedish syllabus for English 5 (Skolverket, 2020), which is the first upper secondary English course, it is stated that students' reception should incorporate spoken English with varying speed and with social and accent features from different media. Students should also listen to coherent and spoken English with explanatory, discussable, argumentative, and reporting features of various topics, both exclusively and intertwined with each other. Moreover, it is stated that students should experience and understand how variation and adaptation is created through sentence structure, words, phrases, and collocations. Also, how phrases and words build structure and context by time aspects, casual connection, clarifying introduction, and conclusions (Skolverket, 2018). To conclude, to meet these requirements and incorporate digitalization in one's teaching, it is of interest to investigate if podcasts can facilitate and provide a basis for the aforementioned.

### 3 Literature Review

This Literature review is based on 23 articles and one edited book. The initial examination of studies provided reason to believe that most studies conducted before 2007 were outdated, because the concept of podcasts was still at an early stage. Therefore, this review solely includes articles published from 2007 and onwards. Although the literature review is thorough, a delimitation of articles has been made. Furthermore, this study is aware that the field of technology and digital tools is subject to constant change and can never be considered up to date. Consequently, the review might not offer a complete coverage of the topic.

As the collected literature presented results and findings that were recurring and intertwined, this review will have a thematic structure presenting the key aspects relevant to this study. The studies were divided into categories according to what they represented the most, to facilitate readability and comprehension. The themes are based on how and why podcasts can promote listening comprehension, how teachers can incorporate them, and the negative aspects the literature presented. The themes are as follows: Improvement of listening comprehension (3.1), Practicality (3.2), Motivation (3.3), Pedagogical Use of Podcasts (3.4), Negative Aspects and Difficulties (3.5). These themes will then be used in the discussion to analyze the results of this study.

Important to note is that the collected literature was conducted in other parts of the world. This is of importance since the technological development, the awareness, the knowledge, and other factors regarding podcasts may differ from a Swedish perspective, and hence, not correlate to results potentially found in Sweden. However, this further strengthens the objective of providing a Swedish perspective.

#### 3.1 Improvement of Listening Comprehension

This literature review found several experimental and quasi-experimental studies that used comparable research designs. For instance, most of the studies taught listening comprehension to a control group in a traditional way while using a podcast to teach listening comprehension to the experimental group. Moreover, most of the studies used pre- and post-tests to establish the learners' level of proficiency prior and post podcast-use.

In this literature review, three quasi-experimental research designs were included (Abdulrahman, Basalama, & Widodo, 2018; Faramarzi, Tabrizi, & Chalak 2019; Sejdiu, 2017;). Regardless of the different designs used, the studies showed analogous results, providing sound indications of learners improving their listening skills. All the experimental

groups that were taught with the help of podcasts performed better than their counterparts that were taught listening comprehension traditionally. In Sejdiu's (2017) study, the experimental group outperformed the control group significantly. His data demonstrated that the podcast group had improved by 10 percent; to compare, the control group showed a 2.9 percent increase which, however, is within the standard norm when targeting a specific language skill. Moreover, Sejdiu's (2017) results showed that every participant of the experimental group, without exception, had improved their listening comprehension test scores, which was not the case in the control group.

The results from the quasi-experimental studies are echoed by the experimental studies in the literature. The use of podcasts as a learning tool led to an improvement in listening comprehension. Despite differing variables like mother tongue, level of proficiency, research design, age, and gender, the results were unambiguous and decisive as the experimental groups showed compelling development and outperformed the control groups (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013; Gönülal, 2020; Kargozari & Tafazoli, 2012; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015; Shiri, 2015).

Lastly, the aspects for why listening comprehension was improved will be summarized. According to several studies, listening to native speakers' spoken language is beneficial for most learners, and the authenticity can aid learners in deepening their understanding of the language (Abdulrahman et al., 2018; Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013; Gönülal, 2020; Sejdiu, 2017). Furthermore, the authentic language can decrease the gap between formal and informal English (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013; Gönülal, 2020; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015). Additionally, time-efficiency (Gönülal, 2020; Faramarzi et al. 2019; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015), autonomy (Faramarzi et al., 2019; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015; Shiri, 2015), appropriate content (Abdulrahman et al. 2018; Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015), and self-regulation (Gönülal, 2020; Kargozari & Tafazoli, 2012; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015; Shiri, 2015) are mentioned as arguments for the improvement of students' listening comprehension.

### 3.2 Practicality

The following section will display the practical aspects the collected studies presented and associated with podcasts. The recurring themes the literature disclosed were aspects like portability, mobility, user-friendliness, cost-efficiency, and time management.

According to Abdous et al. (2009) and Naseri and Motallebzadeh (2016), podcasts

allow learners to save time when working on and completing assignments and tasks while, simultaneously, broadening their multimedia and technological abilities. These aspects are due to the increased flexibility and portability podcasts provided. Moreover, their results showed that learners experienced enhanced opportunities for multitasking and time shifting. O'Brien and Hegelheimer (2007) express the main practical advantages of podcasts being the easy-to-use software, broadcasts being available on-demand, and the choice of either listening to an entire season of a program or simply choosing single episodes that are of interest.

Facer, Abdous, and Camarena (2009) state that podcasts provide aspects of personalization and learner control; moreover, they call podcasts a learning and teaching tool granting portability and nonstop accessibility. These statements are in correlation with Rahimi and Soleymani (2015) who found that podcasts supply students with continuous access to educational content and material while guaranteeing mobility and availability. Additionally, they claim that podcasts give learners the opportunity to decide what kind of device they want to use for their listening experience. This has the practical advantage of letting learners decide in what kind of environment they prefer to study and learn best. Regarding availability, McLoughlin et al. (2007) mention that podcasts have the advantage of the MP3 format being able to play from a vast variety of portable devices. These are, for example, laptops, MP3 players, tablet PCs, handheld computers, personal digital assistants, stationary PCs and of course, most modern mobile phones.

### 3.3 Motivation

Language education is often closely linked to motivation and its importance in improving one's abilities. Shiri (2015) explains that anyone within the field of teaching and learning languages will list the motivational aspect as key to success or failure, and further that it is a crucial aspect when generating a higher level of learning proficiency.

