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Research Paper

Six-minute Flipped Classroom: The Effect of Using Podcasts and Collaborative Learning on Taiwanese Freshmen's English Communicative Competence

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Abstract

As Taiwanese people do not have to speak English in their everyday lives, most are afraid to speak English. Nevertheless, people have many opportunities to bring English into their lives by employing podcasts on their mobiles. The present study aimed to determine whether teaching English listening and speaking with podcasts and collaborative learning can have a positive influence on learners' English performance and to assess feedback from learners. A pre-experimental method was employed to examine the effect of podcasts and collaborative learning on the English learning of 108 freshmen. Data collection and analysis were based on pre- and post-test comparisons and a questionnaire survey. Paired-sample *t*-tests of the pre- and post-tests revealed that students' overall English performance improved through podcasts and collaborative learning. The participants indicated that they had a positive attitude towards the course design and believed their English abilities had improved. However, this study had some limitations. Overall, online learning resources were employed in this study to conduct an English speaking and listening course, and a positive learning result was demonstrated. Participating students agreed that podcast episodes and collaborative learning were effective in their English learning.

Keywords: Podcasts, BBC Learning English, Collaborative Learning, Taiwan, Pre-Experimental Method

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1. Introduction

Owing to globalisation, English has become a lingua franca frequently employed in international conferences, exhibitions, communication, and travel. Since 2001, the Taiwanese Ministry of Education has implemented English education in primary schools. In addition, the Executive Yuan (2018) seeks to promote Taiwan as a bilingual nation by 2030. By improving people's English competence, the government aims to increase global mobility and competitive capabilities. Nevertheless, Taiwanese English competence, to some extent, has not improved as the government had hoped and students are still afraid of English, even after studying it since elementary school (Wang, 2020). English is a foreign language in Taiwan that students have few opportunities to speak outside English class.

Chen and Tsai (2012) and Wang (2016) argued that traditional imperial examinations strongly influenced English teaching and learning in Taiwan. To perform well on various exams, students must typically 'memorise' the forms of English, which may lead them to know extensive vocabulary and grammar, but they do not know how to use them to communicate with people. In other words, students learn the linguistic constructions of English without gaining a feel for the language or authentic usage.

Oxford (2001) and Hinkel (2006) both proposed that language learning should focus on the pragmatic aspects of a language, rather than its linguistic forms. That is to say, English education in Taiwan should not merely teach students how to memorise many vocabulary words and rules and how to cope with different tests. Students' communicative abilities should be trained. Moreover, Chen (2014) indicated that learning a language usually involves

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the learning of four abilities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Because the entrance examination for higher education is based on the results of a paper-and-pen test, listening and speaking have been frequently disregarded over a long period of time in Taiwan. Vandergrift (2007) points out that when people communicate with each other, the four abilities are employed in diverse ways. Listening accounts for the largest proportion (more than 45%), speaking 30% of the total, reading 16%, and writing 9%. Therefore, English education policymakers should reflect on the overemphasis on teaching English writing and reading in Taiwan.

To increase the chances of using English in learners' everyday lives and to bring up-to-date and authentic English materials to the teaching field in Taiwan, the researcher employs podcasts with the materials provided by BBC Learning English and collaborative learning in an English speaking and listening class to train students' English communication skills. The researcher employed a pre-experimental method to investigate the first research question:

1. Do students' English abilities improve through learning with podcasts and collaborative learning?

In addition, a questionnaire survey was conducted to answer the second research question:

2. What are students' attitudes towards using podcasts and collaborative learning activities to learn English?

2. Literature review

In light of the research questions, this study used BBC Learning English on podcasts and group tasks in an English-speaking and listening class at a university in northern Taiwan to train students' English communicative competence. Accordingly, this section reviews related theories and studies of technology and language learning, collaborative learning, BBC Learning English, and podcasts.

2.1 Technology and language learning

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The evolution of technology not only brings advantages to people's everyday lives but also aids the learning of language. The invention of computers and the Internet has largely enriched language learning processes, as they can provide access to authentic up-to-date English materials and diversify teaching and learning methods (Amrullah et al., 2023). Computer assisted language learning or CALL (Levy, 1997) refers to any language learning activity that uses computers or information communication technology (ICT).

