

Innovative Student-Podcasting Activities: Enhancing Language and 21st-Century Skills

The 21st century has changed many practices related to language teaching and learning. One of the most captivating breakthroughs is a set of skills and competencies that our learners must have in order to be called 21st-century students. Critical thinking, creativity, innovation, collaboration, cooperation, and reflection are all skills our students need; thus, a 21st-century learner of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) not only needs the language to communicate but also the competencies to explore the world through English (Shadiev and Wang 2022; Budiyanto et al. 2024). However, incorporating those skills into classroom activities tends to be challenging, especially in large classes with limited resources. It even gets more difficult when we want our students to exhibit those competencies in real-life contexts such as conversations, debates, and discussions.

Using student podcasting—podcasts produced by students—opens up new opportunities to apply language skills in authentic situations, allowing students to discuss real-life topics using 21st-century skills. Podcasts provide an ideal setting to put into practice critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, cooperation, and reflection through debates, discussions, monologues, and conversations.

This article provides recommendations on how students can produce their own podcasts by using pre-planned models. The models help students prepare different types of podcasts: educational, conversational, interview, solo, and roundtable (including debates and

discussions). By using these models, students practice real language use and develop many 21st-century skills.

USE OF PODCASTS IN ELT

Podcasts—audio or video digital recordings about a specific subject matter—are shared online with a wide audience around the world. As Ramirez (2024) explains, “Podcasts are particularly appealing to the younger generation since they are flexible and allow learners to access language-learning materials at any time and from any location” (47).

Much of the support related to the use of podcasts in the English language teaching

Using student podcasting—podcasts produced by students—opens up new opportunities to apply language skills in authentic situations, allowing students to discuss real-life topics using 21st-century skills.

(ELT) classroom refers directly to their implications for developing listening and speaking skills (Hasan and Hoon 2012; Samad et al. 2017; Shafiee and Salehi 2019; Alfa 2020; Syahabuddin et al. 2021; Sabrila and Apoko 2022; Gunawan et al. 2023). Rmelah and Pornwiriyaakit (2023) conclude that podcasts increase listening comprehension. Similarly, Masitah et al. (2023) argue that “podcasts can be one of the media to teach listening skills because this media significantly gives positive results in improving students’ listening skills” (226).

Moreover, it has been found that listening to podcasts not only improves listening and speaking skills but also helps learners “become

more confident and effective communicators in the English language” (Umaraliyeva and Bozorboyeva 2023, 528).

The use of podcasts in the ELT classroom is multifaceted. Rosell-Aguilar (2007) developed a taxonomy to illustrate the two main ways podcasts can be implemented in the classroom, as shown in Figure 1.

Similarly, Hanks (2022) identifies “three kinds of podcasts that are beneficial for students” (15), namely: (1) pre-made podcasts from other teachers giving practice to students on class materials (15); (2) original podcasts made by teachers for their specific students (20); and