In Shiri's (2015) study, the aim was to discover if podcasts would increase learners' motivational levels, and if higher motivation would lead to better results when testing the participants' listening comprehension skills. Shiri's (2015) results indicated that podcast-use did prompt motivation and that the more motivated learners did outperform the control group that was taught without podcasts in a traditional way. Similar results were found by Hasan and Hoon (2012), for their investigation showed positive results in all parts of their research. They found that language learners perceive podcasts as a positive tool for listening comprehension since they enhance autonomy and motivation. Their participants mentioned

that they believed they would have been more proficient in English if they had been introduced to podcasts earlier in their education.

Al Qasim and Al Fadda (2013) conducted research on the effects of podcasts on learners' motivation and improvement of the listening skill. According to their findings, all participants of the experimental group using podcasts perceived that their motivational level was affected positively. Furthermore, the podcast users felt less anxious while studying listening comprehension, as opposed to when learning the skill in a traditional manner. The aspect of anxiety is closely connected to motivation, according to Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė (2009). They found that language learners who had the opportunity to listen to podcasts at their own pace, individually, and when they desired to, showed an increase in motivation. Moreover, they state that these learners felt less anxiety to be exposed to possible failure in front of their peers.

Kavaliauskienė (2008) examined how learners' attitudes developed in correlation to autonomy when listening to podcasts and their self-assessment of their development. The majority of participants, 76 percent, mentioned that their listening comprehension skills developed while using podcasts. The factors stated by learners were, e.g., individual listening, freedom of choice of when and where to listen, listening outside the classroom, and not feeling watched or judged by peers or teachers. All these factors led to higher engagement and a personal will to improve their skills, which correlated with the learners' actual listening comprehension performances. In a study conducted by O'Brien and Hegelheimer (2007), the effects on learner motivation were researched when podcasts were integrated into the curriculum. They found that when podcasts were used in the appropriate context, they have the potential to increase both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

### 3.4 Pedagogical Use of Podcasts

Regarding a teacher's view, this section will present pedagogical implications and didactic methods for how podcasts can be employed in the EFL classroom. Podcasts can be used in a variety of ways to teach listening as well as other language skills. Williams (2007) claims that podcasts can bridge the gap between how content is delivered and the digital natives which are today's students. Additionally, the radio style format of presenting both research and knowledge is a great fit for modern learners' attention span and learning styles. Furthermore, Williams (2007) implies that podcasts, when used adequately by teachers, can create a learning environment that can benefit all types of learners. In particular, Williams (2007)

claims that special needs students or students experiencing difficulties in their learning can benefit from starting, stopping, and replaying a podcast to adjust it to their own learning style. Moreover, these features can be appealing to anyone who likes to learn by repetition or auditory learners in general.

Another pedagogical aspect for teachers using podcasts is the possibility to extend class hours. O'Brien and Hegelheimer (2007) presented this as one of their most positive features in their research project. They state that most teachers want more time with their students since they need added input to enhance their listening comprehension. Podcasts can allow students to designate more time at working on concepts and ideas which were taught during class. Furthermore, teacher-produced, student-produced, or adequately selected podcasts can continue where a lesson finished and directly focus on difficulties or needs discovered by the teacher.

Podcasts have gained noticeable interest for enhancing listening skills, according to Yugsán-Gómez et al. (2019). They state that teachers can implement podcasts inside and outside of the classroom, to complement textbooks, or to develop on themes discussed in class. Further, they advise teachers to use pedagogical podcasts created specifically for educational purposes since they usually do not last for more than a few minutes, opposed to general podcasts which last for at least an hour. There are websites that provide pedagogical podcasts which are suited for various learner levels and present everyday topics. They further express that pedagogical podcasts are accompanied by transcripts, online tasks, and downloadable exercises. These can then be used to form discussions, analyze content, or connect them to relevant course content as well as work on additional language skills.

Another pedagogical feature of podcasts is the possibility of student-created podcasts. These allow students to share information they find interesting and meaningful, which can provide opportunities for students to internalize content and create a digital product of their own. Moreover, it allows students to develop their writing, speaking, problem solving, time-management and vocabulary skills. Additionally, they state that when producing podcasts of their own, students tend to feel more motivated and engaged in their work. This leads to increased intrinsic motivation since they proofread, edit their scripts, rehearse, and plan their podcasts to make them accurate and comprehensible for their interlocutors (Yugsán-Gómez et al., 2019).

### 3.5 Negative Aspects and Difficulties

As the previous sections have shown, there are positive aspects associated with podcasts as an educational tool. Nonetheless, the collected literature also included studies highlighting the challenges and difficulties that can be related to podcast-use in language learning.

Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė (2009) state that digital tools, like podcasts, may not be preferable to all language learners as their personalities and personal preferences may differ. Also, they claim that different learning styles can be problematic in connection with podcast-use. Some learners prefer visual aids and can be distracted by merely listening to a recording. Sevilla (2018) makes a similar claim regarding podcast-use and states that podcasts will completely disregard students who are hearing impaired or show difficulties with hearing only exercises. Another difficulty is mentioned by Şendağ, Gedi, and Toker (2018), they point out the length of the podcast to be important for what could be a positive or negative learning outcome. According to them, the recommended length for a podcast episode used in class should be not less than five minutes nor longer than ten minutes to shape optimal learning conditions. They also state that the content chosen by the teacher is substantial for learning success.

Podcasts offer authentic listening material, which is stated to be a requirement for EFL learners to improve their listening skills and overall language skills (Kavaliasukienė & Anusienė, 2009). Contrarily, the researchers also found an issue with this. They state that authentic language is barely adjusted or simplified to ensure that listeners understand the message, which is what most language learners need. The issue of authentic language for EFL learning is also supported by Kilic and Uckun (2012), for they found that authentic language created higher levels of anxiety amongst their participants than those who were exposed to semi-authentic or non-authentic language. They further state that traditional broadcasts or radio shows have a higher words per minute count than, e.g., lectures, monologues, or adjusted content. Since most podcasts are almost identical to those formats, teachers must be aware when choosing content for their students not to add to students' anxiety levels if the material is too hard to comprehend.

