

Path to Podcasting - A material package  
for a podcasting module in upper  
secondary school

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Podcasteja on hyödynnetty kielten opetuksessa eri tavoin 2000-luvun alusta alkaen (Evans 2008, McLoughlin, Lee ja Chan 2006, Sze 2006, Rosell-Aguilar 2007). Podcastit voidaan jakaa kategorioihin erilaisin perustein. Tämän tutkielman puitteissa olennaisin on jako viihteeksi tarkoitettuihin podcasteihin, kielten opetukseen suunnattuihin podcasteihin ja niin opettajien kuin oppijoiden itse tuottamiin podcasteihin (Rosell-Aguilar 2007). Kielten opetuksessa on mahdollista hyödyntää kaikkia mainittuja kategorioita erilaisin tavoin, joskin tämä materiaalipaketti keskittyy oppijoiden itse tekemiin podcasteihin ja hyödyntää viihteeksi suunnattuja podcasteja käytetyissä materiaaleissa.</p> <p>Vieraaseen kieleen ja erityisesti sen puhumiseen voi oppijoilla liittyä ahdistusta ja pelkoa (Horwitz, Horwitz ja Cope 1986). Suomalainen koulujärjestelmä on pitkään korostanut oikeakielisyyttä ja taitoa kääntää tekstiä tyylipuhtaasti kielestä toiseen (Rissanen, Taavitsainen and Nevalainen 2004). Lukion nykyisessä opetussuunnitelmassa näkyy kuitenkin yleisesti vallitseva näkemys kommunikatiivisuuden merkityksestä kielten opetuksessa (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2019), jota myös kielen oppimisen tutkimus korostaa. Tämä tarkoittaa suurempaa määrää tilanteita, joissa oppijoiden oletetaan käyttävän vierasta kieltä suullisesti opinnoissaan, mikä voi johtaa kielen puhumiseen liittyvään ahdistukseen. Path to Podcasting -materiaalipaketin tavoitteena on tarjota oppijoille mahdollisuus käyttää kieltä projektityöskentelyn välineenä ja madaltaa rimaa puhua vieraalla kielellä.</p> <p>Materiaalipaketti nojaa vahvasti Kolbin (1984) kokemuksellisen oppimisen kehän teoriaan, jonka mukaan oppijat rakentavat uusia käsityksiä käsiteltävästä aiheesta aiempien kokemuksensa perusteella ja hyödyntävät näitä käsityksiä uusissa kokemuksissa.</p> <p>Tämä materiaalipaketti on suunnattu lukion toisen ja kolmannen vuoden opiskelijoille. Materiaalipaketti on toteutettu verkkosivujen muodossa ja sen tarkoituksena on tutustuttaa opiskelijat podcasteihin projektityöskentelyluonteisesti. Nettisivut sisältävät 10x75 minuutin oppituntien suunnitelmat, jotka on jaettu kahteen osaan. Näistä osista ensimmäinen keskittyy esittelemään podcasteihin liittyviä käytäntöjä sekä podcast-tyyppjä erilaisin tehtävin ja toisessa osassa opiskelijat pääsevät työstämään omaa podcast-jaksoaan.</p>	
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# 1 Introduction

Podcasts have been used in different ways in language learning almost since their first appearance in the first decade of the 21st century (Evans 2008, McLoughlin, Lee and Chan 2006, Sze 2006, Rosell-Aguilar 2007). Whether it be listening to podcasts made by native speakers to enhance one's listening comprehension skills or learning a new language solely with the help of a specific language learning podcast, many language learners have seen the value of podcasts in learning a foreign language.

Recently, podcasts have been more and more incorporated into language courses at all educational levels, although research on their effects mostly focuses on tertiary education. Podcasts can be used as supplementary materials (Abdous, Camarena and Facer 2009), as separate exercises (Sze 2006) or the whole course can be based on either listening to or creating podcasts, if not both (Armstrong, Tucker and Massad 2009). Their use within a language course can target the different language skills from increasing one's vocabulary knowledge to improving listening comprehension and practicing speaking in the language. In relation to speaking skills, podcasts are often used to provide learners with extensive speaking practice by producing their own podcasts.