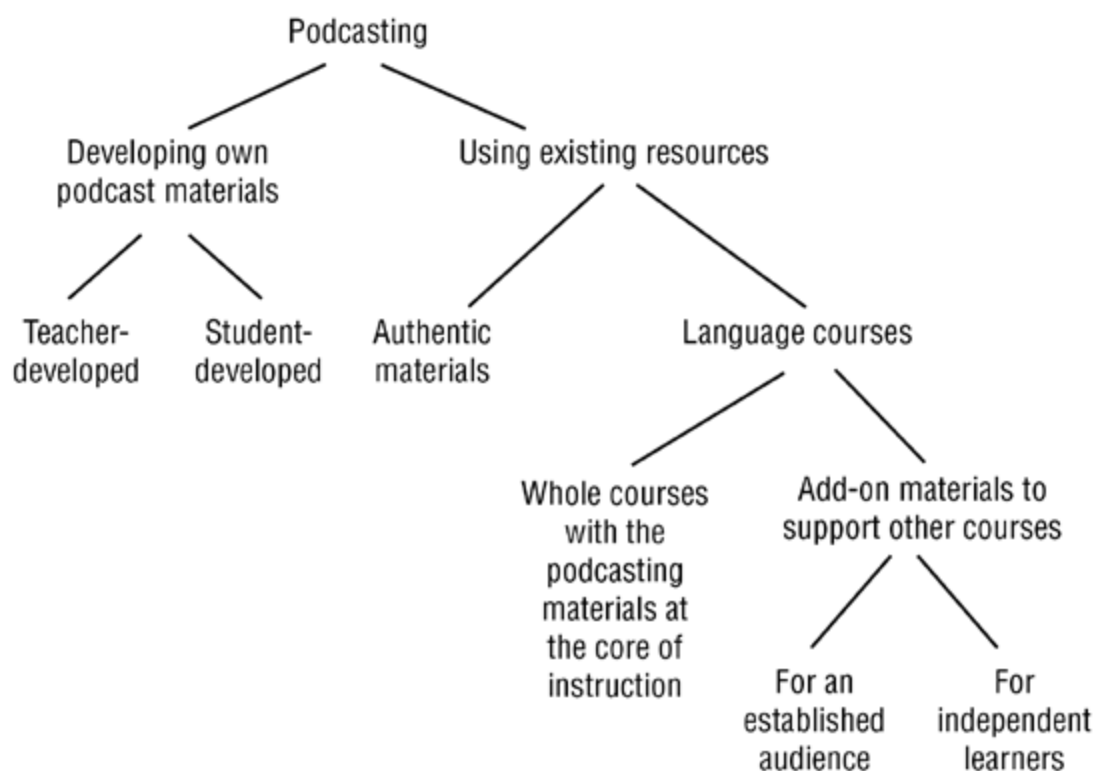


Figure 1. Taxonomy of the uses of podcasting for language learning (Rosell-Aguilar 2007, 476)

The most important feature of these models is that they guide students' logical thinking from the beginning of the talk up to the end. They can be used with a wide range of language proficiencies (A1 to C2) due to their question-answer formats.

(3) general audience podcasts directed toward native English speakers (21).

From Hanks's (2022) classification, we add a fourth type of podcast called "student podcasting," found in Rosell-Aguilar's taxonomy under the category "Developing own podcast materials—Student-developed" (2007, 476). These are podcasts produced by students for other EFL students, teachers, or the general public.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENT PODCASTING

By allowing students to create their own content, podcasts place students at the center of their learning. As noted by Curtis (2017), "learners creating their own tasks, rather than working on the one given to them, may be an essential part of the definition of learner-centredness." Also, the student-podcasting templates illustrated in this article motivate students to engage with the target language and 21st-century skills since these models encompass the three main elements of basic psychological needs found in the self-determination theory (SDT) by Ryan and Deci (2017):

- 1.** Competence
- 2.** Autonomy
- 3.** Relatedness

First, the templates make it easier for students to feel confident enough to engage in debate, discussion, or monologue podcasts with simple steps to follow. Second, students are free to choose topics for podcasts and construct their own arguments to support

their ideas. Third, they produce podcasts in groups, forming a community in which each one participates and learns from others.

Considering the discussion above, student podcasting exhibits seven key characteristics:

- 1.** It fosters autonomous learning.
- 2.** It incorporates real-life topics.
- 3.** It develops the skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, cooperation, and reflection.
- 4.** It integrates speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
- 5.** It boosts fluency and accuracy.
- 6.** It motivates students to engage in active learning.
- 7.** It encourages knowledge-constructivism.

STUDENT-PODCASTING TEMPLATES

The following templates illustrate different ways to use student podcasting. The most important feature of these models is that they guide students' logical thinking from the beginning of the talk up to the end. They can be used with a wide range of language proficiencies (A1 to C2) due to their question-answer formats.

Suggestions for applications are given with specific examples. However, students are free to modify each of the sequences based on their language level and needs. Although there

are numerous podcast formats, this article focuses on a select few, specifically roundtable, solo, educational, and meta-analytic podcasts. As stated previously, the choice of the format depends on the learners, who can decide to add other types of formats. And why not encourage students to devise their own podcast models?

Finally, using the following podcast templates activates many 21st-century skills. Prior to recording the podcast, students seek out new ideas related to the topic. Thus, they learn to critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of different arguments provided to back up a claim. While recording the podcast, they learn to listen actively to other participants and ask thought-provoking questions. They also share ideas with each other on controversial issues and develop tolerance. By debating and discussing, students can collaborate to brainstorm new solutions to local, national, or international issues. In addition, they can take part in the editing phase of the podcast in order to assist with the choice of sound effects (if any), background music, and posting platform. As such, students develop skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and digital literacy.

1. Roundtable podcast

With this format, students can choose between a debate and a discussion podcast.