The literature mentions that most devices able to play mp3-files are relatively inexpensive. This statement may be true in most cases, but there are also students who cannot afford such devices (Facer et al., 2009). Additionally, Facer et al. (2009) state that not all language learners show the same level of confidence and level of experience regarding digital tools. Also, some may simply struggle with the technological aspect of a podcast, for

example, how to download and install the software as well as navigating through the large amount of content. Lastly, in concurrence with the aforementioned, Kavaliuskienė (2008) claims that not all students prefer or enjoy digital tools to the same extent when learning a language. She recommends that teachers should balance the use of podcasts with other digital tools as well as non-technological tools to fulfill all student needs.

## 4 Method

In this section, the methodological considerations in the process of collecting the empirical data will be described and discussed. This will include how the data was collected (4.1), the selection process (4.2), the analysis of the collected data (4.3), ethical considerations (4.4), and limitations with the method (4.5).

### 4.1 Data Collection

Since the purpose of this project is to discover how individuals reason about a specific research question, what kind of arguments are given for and against it, and what kind of feelings it creates, a qualitative research method was suitable. In order to investigate how upper secondary English teachers perceive and describe how and why they incorporate podcasts into their language teaching, this study was conducted by means of a semi-structured interview with five teachers. Each interview lasted between seven to twelve minutes. The advantage of this method is that it enables the respondents to develop their answers, form their thought processes, and make their own inferences. This can further lead to richer and more in-depth data to analyze (Barmark & Djurfeldt, 2015). Moreover, this method provides the interviewer with the possibility to ask follow-up questions (Bryman, 2011). The study was qualitative, and the semi-structured interviews were conducted with upper secondary English teachers in Sweden, aiming at discovering their attitudes and perceptions and how and why podcasts are used in their EFL classrooms.

The interview guide, which can be viewed in Appendix A, was designed with questions as tangible and clear as possible, and the interviews were conducted in English. The term podcast was not defined or explained before the interviews were conducted. The purpose was not to influence the respondents or to guide their answers or thought processes in any way. Moreover, the respondents were not given the possibility to read the interview guide in advance. The rationale behind this was to avoid teachers from preparing themselves and



altering their otherwise spontaneous answers since this could have compromised the outcome of this study. The interviews were conducted both in person and via digital meetings following the interview guide. Regarding the most relevant location for the interview (Bryman, 2011), the objective was to conduct as many as possible in person and at the teachers' workplaces. This has the aim of creating an authentic environment for the teacher. However, due to the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, most teachers preferred to conduct the interviews via digital meetings instead.

The interview guide contains two background questions, which had the objective of giving the respondent a chance to talk and get acquainted with the interviewer. These questions were about how long they had been teaching, and why they decided to become an English teacher. Next, there were two questions regarding their attitude towards podcasts and if they use podcasts for language teaching. Depending on the answer to the latter question, the interview guide was designed accordingly and asked follow-up questions to gather information.

## 4.2 Selection Process

Qualitative research methods can often be challenging regarding the selection of participants. According to Bryman (2011), generalizability can suffer from results that are based on a small number of respondents who were not chosen randomly. To counteract this, Bryman (2011) states that additional research on the respondents' students and an observation of the teachers' teaching practices would be needed. Since this was not done in this project, the results are dependent on the teachers' self-reflections. On the other hand, Bryman (2011) claims that generalizability can be created if a study is based on a theory or identifiable themes, which is the case in this project. Nonetheless, the aim of this research project has not been to present overriding general conclusions with proven data of the highest level of generalizability. The objective has been to delineate an as accurate understanding of this topic as possible and to present the results together with an analysis and a discussion to contribute to a starting point for further research and discussions regarding this topic.

According to Bryman (2011), purposive sampling is common in qualitative research designs. This method aims at strategically selecting participants to ensure that the selection is in coherence with the research questions. Another prevalent selection method for qualitative research is snowball sampling. This involves the researcher using participants he or she has been in contact with initially to further contact other people potentially able to participate in

the study. The aim of this project was to discover Swedish EFL teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards podcasts and how and why they use them in their classrooms. Therefore, it was of interest to interview respondents who possess knowledge and experience regarding this topic and who can contribute to this project's aim. To accomplish this, a combination of the aforementioned sampling methods was applied. Consequently, respondents were selected that use and have used podcasts in their teaching and could therefore answer the study's research questions. Initially, two teachers known to the researcher were contacted and through them other participants were found.

In this study, one male and four female Swedish EFL teachers were interviewed. All participants were found through both purposive sampling and snowball sampling and contacted via phone or E-mail. They gave their consent orally before the interviews were conducted. The schools they work at are located in three different municipalities in the southern part of Sweden, and they teach at the upper secondary school level. To guarantee the participants' anonymity, the teachers were all given pseudonyms (Teacher1, Teacher2, etc.) and no information that could be connected to their schools or municipalities will be provided.

There was no exclusion criterion related to working experience since the Swedish curriculum was revised in 2017. The revised edition, as mentioned in Section 1 and Section 2.3, discusses aspects of digitalization, and advocates its implementation in Swedish schools. Furthermore, the revised curriculum demands that students are given opportunities to develop their digital competence. Therefore, less working experience was not a negative factor, because it did not necessarily mean less experience with digital tools, for the revised curriculum has been in place since July 2018.

### 4.3 Analysis of Data

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. One interview was transcribed manually and the others with a transcription software called *Happy Scribe*. Afterwards, the data was coded with the intention of distinguishing relevant themes. During this process, the concept of thematic analysis, advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006), was followed. The answers were divided into themes and sub-themes regarding the research questions and were connected due to their relevance. Furthermore, a constant comparative method was used. This implies that similarities and differences were emphasized while analyzing the data. In order to do so, the

transcriptions were color coded based on different categories and recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### 4.4 Ethical Considerations

This research project follows the Swedish Research Council's (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002) guidelines for how to conduct research. The council's main concepts were followed and abided by. These are as follows: the information requirement, the consent requirement, the requirement of usage, and the confidential requirement. All participants were contacted personally and asked whether they wanted to participate in the study. If they answered yes, they were informed that their participation was completely voluntary, they could withdraw from the study at any time, that everything they said would be treated and kept confidential, and that they would remain anonymous throughout the entire study.