Many people believe that learning via CALL and ICT has positive effects on education (Chaves-Yuste & Peña, 2023; Grabe & Grabe, 2005; Ratnaningsih et al., 2019; Su & Zou, 2022; Tafazoli et al., 2019). For instance, CALL can not only be employed in all learning topics, but can also evoke learners' self-learning motivation and behaviours. Azizinezhad and Hashemi (2013) similarly claim that learning with ICT provides innovative opportunities for language course designers, as both teachers and students are much freer to select learning topics and materials. They can also decide whether to conduct teaching and learning activities face-to-face or online. Learners can also choose what they urgently need and what authentic materials they are interested in, but they also have the freedom to decide when and where to learn (Amrullah et al., 2023; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). In other words, computers and the Internet break the limitations of regions, and people can perform ubiquitous learning with the help of ICT (Liu, 2009; Ogata et al., 2004). While teachers have a wide range of online resources to use in their classrooms, students can communicate worldwide via computers to improve their English communicative competence.

2.2 Podcasts and BBC learning English

Podcasts are broadcast applications which can spread online videos and audio programs. The push technology (Thomson et al., 2016) of podcasts is used to regularly send programme content to subscribers' portable devices (Levy, 2009). The term 'podcast', which was entered in the Oxford dictionary in 2005 (BBC News, 2005), combines 'iPod' and 'broadcast'.

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According to Chiang (2014), podcasts can facilitate ubiquitous learning because learners can select their preferred topics to learn at the most suitable time using any device which can access the Internet. The major difference between podcasts and other learning materials is that the contents of a programme are in the speaker's native language. Therefore, subscribing to an English programme via podcasts is considered helpful for language learners to learn English because the pronunciation and way of communication are expressed by native speakers.

Many studies employing podcasts for language teaching and learning have shown positive results (Abdous et al., 2009; Chaves-Yuste & Peña, 2023; Chiang, 2014; Liu, 2023; Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018; Su & Zou, 2022; Tymoshchuk, 2023), and almost every linguistic competency can be trained with podcasts. For example, Abdous et al. (2009) investigated the influence of podcast episodes on foreigners' listening and speaking abilities, comparing the effect of podcasts on the learning achievements of two groups of students. Abdous et al. (2009) concluded that the experimental group, who learned the foreign language with podcasts, performed better on listening and speaking. Similarly, Chiang (2014) introduced podcasts as supplementary materials into an ESP course and investigated students' attitudes towards learning with them. The results indicated that the majority of students considered podcast learning to improve their foreign language abilities such as listening, reading, and vocabulary. Furthermore, the students' learning achievements in the ESP course were positively correlated with their term scores.

BBC Learning English (2023) is part of the BBC World Service which, is an English learning system that provides free English learning programmes to English learners worldwide that was founded by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1943. *BBC Learning English* (2023) offers a wide

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range of content, such as drama, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, to train learners' English abilities in different respects. Learners can access BBC Learning English via portable devices or by subscribing to the programmes on podcasts.

BBC 6 Minute English is a subprogramme of *BBC Learning English*. As the name suggests, every episode lasts 6 minutes and concerns a specific topic. The programme is presented between two hosts, in which they introduce and discuss a variety of themes, such as food, technology, global warming, occupation, and culture. Some experts and interviewees share their ideas during the episodes. By subscribing to *6 Minute English* on podcasts, learners can not only regularly listen to the latest issues, but also acquire many vocabulary items and related concepts. Davydenko (2021) researched the effect of employing podcasts and *BBC Learning English* to teach English listening to students in Ukraine. The results demonstrated that students' English competence improved significantly when they regularly accessed BBC Learning English via podcasts.