With debate, a controversial topic is given with two or more opposing sides. An example is the topic *Do smartphones help students engage in active learning?* As shown in Figure 2, each side of the debate chooses to accept (yes) or reject (no). Students then develop arguments that support their stance. The argument follows a logical order based on two or more reasons to back up the conclusion.

Students use this podcast model prior to the actual podcast-recording day. It helps them prepare both their language use and logical thinking, including critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and reflection. On the day of the recording, students engage in fruitful and

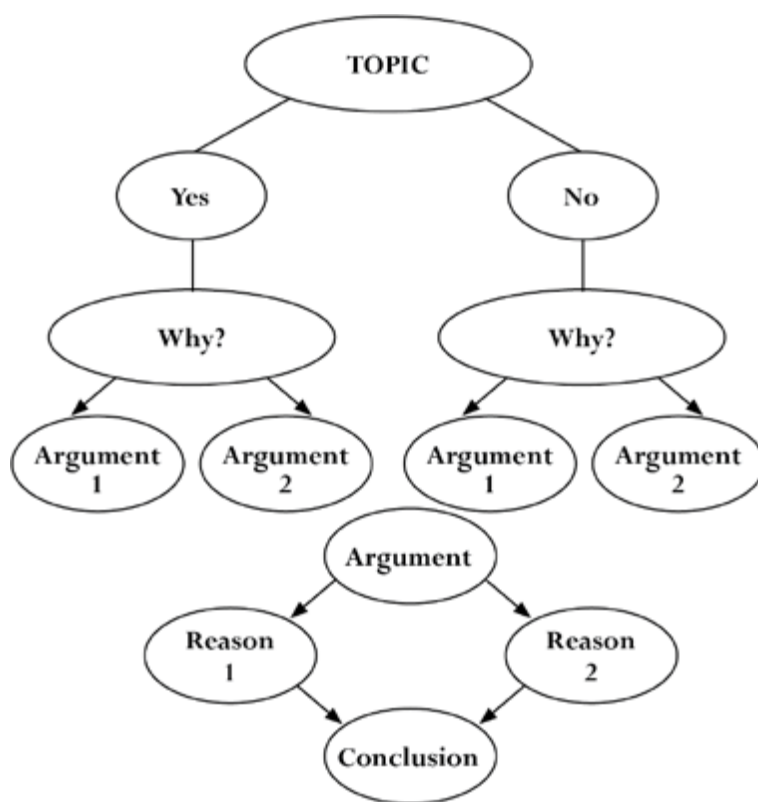


Figure 2. Debate podcast template

mindful debates that educate all the opposing sides. While debating, they practice active listening and constructive criticism since they must evaluate the various conclusions, reasons, and arguments given. Thus, they develop metacognition to assess their own thinking and provide logical counterexamples.

Furthermore, the model can be used with various proficiency levels. Beginners can provide at least two arguments using a simple structure such as, “I don’t agree with this because a study in 2022 shows that smartphones can distract learners.” Intermediate and advanced learners, meanwhile, can give up to five arguments. The primary goal of the debate podcast is to engage students in active thinking and actual and authentic language use.

The discussion podcast (see Figure 3) starts with an open question such as *How can we maximize our English learning?* Each participant then makes two or more comments based on arguments to support their viewpoints.

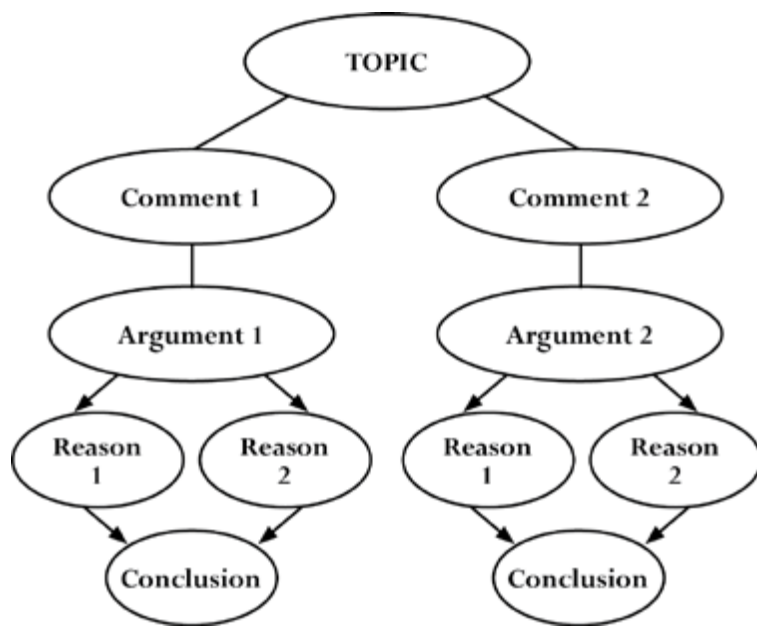


Figure 3. Discussion podcast template

The purpose is to share knowledge and address real-life issues. As with the debate podcast, the argument is the most important element since it reveals the background of the student’s reasoning.