#### 4.5 Limitations with the Method

By presenting collective attitudes and pedagogical approaches that discuss how and why podcasts can be used in the upper secondary EFL classroom, the aim of this project is to illustrate how the teachers themselves describe their attitudes, usage, and approaches for podcasts in language teaching and listening comprehension. Therefore, it is uncertain if an interview with five other EFL teachers would display the same results, and consequently, the generalizability of this study could be questioned. Unfortunately, this is a common problem mentioned in qualitative research (Bryman, 2011). Despite that, most importantly is that the data found by this study can be viewed as Swedish teachers' attitudes and approaches regarding the use of podcasts in the EFL classroom.

Another aspect that could be questioned is if the participants' answers would have correlated more with one another if the interview questions would have been more detailed and structured. However, the purpose of this study is to discover teachers' attitudes and the way they personally incorporate and use podcasts in their teaching. Therefore, the decision was made to ask the question as openly as possible. This was to ensure that not the authors personal experiences of podcast-use would affect the respondents' answers. Accordingly, a more open-minded approach regarding the questions was used to obtain individual responses.

Also, this project cannot guarantee that the teachers' responses are in actual conformity with their teaching approaches when using podcasts. This is because the author then would have had to observe the teachers in their classrooms or ask their students

questions regarding their teachers' answers. Nevertheless, this was not found to be necessary during this stage of the study since the research questions aimed at discovering personal tendencies and choices.

Lastly, a larger number of respondents would have further increased the generalizability of this project and contributed to the number of interviews normally needed for saturation. The researcher did contact more potential interviewees, but some of the teachers did not have any experience regarding podcast-use and could therefore not contribute to this study's aim in any way which led to self-exclusion. This was discussed in Section 4.2 considering purposive sampling. Moreover, time limitations and the smaller scale of this project were of hinderance regarding this aspect.

## 5 Results

In this section, the results will be presented in relation to the themes stated in Section 3. The themes are: Podcasts for Practising Listening in the EFL Classroom, Podcasts and Their Practical Aspects as a Teaching Tool, Podcasts and Student Motivation in the EFL Classroom, How Teachers Use Podcasts in the EFL Classroom, and Challenges in Using Podcasts in the EFL Classroom. At first, a summary of each respondents' background will be given before their answers will be presented according to the aforementioned themes. The following research questions are to be answered:

- 1) What attitudes and perceptions do upper secondary Swedish EFL teachers have towards podcasts as a learning tool for listening comprehension?
- 2) How and why are upper secondary Swedish EFL teachers using podcasts in their teaching?

### 5.1 Presentation of Respondents

This subsection will summarize what each respondent answered to the first two questions to give background information and to distinguish them according to their answers. Moreover, this section will present the teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding podcasts as a learning tool for listening comprehension. Lastly, it will also state the teachers' responses to the final question of the interview guide; if they were interested in learning more about podcasts as a pedagogical tool and how to use them.

Teacher 1 is a person who uses podcasts both in her personal life and for her language teaching. “Personally, I love listening to podcasts. I think it is a wonderful way to learn and introduce English in an authentic way”. She has been working as a teacher for five years this summer. She was not set on becoming a teacher to start with. Her interest in language and teaching developed through travels and the recognition of English as a global language as she stated the following:

I didn't see myself as a language person to start with. It grew on me over time. I think my biggest interest for languages developed under all my travels, where I got the chance to see how language can connect people.

She further explained that this interest then led to her becoming a teacher: “I therefore felt that it would be a win-win situation to become a teacher in English. Both to learn more, but also to teach others the ability to connect with people through language”. She answered that she absolutely wanted to learn more about podcasts and “how to get the most out of it”.

Teacher 2 enjoys linguistics and admires the power languages possess to connect people, especially English. She also enjoyed English as a student herself and found her English teacher to be a role model. “I actually need to say that my teacher in primary school became a role model to me when it comes to inspiring and teaching English as a subject”. Teacher 2 had a positive attitude towards podcasts and said that they motivate her students and presents them with different kinds of English accents and interesting topics. Although she thought of herself as “up-to-date” with podcast-use, she was open to discovering and learning more about the tool's possibilities.

Teacher 3 has been a teacher for six years. She comes from a family of teachers, so it was a natural choice for her to also become one. Nonetheless, English was not her firsthand choice. “I really wanted Roman languages, Spanish, Italian, and French, but I couldn't use that. So, I had to choose Swedish or English and I picked English”. She perceived podcasts as a positive learning tool and wished she would incorporate them more into her teaching for its versatility. When asked if she was interested in learning more about podcasts as a learning tool and how to use them, she answered, “yeah, why not”.

Teacher 4 has always been interested in English and Great Britain as well as the music and literature from English speaking countries. Although Teacher 4 set out to be a journalist, she found teaching to be her call and has worked as a teacher for 21 years. Moreover, she had strong family ties to the profession. “My parents have been teachers in different areas and also

my brother, so it all came kind of naturally to me”. She had an overall positive attitude towards podcasts for teaching and learning, but she barely uses them due to her lack of knowledge regarding them. The only podcasts she has used for her teaching are the ones used in old national tests. She mentioned that she wanted to learn more about podcasts regarding “good sources to use” and “how to use them”.

Teacher 5 described himself as “a promoter of podcasts in the EFL classroom”. The teacher with approximately 20 years of working experience explained his choice of profession by stating “I would say to motivate and encourage the next generation as well as to help people develop are some of the reasons for me”. Even though he was quite content with his knowledge and incorporation of podcasts, he was still open-minded to learning more about them. “If there is something I’ve missed so far, or something new that has developed, I would for sure want to learn more about it”.

## 5.2 Podcasts in the EFL Classroom

This section is divided into five parts, each one dealing with the respondents’ answers to how and why they use and incorporate podcasts which are in accordance with the themes found in the literature review. The themes identified are: Podcasts for Practising Listening in the EFL Classroom (5.2.1), Podcasts and Their Practical Aspects as a Teaching Tool (5.2.2), Podcasts and Student Motivation in the EFL Classroom (5.2.3), How Teachers Use Podcasts in the EFL Classroom (5.2.4), Challenges in Using Podcasts in the EFL Classroom (5.2.5).