2.3 Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning refers to teachers heterogeneously or homogeneously classifying students into various groups to conduct different learning activities and meet certain teaching demands (Chang, 2015; Chang, 2019; Huang & Lin, 1996; Ng et al., 2022; Sato, 2012; Yeh, 2015). Members of each group cooperate with each other to complete tasks in order to improve their learning outcomes. Additionally, Huang and Lin (1996) pointed out that, besides improving students' learning outcomes, collaborative learning can enrich learners' cooperative ability and mature their minds.

The collaborative learning design should include (1) pre-class preparation, (2) teaching execution, (3) learning evaluation and praise, and

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(4) group reflection (Huang & Lin, 1996). Before the class begins, teachers should analyse and understand each student's attributes and know how to classify students into groups, either heterogeneously or homogeneously. During class, teachers should clearly explain the learning tasks, goals, and assignments. Moreover, teachers must assist or facilitate the students' group discussions. After the activity, the students' performance should be evaluated. Groups with good performance should be praised to reinforce their future learning behaviours. Other groups are encouraged to develop better learning behaviours in the future. Finally, teachers must reflect on the learning outcomes of collaborative learning activities to adjust the teaching process in the future (Huang & Lin, 1996).

Some researchers (Shy, 2014; Teng et al., 2014) have investigated the effects of collaborative learning on student learning achievement in Taiwan. In Teng et al.'s (2014) research design, students were requested to do their own self-learning by watching a 15-minute-long online film about electronics before class. When students came to the classroom, the instructors first explained the course task and answered questions that occurred to students during their self-learning. Later, each group had to nominate a member to teach the content they had learned to their classmates. Students could also design questions to ask other groups when they were teaching. Student performance was evaluated based on teachers' comments and students' peer reviews. According to Teng et al. (2014), when students' learning achievement improves, their learning behaviours also change. For example, both student interactions and concentration increase. In addition, Shy (2014) employed the flipped classroom in a literature course, in which students are not knowledge learners but rather providers. Before the class begins, the course instructor uploads learning materials online, and students must group together, research the topic, collect data, and eventually present their work in

the classroom. The results of Shy (2014) suggest that through learning with interaction among classmates and reflection and discussion on the topics, students are motivated to love literature, and their learning desires largely increase.

2.4 Purpose of the study

The study aimed to investigate the influence of podcasts, BBC Learning English, and collaborative learning on students' English learning in an English listening and speaking course. According to previous research, ICT expands the teaching and learning of English because authentic and interesting materials can be brought into the class and ubiquitous learning can be conducted (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Levy, 1997; Ogata et al., 2004). Furthermore, learning English with podcasts, BBC learning, and collaborative learning can positively influence students' learning achievement (Davydenko, 2021; Huang & Lin, 1996; Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018; Ng et al., 2022; Shy, 2014; Su & Zou, 2022). This study thus combines podcasts, BBC Learning English, and collaborative learning to address the research questions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and participants

At the beginning of the study, the researcher explained the research purpose and design to all students and provided them with a consent form. Students were invited to participate in the research and sign the consent form to indicate their agreement. A total of 108 freshmen, whose English competence was at the same level, joined the research by attending an 18-week general English course, namely English Listening and Speaking, in the autumn semester of 2022 at a university in northern Taiwan. Because only one experimental group participated in the study, a pre-experimental method (Mertens, 1998; Nunan, 1992, Wang, 2021) was employed to investigate the

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effect of podcasts, BBC Learning English, and collaborative learning on Taiwanese English learners' learning achievement.

To address the research questions, the teaching procedure consisted of three phases: (1) teaching, (2) self-learning, and (3) collaborative learning activities. First, the English listening and speaking course was administered by the university's language centre. Teachers can choose one of the textbooks provided by the language centre and design the syllabus accordingly. Therefore, the instructor first taught the participants the contents of the textbook. Podcasts and BBC Learning English were employed to design collaborative activities. The instructor selected an episode related to the textbook content. The podcast contents were chosen from *BBC 6 Minute English*, a sub-category of BBC Learning English. Before offering each six-minute episode to students, the instructor grouped every six students into a group according to their attributes. Each student was asked to study the given episode at home via podcast episodes. When students came to the next class, a collaborative learning task was conducted.