Before the podcast-recording day, students work through this model, which will assist them in searching and identifying relevant arguments.

When podcasting, they make sure their contributions to the topic are relevant, follow a logical order, and give solid reasons (or evidence) to back up their claims. Moreover, they are encouraged to criticize other participants’ opinions in a friendly way by evaluating the effectiveness of the arguments. The discussion podcast allows students to practice many of the skills related to critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, reflection, and active listening.

The template can be used with various proficiency levels. For instance, learners with basic English knowledge can construct simple argument structures, while intermediate and advanced ones can employ complex structures to develop arguments. Unlike the debate podcast, this format requires learners (or teachers) to select real-life problems as topics

for which students can formulate solutions based on their different experiences.

In addition, students may choose to use discussion in different podcast styles, such as interview, conversational, and educational formats. With the interview format, a topic is announced, and the host student asks questions and gets ideas from other participants. The conversational format requires participants to converse by sharing ideas about a topic. The educational format (described below) may involve discussing a “how-to” topic where the speaker teaches the audience about the topic, and other participants may ask questions and make comments. Discussion podcasts can cover topics such as *How can education shape the future of young people?*; *What is the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in schools?*; and *How does teamwork impact our personal development?*

2. Monologue (solo) podcast

The monologue (solo) podcast (see the template in Figure 4), done by one speaker/ host, begins with the speaker introducing a simple topic in either affirmative, interrogative, negative, or interro-negative form. Example topics include *The benefits of AI in a low-resource classroom* and *How can AI assist EFL learners in a low-resource classroom?*

The speaker then continues by giving background on the *what*, *who*, *where*, and *when*. More-stimulating inquiries about the topic’s *how*, *why*, and *what effects* follow. These latter inquiries deepen critical-thinking and analytical skills. Finally, from the basic to the advanced questions, the speaker draws a conclusion with *what*, *why*, *what effects*, and the final element, *what solutions*. The last element fosters the skills of problem-solving, innovation, creativity, and reflection.

The above model can be used by more than one student. Although it is called a “monologue podcast,” that does not necessarily mean that the podcast should only be conducted by one person. Multiple

speakers can take part, each presenting a monologue that examines the same topic (or a subtopic) from a different perspective. The purpose of this type of podcast is to have a place in which each participant contributes and others listen actively and provide feedback before presenting their topic.

3. Educational podcast

One or more students can produce an educational podcast. As the name suggests, this type of podcast aims at educating the audience about specific “how-to” topics, such as *how to speak English fluently*, *how to read more quickly*, and so on.

As shown in Figure 5, the educational podcast follows a logical sequence to help the audience grasp the main concepts. After the introduction, the main question is posed, serving as the focus of the entire talk. Next, the objectives of the show are clearly stated to guide the podcast. This is followed by the development section, which includes two parts: basic and advanced *Wh-* questions. The former offers a preview of the main question while the latter delves more deeply by considering other aspects of the topic. For example, if the main question is *How can one speak English fluently?*, the basic questions can include *What is fluency?*; *Who is considered fluent?*; and *Where and when does fluency take place?* The subsequent advanced questions would be *How do I speak fluently?*; *Why does it matter?*; and *What effects does fluency have on speaking?* These questions develop the skills of problem-solving, critical thinking, reflection, communication, and creativity. They help the participants to both communicate and think in the target language.

After the development stage, the speaker moves on to the contributions section. In this part, each participant gives their tricks and tips about the main question. The contributions consist of three elements: *What is the contribution?* *Why is it important?* *How can it be implemented?* The conclusions section summarizes the different contributions in the form of takeaways. These takeaways should

address the following: *What are the takeaways?* *Why are they important?* *What are their effects?*

Throughout all the stages of the educational podcast, the students learn not only to communicate as a community but also to reflect on current educational issues that impact other learners and thus enhance their own learning.