### 5.2.1 Podcasts for Practising Listening in the EFL Classroom

In correlation to the findings of the literature review, five out of five express that podcasts can have a positive impact on students’ listening comprehension. When answering the interview questions, different aspects regarding this theme were mentioned by the teachers, and they gave the following explanations.

Teacher 1 stated that the authenticity played an important role for her students’ development. “Another way I use them is for their listening. I mean, is there a better way to learn a language than listening to a native person, talking about something you like”. Further, she mentioned that “using podcasts helps students learn English as a whole, while listening to something that they like”, and she continued by explaining the value of context, pronunciation, and content, “I mean, to learn the words in a context where you can listen to how they sound and also how they are used, feels so much more relevant [...]”.

Teacher 2 mentioned the possibility of introducing her students to “different kinds of English” as a benefit. Moreover, she stated that the appropriate content aids her students’ learning experience, “I usually always find a pod that fits the individual since there are so many different levels and topics to choose from”, and she added that using podcasts “makes the information you choose more up-to-date and authentic”.

Teacher 3 stated that podcasts provide “different topics”, “so students can find what they’re interested in”. She further mentioned the length of pedagogical podcasts as a beneficial aspect. “You can decide the length [...] in another way that you do with a movie, for example, or a TV-show that you have to watch the whole thing”.

Teacher 4 believed that podcasts provide students with an array of positive input for improvement of listening comprehension and language proficiency overall. Claiming that:

[...] being able to interpret people who speak as naturally as possible, even though maybe it’s scripted, but to understand natural conversation about topics, I think that’s authentic and something that’s useful in the students’ lives, not only at school. It’s like authentic in the best meaning of the word.

She continued by explaining other aspects like “[...] different accents, pronunciations, and speech patterns. They learn new vocabulary and are exposed to idiomatic phraseology and grammar too, which could improve their own language skills in different ways”.

Teacher 5 said that “there is a podcast for everyone I would say. You can in almost every situation find a podcast that suits your students”. He also stated that the main advantage he associated with podcast-use for listening comprehension was “how broad it is, and how easy it is to find just a perfect pod for the perfect situation”.

### 5.2.2 Podcasts and Their Practical Aspects as a Teaching Tool

In accordance with the findings of the literature review, three out of five teachers described that there are practical aspects podcasts provide as a teaching tool. Their answers to the interview questions will be presented in the next paragraphs.

Teacher 1 found that podcasts serve one specific practical aspect; this was for homework assignments. According to her, “they can, for example, listen to something at work at the same time”. Regarding the aspect of time-management she added “the fact that students these days have a lot to do on their spare time makes pods a practical tool”.

When talking about podcasts as a learning tool, Teacher 2 stated the easiness of finding suitable material for her lessons as beneficial. “I am positive that it these days is so easy to find podcasts and that you’re able to use them during the lessons”. She further talked about the portability and mobility and said, “they can listen to it on the bus or at home while doing something else”, and the time-efficiency “they can decide for themselves when and where they want to listen to the assignment”.

Teacher 5 believed that time-management, portability, and mobility were positive factors when working with podcasts. “Just by using them as a homework, for example, it is a better way of learning since it allows them to multitask. I mean, they can do a workout and listen at the same time”.

### 5.2.3 Podcasts and Student Motivation

In correlation with the themes identified in the literature review, four out of five teachers found that podcasts impacted students’ motivation while learning in the EFL Classroom. The teachers’ responses to the interview questions presented varied aspects regarding motivational aspects and are described below.

Teacher 1 saw her students’ motivation benefit from completing both listening and speaking exercises on their own without feeling judged. She stated, “in situations where there is no audience to stress them. My hope is that they find topics to talk about, in an environment where they feel safe, confident, and not anxious”. She also let students record their own podcasts explaining that “[...] they can talk without the pressure from talking in front of others, but also because podcasts can be about exactly anything you want”. Furthermore, she perceived that her students’ motivation was affected by the ability “to base content on your interest and to be able to listen to language in an authentic way”.

Teacher 2 described that her students’ motivation was affected by the broad content podcasts provide. “You can usually find a subject that fits great for that specific class which also helps to motivate them”. She further mentioned that she experienced that the general use of podcasts added to the students’ motivation. “I would say that they get motivated and inspired by using them”.

Teacher 3 stated that she believed that podcasts were “a very good learning tool” because “students can find what they’re interested in”. She also experienced a positive aspect regarding podcasts’ length and its motivating effect on learners, “[...] there are podcasts that



are like half an hour or even shorter than that about things that students might be interested in”.

Teacher 5 explained that podcasts are “engaging and effective” since there are “more distractions competing for their attention than ever before”, he believed that podcasts were appropriate for students’ attention spans which he called “famously short”.

#### 5.2.4 How Teachers Use Podcasts in the EFL Classroom

All five teachers explained how they used podcasts in the EFL classroom to develop their students’ language proficiency. The answers provided both varying but also similar aspects to how podcasts are used in Swedish EFL Classrooms. The teachers’ didactic approaches are presented below.

Teacher 1 had recently started a new project where her students “use podcasts as a tool for recording themselves. Both for feeling more confident in speaking, but also in order to evaluate their speaking ability”. She had also incorporated podcasts in students’ homework assignments. Something she experienced was welcomed by her students and “teaches the students so much more than just practicing vocabulary the old way”. Another way Teacher 1 used podcasts was as a starting point for discussion, “I also kind of noticed that it helps the students to discuss a subject”.

Teacher 2 mostly used podcasts according to the following set-up. She chooses podcasts she “find[s] suitable for the students” thereafter she divides them into groups and explains:

They start by listening to it themselves. After that, they make a short summary themselves about what they just listened to. And after that, I let them discuss in pairs about it. And finally, the smaller groups discuss what they’ve listened to.

Teacher 2 used podcast for listening and also for speaking since they offered “a base to practice their oral skills”. Teacher 2 also created homework assignments with podcasts. Additionally, she stated that she was a firm believer in choosing the material and content for her students to make sure that the podcasts are appropriate and suitable for their assignments. “That is why the teacher should choose the podcasts for the students and not the students for themselves”.