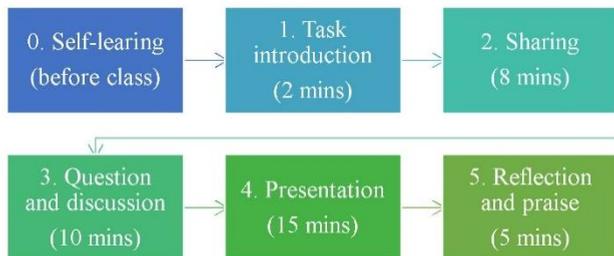


Figure 1. Procedure of the collaborative learning task

Figure 1 illustrates the procedure of the collaborative learning task, which lasted approximately 40 min. Students completed self-learning before participating in the activities. The first stage is task introduction, in which the teacher explains the learning task and the anticipated goals of the activities to

the entire class. Next, each group spent approximately eight minutes sharing or exchanging what they learned by listening to the given podcast episode. At this stage, every group should review and check whether the members receive identical information from the *BBC 6 Minute English* programme contents. The teacher then asks the entire class some questions generated from a specific episode to evoke further discussion. Participants were required to find answers or solve problems within 10 min, based on the information expressed by the episode and their own thoughts. Teachers can join students' discussions and observe their learning behaviours. In the fourth stage, one member of each team must present the results of their discussion to the entire class in English before the end of the activity. Other members can provide additional information when the team representative is presenting. Finally, the teacher summarises the task, provides feedback according to each team's performance, and praises the groups who perform well.

3.2 Data collection

To investigate the effects of podcast episodes and collaborative learning on Taiwanese learners' learning achievement and attitudes towards learning English with ICT, the researcher utilised a pre- and post-test, classroom observation, and a questionnaire survey to collect the data. The procedure for data collection and analysis is as follows:

The participants were invited to take the pre- and post-tests at the beginning and end of the course, so that the influence of podcasts and collaborative learning activities on their learning achievement might be determined. The pre- and post-tests were conducted using a paper-and-pen test administered by the university language centre. Test questions were randomly extracted from the TOEIC mock test employed by the university. The participants had one hour to finish the test, which consisted of 25

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listening and 25 reading questions. The maximum total score for each test was 100.

When engaging in collaborative learning activities, the researcher observed the participants' behaviour. Direct observation is a qualitative research method in which the researcher studies target behaviours in a natural setting to obtain first-hand data (Cohen et al., 2013; Robson, 2002). The purpose of direct observation is to understand the situations in a particular setting.

The researcher and several well-trained assistants observed the classroom when collaborative learning activities were conducted and investigated students' learning behaviours. The focus of the observations was on group work and students' behavioural changes. The researcher inspected each group's discussion activities and recorded their participation. Moreover, when the groups presented their discussion results, the researcher paid attention to the presenters' use of English. A research note was used to record the learning situations during the activities.

In addition to clarifying participants' learning achievements in learning English with podcasts, the present study also aimed to examine participants' attitudes towards learning with podcasts and collaborative learning activities. A five-point Likert-type-scale questionnaire was designed based on surveys conducted in previous studies (Abdous et al., 2009; Chiang, 2014; Davydenko, 2021). The researcher's questionnaire contained 18 questions, including 2 yes-and-no questions and 16 Likert-scale questions. Participants were invited to read the statements and rate his or her comments as follows: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*. The reliability of the research questionnaire was tested, and the statistical results showed that Cronbach's alpha had the value .93, indicating high reliability (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Taber, 2018; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

3.3 Data analysis

After the research course was completed, participants' pre-test and post-test scores were collected and analysed using a paired-sample *t*-test (Lind et al., 2021; Khashan & AbuSeileek, 2023; Malmia et al., 2019; Wang, 2021) to determine whether a significant difference existed between the two tests. The alternative hypothesis for comparison was that the participants' post-test scores would be greater than their pre-test scores (H_1 : post-test > pre-test). In other words, the null hypothesis is that participant's post-test scores would be equal to or less than their pre-test scores (H_0 : post-test \leq pre-test). Furthermore, because the alternative hypothesis presented an upward trend, a one-tailed-sample *t*-test was used in the assessment (Lind et al., 2021). A 95% confidence interval was used in this study. Thus, when the one-tailed *p*-value was less than .05, the null hypothesis was rejected, in which case a positive influence of learning English with podcasts and collaborative learning activities is observed. The first research question was answered through this comparison.