In the context of Finland, English language teaching in upper secondary school has emphasized other aspects of the language, especially grammar and being able to translate texts correctly, instead of speaking the language in communicative situations (Rissanen, Taavitsainen and Nevalainen 2004). Although the emphasis has moved towards teaching the language with a more communicative approach and many English modules list communicating in the language as one of the goals (LOPS 2019), learners might still feel pressure or anxiety when required to speak in the language if they have not had practice in using the language communicatively. Foreign language anxiety is especially present in traditional classroom settings (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986), where learners are called on to answer in front of their peers with little to no preparation. On the contrary, a module in which learners can prepare and practice their speaking repeatedly in a relatively casual setting gives them the autonomy over their own learning and might reduce the anxiety that speaking has formerly caused (Yeh, Chang, Chen and Heng 2021, Amorati, Ferrari and Hajek 2022). Creating a podcast in a safe and guided environment provides learners with the opportunity to practice not only their oral skills in the target language but also their metacognitive skills such as project management or problem solving (Amorati et al. 2022).

The National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (LOPS 2019) emphasizes the importance of constructing new knowledge based on existing knowledge through active participation, analysis, interpretation and adaptation in all subjects. The school strives to provide learners with meaningful experiences while learners are also encouraged to utilize their personal experiences for learning (ibid.). As the current learning conception values the impact of experience and participation, this material package draws from the experiential learning theory, especially the experiential learning cycle, in its structure. The different sections of the module demonstrate the four phases of the experiential learning cycle, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb and Kolb 2017), by inviting learners to reflect on the experiences accumulated outside of school and working towards creating a project based on these reflections.

Although podcasts and their use in language learning have been widely studied (see e.g. Abdous et al. 2009, Armstrong et al. 2009, Bueno-Alastuey and Nemeth 2022, Hamzaoglu and Koçoğlu 2016, Yeh et al. 2021), few of the studies provide teachers with materials or instructions on how to use podcasts effectively, which this material package aims to remedy. This material package is aimed at second and third year upper secondary school students and provides the teacher with a 10 lesson template for a podcasting module. It includes a teacher's manual for using the materials, tasks from introductory exercises to gradually producing one's own podcast and additional resources to be used within the module. The tasks have been designed with attention to learners' possible apprehension towards speaking a foreign language and aim to ease the anxiety learners associate with speaking English.

The material package is built with 4 main theories in mind and these theories are further illuminated in the following chapters. In chapter 2 I explain the relatively short history of podcasts as well as how they have been utilized in language learning in different ways. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the different aspects of speaking skills, namely fluency, intelligibility, interpretability and comprehensibility. In chapter 4 I tackle foreign language speaking anxiety, a common phenomenon in foreign language learners (Horwitz et al. 1986) while in chapter 5 I introduce the experiential learning theory as the base theory for the material package. Chapter 6 gives a comprehensive view on the aims, target group and assessment of the material package and draws connections between the presented theories and the tasks in the material package.

## 2 Podcasts and language learning

To understand how podcasts and language learning are connected one must first understand the concept of a podcast. To ensure this, I will first explain the definition of a podcast as well as present a rough division of different podcast types. I will then continue to present and give examples on how podcasts can be used to teach different aspects of language skills.

### 2.1 What is a podcast?

Although the word podcast entails much more than it did back when podcasts were invented, the essential idea remains the same. Podcasts are files, most often in audio form (Evans 2008, Kassaie, Shairi and Gashmardi 2021), that used to require subscription to be automatically downloaded to the users' respective devices. During the first decade of the 21st century when podcasts first rose to popularity, the subscription feature was the one thing to set them apart from manually downloadable audio files. However, over time this feature has become less prominent and today podcasts can be listened to on various platforms that do not necessarily require the listener to subscribe to the podcast. In a sense, the key factor to differentiate podcast from other types of audio files has become obsolete and the word podcast can refer to a variety of different media in an audio form.