Teacher 3 used podcasts to introduce her students “to the English-speaking world”. In addition, she enjoyed the fact that podcasts provide an alternative to mainstream media focusing merely on America and England. “It’s easy to find things that are not so focused on America or England. We like to focus on other parts of the English-speaking countries”. The versatility of podcasts was also regarded as something positive by Teacher 3. She stated, “[...] and you can do different things with it after listening, like writing or speaking”. Furthermore, she mentioned podcasts’ length and its effect on learners who may struggle with their attention span. “They’re like 15 minutes, maybe. So even the ones that can’t focus for that long [...] they are able to listen to the whole podcast without losing interest”.

Teacher 4 did not incorporate podcasts extensively but said, “the podcasts I do use are actually the ones that you use [...] when you practice on old national tests”.

Teacher 5 used podcasts as a starting exercise for his lessons. “Sometimes I start a lesson with a short podcast about something and a topic that we then discuss in the whole class”. For other instances, he has used podcasts more broadly. “Sometimes I rather go by the old but efficient EPA model, where I let the students listen to a podcast themselves and then summarize it before discussing it all together”. Teacher 5 stated how he used podcasts to teach both listening and speaking “then of course it leads to the speaking skill since I often use it as a conversation starter”. Teacher 5 mentioned that he did not believe in letting students record themselves and listen to one another “since there are already so many good podcasts out there”. He was strong believer in that teachers needed to choose podcasts wisely based on their target group for “the more you put into it, the more you gain”. Another aspect he mentioned was that he preferred using podcasts over movies and other visuals. In his experience, “it helps them to develop their minds by creating their own visual images”.

### 5.2.5 Challenges in Using Podcasts in the EFL Classroom

Five out of five teachers mentioned aspects and situations that were challenging while using podcasts in the EFL classroom. The responses, which corresponded with the findings of the literature review, raised different aspects regarding this theme and are stated below.

Teacher 1 experienced the most difficulties with letting students choose topics freely which, at times, were not suited for school. “I would say that it is sometimes hard to make sure that the topic the children choose is suitable for a school project”. Further, she mentioned, “when I let my students choose broadly, it’s also harder for me to make sure that they actually listen to what they said they listened to since I don’t have time to check up on

everything”. She learned from her mistakes and usually picks podcasts for her students now instead. Another difficulty mentioned by her was “relying on the technology”.

When contemplating about negative aspects Teacher 2 thought a problem can appear when students chose podcasts themselves. “I would say that a lot of time would disappear and will disappear just by letting them choose a podcast”. In addition, Teacher 2 said that “there is always a risk that the technology can struggle”, but she felt that the way everything is evolving around digitalization, one simply must trust and rely on it regardless.

When asked about difficulties, Teacher 3 explained that “like with most things that you do in the classroom, not everyone is interested and many of the students have a hard time with listening comprehension”. She continued by saying, “so they might be a bit anti-listening to things because they know they’re bad at it even though they need to practice it”.

Teacher 4 viewed podcasts as problematic for visual learners and for learners with lower abilities who benefit from seeing the people who are talking, since this can help them with their comprehension. “Well, a disadvantage could be that they are not able to see the people who are talking for students on lower levels [...]”.

Teacher 5 mentioned that podcasts are only a good pedagogical tool when used correctly. “If you are, let’s say, a more lazy teacher and struggling with preparing for your lessons, that will definitely affect the power of using podcasts”.

To conclude, this section displayed a summary of the most relevant responses, according to the coding of the data, the teachers gave to the semi-structured interview guide. The replies were selected due to importance and significance to this project’s research aim. Moreover, the thematic structure of both this section and the participants’ answers was chosen to enhance readability and to highlight each respondents’ personal thoughts, reflections, and observations.

## **6 Discussion and Pedagogical Implications**

This section will present a discussion of the qualitative data accompanied by pedagogical implications, and it is organized around the same themes found in Section 3 and Section 5. The aim of this project is to investigate (1) what attitudes and perceptions do upper secondary Swedish EFL teachers have towards podcasts as a learning tool for listening comprehension, and (2) how and why upper secondary Swedish EFL teachers use podcasts in their teaching. To begin with, the first research question will be discussed along with the participants’ desire for more knowledge about podcasts. Thereafter, the results that emerged concerning the

second research question will be presented and discussed thematically as follows: *Podcasts for Practising Listening in the EFL Classroom, Podcasts and Their Practical Aspects as a Teaching Tool, Podcasts and Student Motivation in the EFL Classroom, How Teachers Use Podcasts in the EFL Classroom, Challenges in Using Podcasts in the EFL Classroom.*

## 6.1 Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions

The participants of this study displayed overall positive attitudes towards podcast-use in the EFL classroom for teaching listening comprehension and perceived the tool as an asset for language teaching. Despite varying use in their teaching and their knowledge about the digital tool, they were unanimous in this regard. This finding can be interpreted as positive regarding the requirements of the Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2018; Skolverket, 2019) and the Swedish Government (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017) to use and to implement digital tools in school. The fact that these teachers show this attitude can grant digitalization to take a natural part in their students' education. Moreover, it shows that podcasts can be viewed as a helpful tool for teachers to teach language while incorporating digitalization. Even though this study only refers to a small group of teachers, it is, nonetheless, a point of reference in this matter and can be the outset for further research.

After the data was collected, it also became evident that all interviewed EFL teachers mentioned a desire to learn more about podcasts as a teaching tool and how to use them effectively in educational and pedagogical settings. This was regardless of the extent to which they were using podcasts and to what degree they viewed themselves as informed, experienced, or educated in this area. This emerged through the final question in the interview guide. This suggests that teachers are willing to develop and to learn more regarding podcasts for education. Further, this can be considered as adding to this study's relevance and can be interpreted as a desire among Swedish teachers to learn more about proven strategies and approaches in podcast-use.