Classroom observation data were assessed using content analysis (Dörnyei, 2007; Krippendorff, 2018). Observed events were assigned different codes and classified into different categories. Participants' behaviours at the beginning and end of the terms were compared.

To understand the participating students' attitudes towards the English course with podcasts and collaborative learning, an analysis of the research questionnaire is required. After the questionnaire survey was completed, the researcher first converted the participants' answers to the Likert-type scale questions to scores: *strongly agree* = 5, *agree* = 4, *neutral* = 3, *disagree* = 2, and *strongly disagree* = 1. The mean score for each statement was calculated. When the mean was greater than the neutral value of 3, the participating students had a more positive attitude towards the statement the closer it was

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to 5. In contrast, if the mean was less than 3, it represents participants' more negative attitudes the closer it was to 1. After analysing the questionnaire, the participants' ideas about learning English with podcasts and collaborative learning could be determined (Amrullah et al., 2023; Chen & Wu, 2009; Wang, 2016).

4. Finding and discussion

Because 31 participants did not finish either the pre- or post-test, paired-sample *t*-test analysis was conducted of data from 77 participants. In addition, 87 of the 108 students completed the research questionnaire; therefore, the questionnaire analysis was based on these 87 responses.

4.1 Comparison between the pre-test and post-test

The first research question, whether students' English abilities were improved by learning with podcasts and collaborative learning, could be assessed using a paired-sample *t*-test with participants' pre-test and post-data scores (Lind et al., 2021; Malmia et al., 2019; Khashan & AbuSeileek, 2023; Wang, 2021). Table 1 shows the mean scores of both the pre-test (44.68) and post-test (51.12). The post-test scores of the participating students were clearly greater than their pre-test scores after they had taken English-speaking and listening courses for a semester.

Table 1.

Mean Scores of the Pre-Test and Post-Test

		Mean	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
Pair	pre-test	44.68	77	12.19	1.39
	post-test	51.12	77	12.77	1.46

An overall view of the means for both tests was obtained. Table 2 presents the one-tailed paired-sample *t*-test result. The alternative hypothesis was that participants' post-test scores would be greater than their pre-test scores (H_1 : post-test > pre-test), and the significance level was set at .05.

Table 2.

Paired-Samples T-Test Result

Pair	pretest–posttest	Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (1-tailed)
		Mean	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error	Lower	Upper			
		-6.44	13.32	1.52	-9.47	-3.42	-4.24	76	.00*

* indicates that the difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As shown in Table 2, there was a significant difference between the pre- and post-tests ($t = -4.24$, $p < .05$). Accordingly, the null hypothesis that the participants' post-test scores were equal to or less than their pre-test scores (H_0 : post-test \leq pre-test) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was supported. Referring to Table 1, which indicates a higher overall mean on the post-test (51.12) than on the pre-test (44.68), the paired-sample t -test results indicate that learning English through podcast episodes and collaborative learning can enhance learners' English communicative performance.

This result corroborates previous studies (Abdous et al., 2009; Chaves-Yuste & Peña, 2023; Chiang, 2014; Davydenko, 2021; Davydenko & Ponomarenko, 2018; Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018; Sato, 2012; Shy, 2014; Su & Zou, 2022), that using podcasts, *BBC Learning English*, and collaborative learning can improve learners' English competence as well as their performance.