The word podcast originates from the terms iPod, a now discontinued portable media player, and broadcast (Evans 2008). As mentioned above, in recent years, podcasts have evolved from mere audio files to include content from videos to pictures and hyperlinks (Rosell-Aquilar 2007). Since the range of different podcasts is quite wide, they have often been divided into three main categories based on their selected mediums. These are respectively audio, video and enhanced podcasts (Al Fadda and Al Qasim 2013) with audio podcasts being the most popular form (Dennett et al. 2008 in Al Fadda and Al Qasim 2013).

Besides the above-mentioned division of categories, podcasts can also be categorized as follows: podcasts that already exist, ones that are made explicitly for language learning purposes and both teacher and learner-generated podcasts (Rosell-Aquilar 2007). The already existing podcasts are what one would call authentic materials, which means that they were created by target language speakers for target language speakers. These are often the type of podcast chosen for language teaching purposes because they can be used as authentic materials for listening comprehension exercises. As opposed to podcasts utilized by teachers,

podcasts made specifically for language learning purposes are typically meant for listening independently. They can be targeted towards different ages from primary school to adult education and they usually deal with a certain and a highly limited topic that can be fitted into a short audio recording (Kassaie et al. 2021) and thus be more easily digestible for the learner.

In addition to authentic and language learning podcasts, podcasts can also be made by teachers as supplementary materials for a course. These usually include video recordings of lectures for learners who have been absent or who want to revise the contents of the lecture, short videos or audio recordings to explain a certain topic or to give verbal feedback in an audio form (Abdous et al. 2009). Teacher-generated podcasts differ from the stereotypical podcast in that they are often course-specific and not available to the public. Since the first appearance of podcasts, teachers have not only used them as readily available materials but also as projects for learners to produce their own podcasts, which is reflected in the field of research (see Phillips 2017, McLoughlin et al. 2006, Armstrong et al. 2009).

Learner-generated podcasts can be made as a part of a course but the course can also consist fully of making podcasts and listening to podcasts made by other learners. Recent examples of learner-generated podcasts as a part of a course can be found for instance in Phillips' (2017) article that introduces an English language podcasting module for bachelor students of healthcare. The students in the study were required to produce two different podcasts, one created with a group, the other individually. After completing their respective podcast assignments the participants were also asked to listen to their peers' podcasts and give feedback on them. McLoughlin et al. (2006) present a different way of utilizing learner-produced podcasts as they recruited university students studying information technology who had already completed the course in question to create and produce introductory podcast episodes that were used as course materials for their peers yet to study the course. As can be seen, podcasts have been used as tools in language learning consistently since their first appearance.

## 2.2 Podcast use in language learning

Podcasts provide an opportunity for learners to engage with the target language in a meaningful way both inside and outside the classroom (Saedakhtar, Haqju and Rouhi 2021). They bring the language closer to the learners' everyday life and are easily accessed in many

circumstances providing learners have access to smartphones or other portable media players. Compared to other materials used in the classroom, such as listening comprehension exercises provided by the textbook publisher or traditional exercise handouts, podcasts allow learners to take ownership of their own learning by choosing the topic, pace and setting where they listen to a podcast (Copley 2007 in Kassaie et al. 2021). Having the possibility to decide where and when to listen to the target language is often mentioned as one of the perks of using podcasts in language learning programs (Evans 2008).

Language learning is often divided into four categories, which are reading, writing, speaking and listening. Although none of the areas mentioned rise above the others in their importance, a majority of everyday communication requires understanding what is being said. Vandergrift and Goh (2012, 4), define listening comprehension as a skill that "enables language learners to receive and interact with language input and facilitates the emergence of other language skills". Out of the language skill categories, listening comprehension is the one most often linked to the use of podcasts since they are first and foremost still produced as audio files. Podcasts can provide learners with authentic materials and thus expose them to different ways of using the target language. This might explain why research conducted on podcasts mostly focuses on their effects on improving learners' listening comprehension skills.