4. Meta-Analytic (MA) podcast

The meta-analytic (MA) podcast, a term that I coined, refers to an educational-format podcast that focuses on analyzing a topic by drawing insights from other podcasts. This

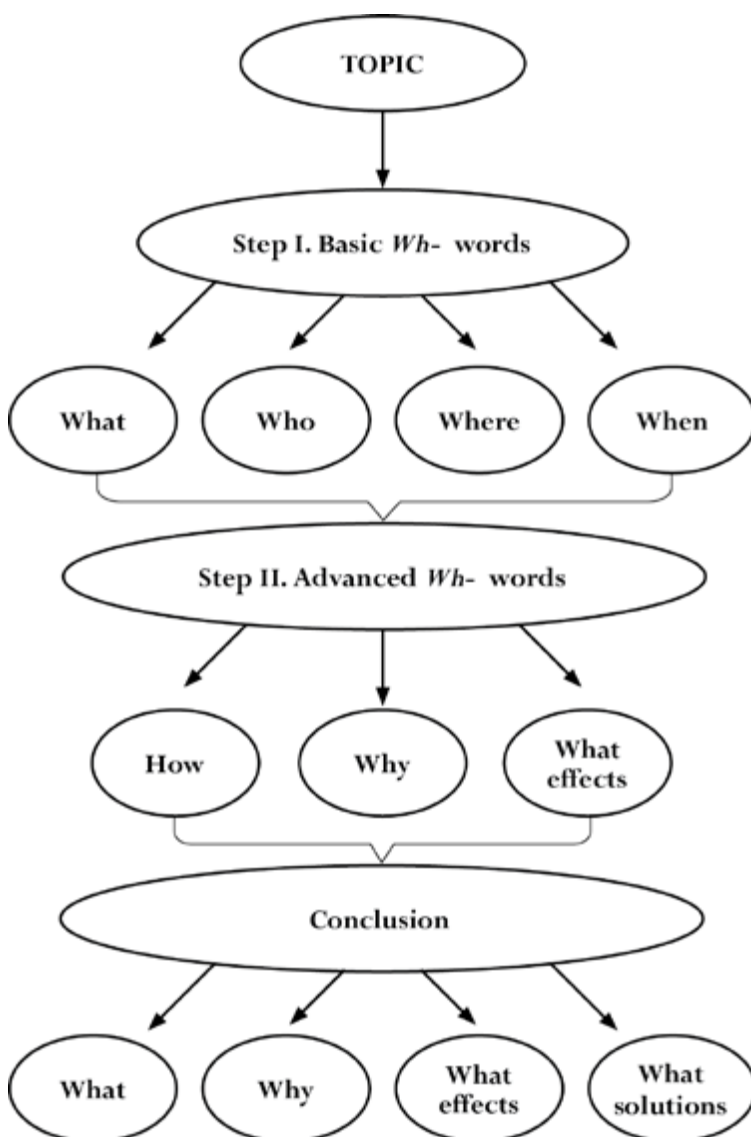


Figure 4. Monologue (solo) podcast template

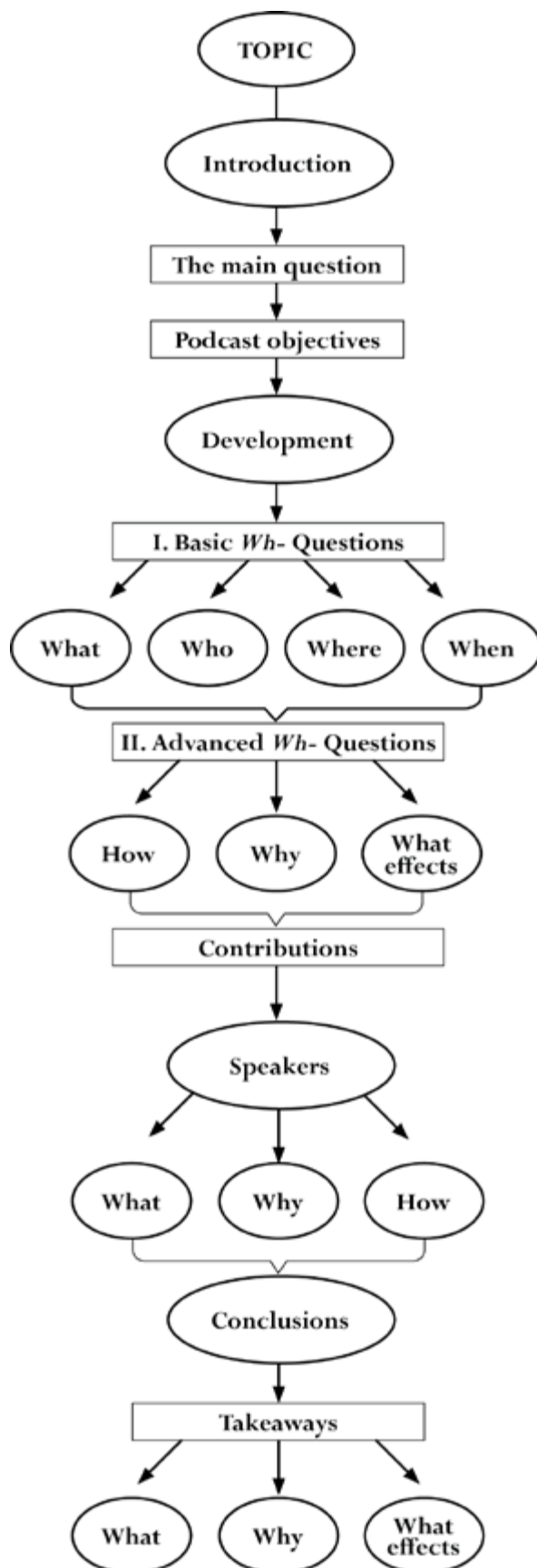


Figure 5. Educational podcast template

type of podcast develops both listening and speaking skills, along with critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, logical thinking, and reflection.

The MA template, shown in Figure 6, is quite similar to the educational podcast template. However, right after the development of the main question, participants listen to three to five short podcasts that they have previously selected for the show, focusing only on those segments that are directly related to the topic. After this, they summarize the podcast idea by responding to these questions: *What is the main idea? Why is it important? How does it work?*

By listening to various podcasts, analyzing them, and synthesizing common points about a single issue, students go beyond basic language competencies; they also learn to evaluate sources of information. This gives them the ability to look at a topic from various perspectives.

The MA podcast can cover topics like *What has been said about the benefits of digital literacy for children?*; *What are the advantages and disadvantages of AI counseling?*; etc. Students can propose a set of topics they find suitable for this type of template.

CONSIDERATIONS

There are several key considerations to keep in mind when using student podcasting. First of all, the above templates/models need not be followed verbatim. The steps can be modified by either the teacher with the students or the students themselves; it all depends on the learning goals, interests, and desires of each party involved. In fact, as we (21st-century teachers) are to forge and cultivate 21st-century skills in our learners, I strongly recommend letting students come up with their own podcast models from time to time.

Secondly, the templates include *Wh-* words that can easily be turned into questions. These questions constitute the core of the podcast and should be formulated based on learners' levels. Also, the *Wh-* questions