4.2 Participants' learning situations

In the first session of collaborative learning activities, it was observed that participating students were afraid of speaking English to their group members. Some participants did not even try to speak words in the first stage, and the teacher had to join and guide the students' discussions about the podcast episode. Although some members were more active, their English communicative competence was not strong enough to evoke group work or express themselves well. In addition, it was found that some students had not

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completed self-learning at home. Obviously, it was difficult for them to join the collaborative learning activities because they did not know the content delivered by the podcast programme. Moreover, when groups were doing their presentations, it was found that they had difficulty speaking in English; for example, they mispronounced some words and spoke ungrammatically, even though they had brought notes and tried to read them out.

The learning situation and cooperation mode gradually improved as research progressed (Huang & Lin, 1996). Students learned that completing self-learning before the activities was important if they were to participate in the group work, and that they would have difficulty understanding the ideas discussed in the activities if they did not. Students could exchange ideas about specific topics only if they had done pre-learning of the episodes. Students whose English abilities could not support them in expressing their thoughts in full English sentences tried to use Chinese words or phrases in their discussions. In other words, translanguaging was observed during collaborative learning. The researcher deduced that students use a little Chinese in their discussions because they are not used to speaking English. As students grow up in an EFL environment in Taiwan, English is not necessarily spoken in their daily lives. Therefore, when discussing the topic with group members, they may encounter difficulties in expressing themselves in English; thus, they use Chinese to some extent. Furthermore, after learning presentation styles and skills from other groups' presentations, the participants could present their ideas better than in the early stages. The researcher observed that students' confidence in using English seemed to improve during the collaborative learning process, and they gradually became more active (Shy, 2014; Su & Zou, 2022; Teng et al., 2014).

4.3 Questionnaire analysis

The second research question, which aimed to determine the participating students' attitudes towards learning English with podcasts and collaborative learning, was addressed using the questionnaire data of 87 respondents. In all, 49 participants (56.3%) indicated that they had had experience using podcasts before joining the research, while the application was new to the other 38 participants (43.7%). Only four participants (4.6%) responded that they did not have ICT equipment, such as mobile phones, computers, or tablets, for podcast learning at home. Questionnaire statements were assessed using mean scores to determine students' degree of agreement with diverse aspects of the course (Amrullah et al., 2023; Chen & Wu, 2009; Wang, 2016).

Table 3.*Means of the Questionnaire Questions*

Statements	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
1.To me, there is no problem on using podcasts to do self-learning.	87	3.72	.96	.10
2.I finished self-learning before each learning activity.	87	3.49	.93	.10
3.I joined every podcast learning activity.	87	4.13	.97	.10
4.The discussion activities of the podcast episodes improved my understanding of the learning contents.	87	3.94	.87	.09
5.I think I have the ability to finish the group tasks.	87	3.93	.85	.09
6.The instructions for the learning tasks were clear.	87	4.22	.84	.09
7.When doing self-learning, I think I can understand the podcast contents by only listening to the programmes.	87	3.30	.95	.10
8.I can understand the podcast contents with the assistance of other materials.	87	3.54	.89	.10
9.I think all my group members participated in the collaborative learning task.	87	4.17	.88	.09
10.I think the group members helped each other during the learning activities.	87	4.30	.81	.09
11.I think learning via podcasts can improve my English competence.	87	3.91	.82	.09
12.I think learning via group activities can improve my English competence.	87	3.89	.83	.09
13.I am satisfied with learning via podcasts and	87	3.92	.82	.09

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collaborative learning activities.				
14.I think the learning contents on podcasts are moderate (not too easy and not too hard).	87	3.70	.84	.09
15.Compared to the beginning of the semester, I think my English has improved.	87	3.59	.91	.10
16.The teaching content of the course is moderate.	87	3.22	.80	.09