For instance, the 12 university students learning French as a foreign language in the study by Kassaie et al. (2021) took part in a podcast-based language instruction intervention, which included both listening and speaking exercises related to the podcasts. During the intervention period of five weeks, the experimental group listened to a new podcast thrice in each class. They were then required to produce their own podcasts in which they answered a set of related questions at the end of each listening session. An earlier study on learner-generated podcasts' effect on learners' listening comprehension (Al Fadda and Al Qasim 2013) describes a relatively similar manner of approach. The 25 English major university students in the experimental group received weekly podcasts on their respective devices and were also encouraged to create their own podcast episodes to be listened to by their peers on the course. Regrettably, the focus of the majority of recent studies on podcasts and listening comprehension is on the effects, not the ways in which the podcasts have been used in the interventions, which results in a lack of examples of how podcasts could be used to improve learners' listening comprehension skills.



Listening comprehension is closely related to learners' vocabulary knowledge (Nation 2022) since understanding what is being said can be difficult if one does not know the words that have been uttered. Many linguists have contemplated on how many lexical items one should have in their linguistic repertoire to be able to use the language communicatively (Bueno-Alastuey and Nemeth 2022). Since communication includes both receptive and productive language skills, the amount seems to vary depending on whether the focus is on understanding language input or producing output (Nation 2022). Regardless of the needed amount, it is clear that vocabulary is necessary for communicating in a foreign language at any level. There are presumably as many ways of teaching and learning vocabulary as there are learners and not all tools work for everyone. That does not, however, mean that they should not be tried or that they do not have their place in vocabulary teaching.

One of these tools is a podcast. They can be used both receptively and productively when teaching vocabulary. Bueno-Alastuey and Nemeth (2022) describe a vocabulary intervention model in which the participants, who were 23 adults taking an English language course in an Official Language School in Spain, were given a list of words to familiarize themselves with after which they were required to come up with definitions for the words with the help of a text that mentioned the target words in context. The final task was to produce a short podcast presenting the students' own opinions on the text they used to study the words. Bueno-Alastuey and Nemeth's (2022) study shows one example of productive podcast use related to learning vocabulary. Another example of using podcasts is to have learners record dialogues using the target words or have them explain the meanings of the target words on a recording (Gholami and Mohammadi 2015). Vocabulary can also be taught by utilizing the receptive side of podcasts, for instance by giving learners a list of words and having them listen to a podcast that includes definitions for those words. To add some physical activity, learners could also be asked to stand up or raise their hand when they hear any of the target words in a podcast listened to in class. As can be seen from these examples, podcasts are not only a way to introduce new and unfamiliar words to the learners but a way to interact with and use the newly learned words

## 3 Speaking skills

To be able to discuss how podcasts can affect one's speaking skills, it is essential to determine what is meant by speaking skills. Speaking skills as a whole consist of numerous different factors, all of which cannot be discussed in the framework of this thesis. Therefore, in the following sections I will highlight the few concepts deemed important for the understanding of the term. First, I will define the concept of fluency as it is understood within the confines of this thesis. I will then briefly present and define the related concepts of intelligibility, interpretability and comprehensibility and argue for their relevance concerning the material package. Lastly, having introduced the general aspects of speaking skills the material package will focus on, I will give examples of how podcasts have been used to teach speaking in a foreign language.