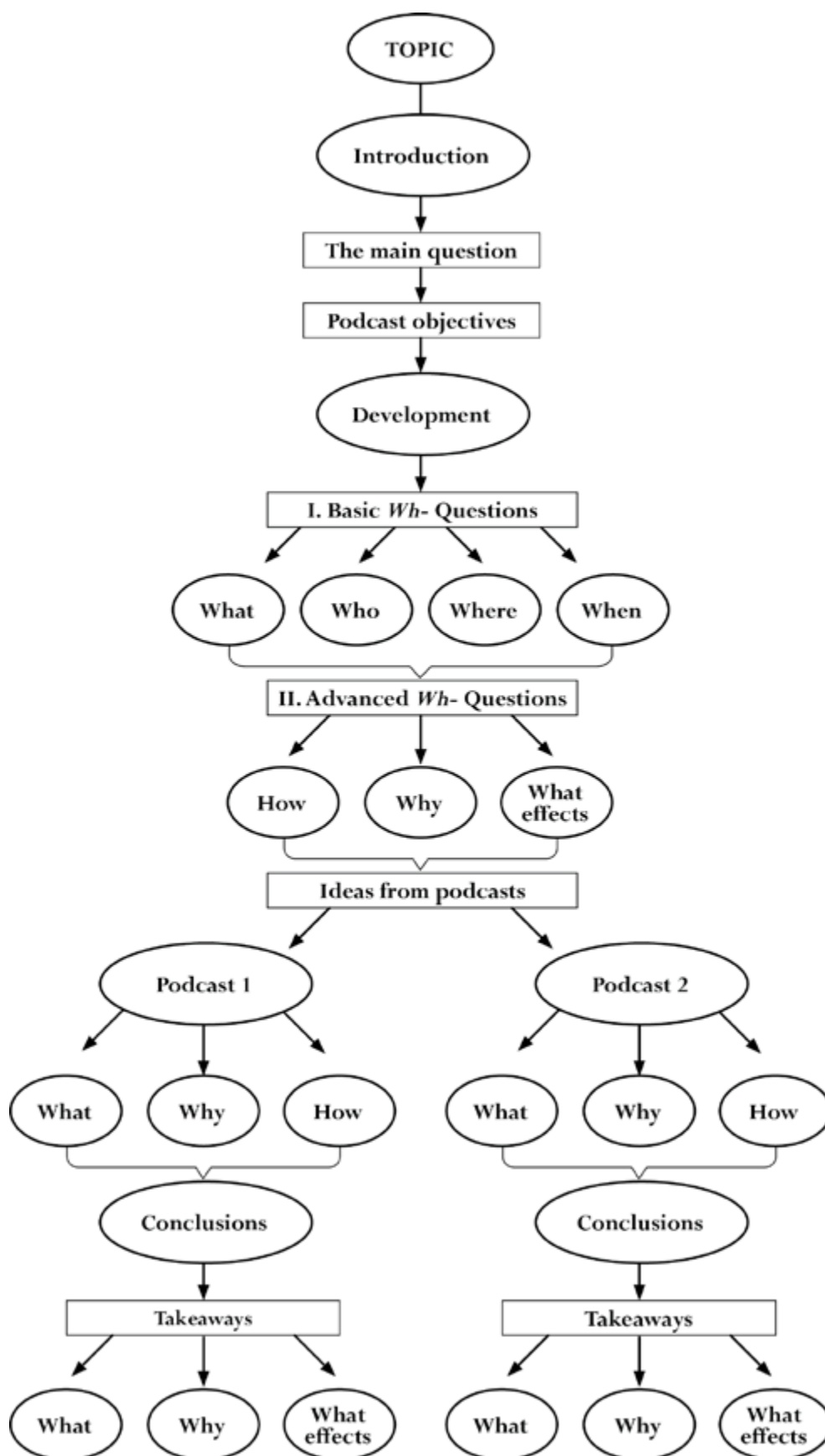


Figure 6. Meta-Analytic (MA) podcast template

The podcast episodes can be integrated into other classroom activities.

deepen 21st-century skills essential to 21st-century learners.

Thirdly, to help learners prepare podcasts, the templates can be turned into worksheets that students can complete in class before the actual recording. At this time, they will only have to answer the *Wh-* questions and elaborate on their answers. Here, the speaking style should mirror that of real podcasts—informal, using familiar language.

Finally, to assist with the actual recording and producing of podcasts, the following steps are necessary:

1. The teacher and students collaboratively decide on the topic and the model of the podcast.
2. They gather the necessary podcasting tools, which include a mobile phone (or PC), a microphone, and a podcast-recording app.
3. They outline the episode and assign speaking roles for each participant, including when to take turns.
4. The teacher makes sure that each student knows their turn and records the podcast.
5. After the recording, the teacher and students listen to the podcast and decide whether to edit or opt for a new trial.

Nevertheless, it can be difficult to find a free podcast-recording tool or to have all the necessary equipment like a microphone, a sound mixer, etc. From the start (and since these podcasts are not meant for commercial purposes), I suggest using free mobile apps to record the podcasts. Some of

these apps can even integrate sound effects to enliven the show. The podcast does not need to be long; for starters, a ten-minute podcast is ideal. This will gradually expand depending on the choice of topics, the number of participants, and the language proficiency. The choice of posting or publishing the podcasts depends on the individual teacher and students. They can either publish the final podcast with only the class or post it online for a wider audience. Keep in mind that the benefits of student podcasting are rooted primarily on the actual production process.

CONCLUSION

The 21st century requires ELT teachers to cultivate the use of language and competencies to make our students 21st-century learners. Podcasts produced by students allow them to use language in an authentic setting while practicing the skills of critical thinking, innovation, creativity, problem-solving, reflection, and active listening. To easily implement podcasting in the classroom, the templates/models presented in this article provide easy steps for students to create their own shows.

The teacher, working as a facilitator, guides the students throughout the process of podcast production. They give the templates to students and make sure that the students understand each prompt and can formulate effective arguments, reasons, and conclusions.