The overall mean scores for each questionnaire statement are shown in Table 3. It is apparent that the mean for each statement is greater than the neutral value of 3, which indicates that the students had a positive attitude towards the course design, including podcast materials and collaborative learning. It is notable that the participants had stronger attitudes towards collaborative learning. For example, the mean scores were more than 4 for Statements 3 ($M = 4.13$), 6 ($M = 4.22$), 9 ($M = 4.17$); and 10 ($M = 4.3$). This implies that students may have stronger experiences and impressions of collaborative learning activities. Participants helped each other in group work, solving problems, and gradually reaching learning goal (Huang & Lin, 1996; Sato, 2012; Teng et al., 2014). In addition, participants also indicated that their English learning had a positive outcome because the responses about learning achievement were greater than 3.8, such as statements 5 ($M = 3.93$), 11 ($M = 3.91$), and 12 ($M = 3.89$). Furthermore, the mean score of Statement 15 compared to the beginning of the semester, I think my English improved ($M = 3.59$), showing that participants of the study could perceive the improvement of their English competence after joining the research course. Participants were positively satisfied with learning through podcast episodes and collaborative learning (Statement 13, $M = 3.92$). The students considered the degree of difficulty in the teaching content and materials to be reasonable (Statement 16, $M = 3.22$). Overall, the participating students had a positive attitude towards the course design and learning activities.

According to Chiang (2014), podcast episodes are a listener-friendly application. For the majority of participants, there were few problems in

using podcasts to learn, so long as they had an ICT device which could access the Internet. Before participating in the study, many participating students had had the experience of listening to a podcast programme. Moreover, the participants indicated that they listened to the assigned BBC 6 Minute English episode before class. They could autonomously listen to the programme via podcasts at a convenient time and place, which is an advantage of learning with ICT (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Ratnaningsih et al., 2019). Participants also agreed that their English competence to some extent improved through learning with podcasts, BBC Learning English, and collaborative learning activities (Abdous et al., 2009; Davydenko & Ponomarenko, 2018; Khashan & AbuSeileek, 2023; Su & Zou, 2022). Nevertheless, when a class involves learning with ICT, instructors must pay attention to students' digital divide, as some stated that they had problems accessing the podcasts.

5. Conclusion

This study employed a pre-experimental method to investigate the effects of podcast episodes and collaborative learning on Taiwanese learners' English learning, as well as their opinions about the 18-week course design and learning activities at a university in northern Taiwan. A total of 108 freshmen participated in the study, and they were further grouped into groups of six to complete their class task. Data were collected with pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and a questionnaire survey. Although there was no control group in the study, the pre/post-test comparison indicated that students' overall English performance clearly improved by learning English with Podcasts, BBC Learning English, and collaborative learning activities. In addition, the students' learning behaviours improved as they became more autonomous and active. Through the process of learning activities, discussion was prompted well, and students could better manipulate the tasks. The

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results of the questionnaire also showed that the students had a positive attitude towards the course design and learning arrangements. They believed that their English was enhanced through learning with podcasts and collaborative learning, and perceived their English abilities as improved after completing the study.

The results of the study corroborate other studies of CALL, podcast learning, and collaborative learning (Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2013; Chaves-Yuste & Peña, 2023; Chiang, 2014; Davydenko, 2021; Davydenko & Ponomarenko, 2018; Liu, 2023; Levy, 2009; Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018; Ratnaningsih et al., 2019; Tymoshchuk, 2023). Students' English competence improved after the course with podcast learning and collaborative learning, according to the paired-sample *t*-test results. Furthermore, participants were able to autonomously listen to the podcast programmes when they found it convenient at home, exchange ideas, and give feedback in classroom activities.

However, some limitations restrict the findings of this study. First, because the research course was administered by the language centre of the university, the researcher was not able to secure a control group to compare the learning results between an experimental group and a control group. Future research should conduct teaching experiments to obtain more convincing facts about the benefits of learning English through podcast episodes and collaborative learning. Second, Taiwanese English learners live in an EFL environment, meaning that they do not speak English frequently in their everyday lives. At the beginning of the study, the participants spent time learning communication in English. This delayed the teaching schedule to a certain extent. Thus, future studies should recruit participants who know and are willing to communicate with others in English to take an English course with a research design. These results are expected to be more salient than

those of this study. In addition, when conducting collaborative learning activities, more task facilitators, such as English teachers, should join each group's discussion to smooth the procedure for better learning outcomes.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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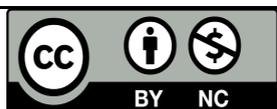
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