## 6.2 How and Why Podcasts Are Used

### 6.2.1 Podcasts for Practising Listening Comprehension in the EFL Classroom

After analyzing the collected data, it showed that five out of five teachers mentioned that their students' listening comprehension was enhanced by podcast-use. Three teachers gave answers that agreed with the statement that listening to native speakers' spoken language is beneficial for their learners, and that the authenticity podcasts provide aids their learners in deepening

their understanding of the language (Abdulrahman et al., 2018; Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013; Gönülal, 2020; Sejdiu, 2017). On the other hand, the Swedish classroom of today is a place of multiculturalism and various proficiency levels. Even though the concept of authenticity is supported, teachers need to consider that students who maybe just started learning English will not benefit from authentic communication as it may hinder their development. These issues are also stated by the literature since authentic language is rarely adjusted to ensure that learners will comprehend the heard message (Kavaliasukienė and Anusienė, 2009) which can, consequently, increase anxiety levels for learners as opposed to semi-authentic or non-authentic language (Kilic and Uckun, 2012).

Appropriate content was discussed by three teachers as an aspect improving students' listening, which is confirmed by studies conducted by Abdulrahman et al. (2018), Al Qasim and Al Fadda (2013), and Rahimi and Soleymani (2015). Appropriate content was viewed differently by the participants. Some regarded appropriate to be anything related to students' interests, while others said it was merely educational podcasts that provided appropriate content due to their adapted material. The literature states that educational podcasts are to be used for teaching, but there is a discrepancy between some of the respondents. Even though there are reasonable arguments given for why any podcast can be used for teaching, the ideal approach would be to use educational podcasts for their pedagogical content. This agrees with Skolverket (2018) stating that teachers ought to counteract ideologies that are not in correspondence with the schools' norms and values.

Furthermore, four teachers described self-regulation as a supporting factor for improved listening comprehension. This was in relation to students being able to find material and regulate their learning experience independently. Self-regulation was found to be a prominent factor also in the studies conducted by Gönülal (2020), Kargozari and Tafazoli (2012), Rahimi and Soleymani, 2015, and Shiri (2015), and it is an important factor in Swedish schools as Skolverket (2018) states that students should be given the possibility to take responsibility for their learning and actively contribute to their own education. Lastly, two teachers found that the gap between informal and formal English could be decreased (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013; Gönülal, 2020; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015). This is partly due to podcasts providing colloquial English as opposed to more formal English usually learned at school and partly because podcasts can deliver content with the purpose of teaching either formal or informal language.

### 6.2.2 Podcasts and Their Practical Aspects as a Learning Tool

When answering the interview questions, three out of five teachers talked about practicality of podcasts and how this benefited their students and their teaching. All three teachers mentioned the aspects of mobility and portability regarding their EFL teaching. These findings were also mentioned and supported by the literature (Abdous et al., 2009; Facer et al., 2009; Naseri & Motallebzadeh, 2016). One participant viewed time-efficiency as important, for it provided the learners with the opportunity to study and learn when and where they wanted to (Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015). Furthermore, two teachers described time-management to be beneficial for their homework assignments since their students can save time while working on assignments due to the flexibility of podcasts (Abdous et al., 2009; Naseri & Motallebzadeh, 2016). The previously mentioned aspects are probably consequences of our modern time in which students desire some freedom of choice about when and where to study and work on assignments. Also, this may be an implication of even adolescents having a tighter schedule than before. One respondent added that the easy-to-use software was an advantage for both herself and her students. This is also stated by O'Brien & Hegelheimer (2007) as a beneficial part since the general conception is that podcasts are user-friendly and require little time to understand how to handle.

None of the teachers referred to the advantage of specifically using mobile phones or other portable devices for schoolwork, which is an aspect often stressed in the literature (McLoughlin et al., 2007; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015). This may be because Swedish teachers and students are very familiar with these devices and view them as an evident part of today's society, which may not be the case in other parts of the world. Lastly, another interesting aspect is that practicality itself was a recurring topic in the literature and in teachers' answers. Not so long ago, when only more traditional materials were used in teaching, practicality was most likely never even mentioned or discussed in pedagogical settings. This indicates that modern teachers have one more aspect to consider in today's school.

### 6.2.3 Podcasts and Student Motivation

Four out of five respondents provided answers that mentioned motivational aspects podcasts can provide for their students' learning experience and listening comprehension. In accordance with the results of Al Qasim and Al Fadda (2013), Kavaliauskienė (2008), and Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė (2009), one teacher talked about the correlation between

motivation and anxiety. She experienced that her students' motivation was increased by not feeling judged or watched by the teacher or their peers while working on assignments. It may be of interest for teachers to apply podcasts because of this reason, for teachers are supposed to adapt their teaching to all learner styles and to aid students in developing confidence in their abilities (Skolverket, 2018). Students who are anxious about being judged could be helped in this regard. On the other hand, Skolverket (2018) states that students ought to work collectively as well. Consequently, a balanced approach of both individual and collective assignments may be advisable.

All four teachers describe how they perceived an increase of their students' motivation merely by using podcasts. This corresponds with O'Brien and Hegelheimer's (2007) statement that when podcasts are used in the proper context, they have the potential to increase both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Further, these observations also correlate with other findings which stated that the sheer usage of podcasts for learning purposes affects students' motivation (Hasan & Hoon, 2012; Shiri, 2015). Regardless, teachers should not rely solely on one digital tool, but rather incorporate various digital tools to ensure variety and to satisfy all students' preferences and needs (Kavaliauskienė, 2008).

Two of the interviewees said that their students showed higher motivation due to the autonomy and freedom of choice with podcast-use (Kavaliauskienė, 2008; Kavaliauskienė & Anusienė, 2009). Even if autonomy is welcomed by students and required by Skolverket (2018), this should not lead teachers to believe that they are to let students do and choose everything on their own when working with digital tools. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should establish a clear framework in which students then can work and make choices of their own.

#### 6.2.4 How Teachers Use Podcasts in the EFL Classroom

All five teachers provided answers and examples of how they used and incorporated podcasts into their language teaching. Three respondents were using podcasts in a similar fashion. They use them as a starting point for discussions, analyze content and connect them to relevant material. This is mostly done by individual listening, then pair or group discussions, and ends in a collective discussion or writing exercises. Regarding previous research, the same set-up is advocated by Yugsán-Gómez et al. (2019). This approach appears to be applicable and useful as it furthers a combination of skills and techniques for both reception and production of language. Moreover, it is in accordance with Skolverket's (2018) guidelines

for providing students with meaningful and functional assignments to develop versatile language abilities. In addition, the attribute that podcasts can enhance other language skills, especially speaking, was answered by four teachers who described they viewed podcasts as a tool combining both listening and speaking skills (Yugsán-Gómez et al., 2019). This aspect adds to the potential value podcasts possess as a teaching tool since most teachers will welcome a tool that has the capability of enhancing more than one skill when used.