After recording the podcast, the teacher can have students reflect and analyze it. If students have used their own model, they can compare it with the templates provided here, noting similarities and differences. Then they can discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the model they used.

The final produced podcast can be shared online with other English students, teachers, or communities. This can extend beyond the classroom wall and become part of a radio show or a larger project connecting many schools around the world.

Moreover, the podcast episodes can be integrated into other classroom activities. For example, after listening to their own podcasts, students can write a reflection or engage in discussions and debates about the arguments and reasons they presented in the podcasts. The 21st-century skills developed and expressed through student podcasting can contribute to addressing issues that impact English learners nationally and internationally.

REFERENCES

- Alfa, R. R. 2020. Using podcast as authentic materials to develop students' speaking skills. *JELLT (Journal of English Language and Language Teaching)* 4 (1): 65–74. <https://doi.org/10.36597/jellt.v4i1.7692>
- Budiyanto, K. Kabri, E. Harapan, and M. B. Purwanto. 2024. 21st century English learning: a revolution in skills, critical thinking, creativity, and visual communication. *Asian Journal of Applied Education (AJAE)* 3 (1): 43–54. <https://doi.org/10.55927/ajae.v3i1.7841>
- Curtis, A. 2017. *Methods and methodologies for language teaching: The centrality of context*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Gunawan, M. H., I. C. P. Mandiri, D. Suherdi, E. S. D. Hanifa, and A. P. Gunawan. 2023. Exploring EFL students' perceptions of the use of podcasts/ TED talks in extensive listening class. *Indonesian EFL Journal* 9 (1): 43–52.
- Hanks, E. 2022. Utilizing podcasts in virtual EFL instruction. *English Teaching Forum* 60 (3): 14–23.
- Hasan, Md. M., and T. B. Hoon. 2012. ESL learners' perception and attitudes towards the use of podcast in developing listening skills. *The English Teacher XLI* (2): 160–173.
- Masitah, S., L. Rakhmanina, Melati, and M. D. Daveri. 2023. The effectiveness of listening podcasts to improve students' listening skill: An experimental study in the second grade of the SMAN 4 Bengkulu. *Journal of English Education and Linguistics* 6 (2): 222–227.
- Ramirez, M. G. 2024. The use of podcasts for language learning: A systematic review of literature. *International Journal of English Language Studies* 6 (1): 47–53. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijels.2024.6.1.4>
- Rmelah, P. A., and P. Pornwiriyaakit. 2023. Developing English listening skills for comprehension through repetition technique using podcast. *Journal of Education and Learning* 12 (6): 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v12n6p73>
- Rosell-Aguilar, F. 2007. Top of the pods—In search of a podcasting “podagogy” for language learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 20 (5): 471–492. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588220701746047>
- Ryan, R. M., and E. L. Deci. 2017. *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Sabrila, R. A. P., and T. W. Apoko. 2022. The effectiveness of podcast on listening skill for vocational school students. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature* 10 (2): 1177–1186. <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v10i2.2897>
- Samad, I. A., A. Bustari, and D. Ahmad. 2017. The use of podcasts in improving students' speaking skill. *Journal of English Language and Education* 3 (2): 97–111. <https://doi.org/10.26486/jele.v3i2.256>
- Shadiey, R., and X. Wang. 2022. A review of research on technology-supported language learning and 21st century skills. *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (897689). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.897689>
- Shafiee, F., and H. Salehi. 2019. The effects of podcasting on listening and speaking skills: A review paper. Paper presented at the 7th National Congress on Applied Research Language Studies.
- Syahabuddin, K., Mulia, and K. Rizqa. 2021. Improving students' listening skill using podcasts. *Journal of Digital Education, Communication, and Arts* 4 (1): 51–61. <https://doi.org/10.30871/deca.v4i01.2867>
- Umaraliyeva, M. M., and O. A. Bozorboyeva. 2023. Enhancing listening skills of EFL learners by means of podcasts. *Educational Research in Universal Sciences* 2 (6): 526–529.

Enock Mbenza teaches at the Institut Supérieur des Techniques Médicales de Kisantu (ISTM/Kisantu) and the Congo American Language Institute (CALI), Democratic Republic of the Congo. He received a bachelor's degree in ELT from Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Mbanza-Ngungu (ISP/Mbanza-Ngungu). His research interests include English for Specific Purposes syllabus and materials design, 21st-century skills in classroom activities as well as English language teaching in large classes.