

# Podcasts for Learning English Pronunciation in Igboland: Students' Experiences and Expectations

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**Abstract.** This paper studies students' experiences and expectations on the use of podcasts in learning English pronunciation in Igboland. The Igboland is made up of five states in Southeastern Nigeria where Igbo is spoken as a mother tongue. The states are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The study is a survey research where two universities were studied. A proportional sampling technique was used with the aid of a structured questionnaire that was used to elicit information. The data gathered were analysed using mean, standard deviation, t-test, and ANOVA with the aid of Statistical tool for the Social sciences. The study concluded that the students agreed to the fact that podcasts improved their English pronunciation. The hypotheses tested generally showed that there was no significant difference in the internet background, level of students or gender in the use of podcasts. Thus, technology was indispensable in learning a second language.

**Keywords:** podcasts, English pronunciation, Igboland, technology.

## 1. Introduction

English is learned as a second language in Igboland (and all over Nigeria). Learning English in Nigeria is confronted with some challenges. One of them, according to Oluikpe (1978), is that English is not taught to solve the language problems

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relating to the linguistic peculiarities of Nigerian learners. Some of these include the fact that rather than writing textbooks for commercial purposes as it is the practise in the country, they should be written for different language groups to solve their particular linguistic issues. Language teaching in Nigeria like in other parts of the world involves teaching pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and the culture of the target language. The place of pronunciation in L2 teaching is often relegated to the background when compared to the place of grammar, vocabulary and culture (Lord, 2008). Part of the reason for the relegation is that many teachers assume that with more input on the L2, students will learn pronunciation, or it will be acquired sometime later.

Native-like pronunciation is needed especially now that the world is becoming globalised and considering the position of the English language internationally. To be meaningful from an international perspective, effective communication is required. Thus, an L2 learner should strive to acquire native-like pronunciation to achieve intelligibility because it is a key factor for effective communication. Technology is essential in minimizing L1 segmental transfer to L2. Podcasting is one of the techniques used to enhance L2 pronunciation (Knight, 2010). The net-generation students are often very busy and involve themselves in multitasking (Tapscott, 2009) and many of them have devices for playing audio files (Rainie & Madden, 2005; Schmidt, 2008; Tapscott, 2009). These reasons combined make podcasts relevant to be one of the tools used in delivering L2 materials to the students.

## **2. Purpose of the study**

The general objective of this research is to identify podcasts for learning English pronunciation by students in Igboland. Its specific objectives are to find out whether or not the students' background in internet or computer assisted language learning (CALL) affect the use of English as a second language (ESL) podcasts. For this, how the types of gadgets that students use for podcasts affect their interest in listening to podcasts is worth exploring together with background information on the students' first knowledge of podcasts. Further objectives are to explore the reasons students listen to podcasts as well as their expectations, and if listening to podcasts influence the students' performance in English phonetics related courses and their spoken English and English phonetics. Additional objectives include to test some hypotheses that seek to know the level of difference in the mean ratings of the four levels of undergraduate studies on the influences of students' background information on the knowledge of podcasts, on podcasts and performance in English phonetics, and on students' experiences in the use of podcasts. In addition, the

objectives are to examine the level of difference in the mean ratings of gender on influences of students' background on internet or CALL, the types of gadget in the active use of podcasts, reasons for listening to podcasts, and students' expectations in using podcasts to learn English pronunciation.

### **3. Findings and discussion**

The study suggests that the students' background on internet or computer assisted language learning affects their use of ESL podcasts and that there are significant differences in the mean ratings of male and female students on accessing courses and class assignments, listening to online podcasts, and posting comments to online groups and social networks. There are no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of male and female students in making PowerPoint slides, downloading online podcasts, creating/working on a webpage, journal and weblog, checking emails with different browsers, and sharing ideas using e-learning forum platforms.

The respondents agreed that an ipod/Mp3 player, desktop computer, laptop/notebook computer, cell phone, Blackberry, Mp4 and the like, digital camera, and webcam are the types of gadgets that affect active use of podcasts. Concerning the students' background information on the knowledge of podcasts, there are no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of students at all levels of undergraduate education. The knowledge of podcasts was through a friend who had an interest in acquiring the native speaker's pronunciation. Learning of podcasts is considered necessary. There are no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of students at all levels of undergraduate studies on the point that the knowledge of podcasts was through the teacher.

The respondents agreed that vocabulary, pronunciation, composition, grammar, logical reasoning, socialisation, lectures, and entertainment are the students' reasons for listening to podcasts. There are no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses on students' reasons for listening to podcasts at all levels of education on the above eight items. The respondents agreed that podcasts have positively affected scores in English phonetics courses, improved oral English performance more than vocabulary, grammar, and level of logical reasoning. There are no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of students. At all levels of education on podcasts they have positively affected scores in English phonetics courses. Podcasts have improved English pronunciation more than vocabulary, grammar, and level of logical reasoning, while the fact that podcasts have improved oral English performance shows a significant difference.

The respondents agreed that it is convenient to listen to podcasts at any place and any time. They possess the ability to download and save podcasts to computer/portable devices conveniently/easily, listening to podcasts on a computer, ipod or Mp3 player. Listening to any kind of podcasts is interesting and there are no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses on students' experiences in using podcasts for learning English pronunciation at all levels of education. The respondents agreed that the presenter's voice should be clear, podcasts should be interactive, free/cheap internet access should be provided by the university administration, and teachers of English phonetics and other related courses should be abreast of new technologies in learning pronunciation. These are the students' expectations in using podcasts to learn English pronunciation. There are no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of students' expectations in using podcasts to learn English pronunciation at all levels of education.

The overall results of the study showed that there was a significant improvement on the students' performance in English phonetics. As such, we employ teachers of another language to encourage the use of authentic audio technology in native speakers' accent in delivering their learning materials. This kind of audio will equip the students more than solely relying on the teacher's production which may be affected by mother tongue interference.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study sought to investigate students' experiences and expectations on the use of podcasts to learn English pronunciation in the Igbo speech community. Most students testified to the fact that although their first knowledge of podcasts was independent of their teacher, they see podcasts as an effective tool that has reasonably improved their oral as well as written performance in English phonetics related courses through the use of portable gadgets. Podcasts are therefore a pedagogic instrument that learners of English language in Igbo speech community embrace in learning English as a second language in all levels of undergraduate education irrespective of gender.

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