Another didactic element three teachers acknowledged was the importance of teacher-selected or pedagogical podcasts. They promoted this idea since they believed it was important that educational, pedagogical, and appropriate content should be used for schoolwork. These arguments conform with the findings and guidelines presented by O'Brien and Hegelheimer (2007), Williams (2007), and Yugsán-Gómez et al. (2019) stating that pedagogical podcasts are to be used when working with podcasts in educational settings. One of the participants had incorporated student-created podcasts into her teaching which is recommended by O'Brien and Hegelheimer (2007) and Yugsán-Gómez et al. (2019). It was interesting that only one teacher mentioned this aspect since it is recommended by the literature. One reason for this could be that teachers are not aware of this possibility and lack the know-how regarding student-created podcasts. Another reason could be teachers' lack of time since they often describe that they do not have enough to meet all requirements. If teachers were to incorporate student-created podcasts, this would demand time for specific instruction, and thereafter, additional time for the students to prepare and get acquainted with the task.

One interviewee mentioned that some learners struggle with their attention span and that podcasts provide episodes of various lengths which are especially suitable for these kinds of learners. This is echoed by Williams (2007) claiming that podcasts can be beneficial for all types of learners but can specifically be used for learners with certain difficulties. This in concurrence with Skolverket (2018) stating that teachers should adapt and accommodate to students' various learning styles and levels, when necessary.

### 6.2.5 Challenges in Using Podcasts in the EFL Classroom

All respondents gave answers to challenges they have experienced in the EFL classroom when working with podcasts for listening comprehension. Three teachers regarded letting their students choose podcasts on their own to be problematic. In these instances, the teachers experienced that it was difficult to control that the content is suitable and valuable for



education. This agrees with Şendağ et al. (2018), who claim that the content chosen by the teacher is substantial for learning success. This issue was discussed in 6.2.1.

One participant noted the disadvantage that not all learners will enjoy podcasts or listening only exercises. This negative aspect is mentioned by Kavaliuskienė (2008), Kavaliasukienė & Anusienė (2009), and Sevilla (2018) who further explain that podcasts may not be suitable for all learning styles, learner preferences, and personalities. In line with this, another interviewee mentioned that a difficulty can arise for visual learners when using podcasts for listening only assignments, which is in accordance with Sevilla's (2018) study. Moreover, Kavaliasukienė & Anusienė (2009) add that to some learners it may be distracting to merely listen to a recording and that some simply prefer visual aids. Taking these statements into consideration, it can obviously present a challenge to meet all students' needs when using podcasts as it is a listening only tool. In this regard, teachers may seek alternatives and include visual aids if desired. Nonetheless, when compared to traditional listening comprehension exercises, podcasts may still present an attractive alternative with its potential of personalization for the learners. A modern day challenge was mentioned in compliance with Facer et al. (2009), two teachers spoke about technology being a potential risk for difficulties. As some may struggle with the technological aspect as well as teachers having to rely on technology working flawlessly.

Most of the challenges participants described are common difficulties regarding most aspects of teaching, not only concerning digital tools. Learner styles, preferences, and personalities differ, and the human factor can always interfere. On a given day, motivation and student participation may be none-existing, and even the best didactic and pedagogical approach will not show any results. Moreover, adolescents are experiencing changes in their mind and body and sometimes school will not be prioritized regardless of the teachers' efforts. Nevertheless, this should not be perceived as a demotivating factor; instead, it can be considered as an interesting challenge teachers face in their profession. A challenge to continue to discover and explore ways of reaching their students, so that they may become proficient language users.

## **7 Conclusions**

This project aimed at contributing to a Swedish perspective of podcasts in language teaching and investigated the attitudes and perceptions Swedish upper secondary EFL teachers have towards podcasts as a learning tool for listening comprehension. And further, it aimed at

discovering how and why podcasts are used in their teaching. For this reason, five teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The main findings showed that the teachers had an overall positive attitude towards podcast-use, perceived the tool as a suitable aid in their language teaching, and desired to learn more about its pedagogical use. Moreover, the results showed that teachers use podcasts in their teaching to improve listening comprehension, to provide practicality in learning and teaching, and to increase student motivation; further, that there are various approaches of incorporating podcasts and that there are challenges teachers face when working with them.

Regarding future research, it would be of interest to observe the respondents during their classroom teaching since this could generate even more answers, which were perhaps not stated in the interviews or that the teachers themselves were not aware of. It would also be significant to gather information from the respondents' students in order to compare that their experience of podcast-teaching is in line with their teachers' answers. Additionally, to enhance the results of this study, a research project of a larger magnitude with more participants could yield even more attitudes and didactic methodologies. Further, it would be relevant to investigate specific approaches of podcast-use and to compare these methods among each other to find out which provide the most benefits. These suggestions could lead to more data and the possibility of sharing proven strategies and approaches of successful incorporation of podcasts in the EFL classroom. Eventually, this could bring about more teachers discovering suitable approaches of using podcasts to teach listening comprehension. As stated above, there appears to be a desire among teachers to learn more about podcasts and how to use them for education. This could also be further researched to discover if this desire is shared by a larger number of teachers, and if so, if it would be desirable and advisable to, for example, include podcasts in teacher trainee programs.

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# Appendix A

## Interview Guide

For how long have you been working as an English teacher?

Why did you become an English teacher?

What do you think about podcasts as a learning tool?

Are you using podcasts in your EFL classroom?

If yes, for what exercises do you use podcasts, and why?

Which language skills do your students train when using podcasts?

How does it benefit your students according to you?

What advantages/disadvantages do you experience with podcast use?

Are there any challenges with using podcasts?

Are you aware that there are pedagogical podcasts for language learning?

Would you be interested in learning more about podcasts as a learning tool and how to use them?

If not, what reasons do you have for not using podcasts?

Are you using other digital tools instead?

Are you aware that there are pedagogical podcasts for language learning?

Would you be interested in learning more about podcasts as a learning tool and how to use them?