### 3.1 Fluency

The etymological roots of the word fluency lie in Latin, as it is derived from the word *fluere*, meaning fluid (Logan 2019). This might already offer some insight into what is meant by fluency. Regardless, fluency is a concept that has proven difficult to define and researchers have offered their respective definitions without necessarily arriving at a shared understanding of what fluency means or the different factors that it is comprised of (see e.g. Riggensbach 2000). Whether fluency is "a performance phenomenon" (Lennon 1990, 391), a sum of different temporal factors as hypothesized by Möhle (1984 in Lennon 1990) or the listener's perception of the understandability of the produced speech (Götz 2013), depends on the situation and the lens fluency is viewed through. However, according to Chambers (1997), the main features of any fluent performance seem to be speed and effortlessness, which are reflected in the following definitions.

To understand the concept of fluency better, it is often separated into categories that emphasize the different aspects of the term. The most influential of these categorizations is Lennon's (1990) theory of broad and narrow fluency or as later renamed to high-order and lower-order fluency (Lennon 2000 in Lintunen, Mutta and Peltonen 2020). High-order fluency refers to fluency as a way to describe a person's overall oral proficiency in a certain language, whereas lower-order fluency narrows the focus on smaller aspects that contribute to one's oral proficiency (Lintunen et al. 2020). Lennon (1990) also states that instead of the

produced speech itself, fluency refers to the action of speaking and the processes that precede it, which improve with practice and exposure to the target language (Shin 1989 in Lennon 1990). With this material package in mind the definition of high-order fluency is more relevant, as the module will use English as a tool for creating a podcast instead of the language being the sole focus of learning.

Another categorization of fluency is presented by Götz (2013), as she divides fluency into three categories of productive fluency, perceptive fluency and non-verbal fluency, all of which are composed of different factors of speech. In the context of this thesis, only the concept of productive fluency will be taken into account, as Götz's definition for perceptive fluency closely resembles those of intelligibility and comprehensibility as proposed by Munro and Derwing (1995a, 1997) in section 3.2, and non-verbal fluency refers to aspects that cannot be transmitted through a podcast and thus, not relevant for this thesis.

As mentioned above, fluency is said to consist of different temporal aspects that affect the performance of speaking. Götz's (2013) definition of productive fluency leans towards this perception, listing aspects such as the speech rate, the mean length of runs and the amount and frequency of pauses made by the speaker as the different features that make up fluency. In practice these features can be observed as the speaker "pausing less often and pausing at the appropriate junctures in an utterance" (Chambers 1997, 540). Pausing less often will automatically affect the mean length of runs, that is the average length of an utterance between pauses, produced by the speaker, which will make the speaker appear more fluent (Götz 2013).

However, as much as researchers have tried and succeeded in identifying the different features that contribute to one's fluency, it appears that it is the "frequency and distribution of such features rather than their presence versus absence" that truly make a speaker fluent (Lennon 1990, 393), which is the definition used in this thesis.

### 3.2 Intelligibility, interpretability and comprehensibility

Having established the definition for fluency in this thesis, it is imperative to look at the concepts that are often discussed in close relation to fluency. These are the notions of intelligibility, interpretability and comprehensibility, which describe the different aspects of understanding orally produced language in communicative situations.

Munro and Derwing (1995a, 76) define intelligibility as "the extent to which a speaker's message is actually understood by a listener". In other words, intelligibility places emphasis on the listener, instead of the person speaking. Another concept that emphasizes the listener is that of interpretability, which similar to intelligibility consists of the listener understanding the purpose or meaning conveyed by the speaker (Kachru and Smith 2008 in Nelson 2011). The last concept, comprehensibility, differs slightly from the other two as it does not focus on the meaning of the utterance but the perceived difficulty of understanding on the listener's part (Munro and Derwing 1997, Munro and Derwing 1995b).

However, as the aim of this material package is to offer learners practice in their speaking skills, the question of relevance for these concepts arises. If the purpose is to practice the production of language, why focus on the receptive aspect of communication? As mentioned in section 2.2, listening is a skill that provides the basis for the other language skills (Vandergrift and Goh 2012). Therefore, listening to different models of speaking, such as podcasts or the utterances produced by one's peers can give learners examples of what is and what is not intelligible or comprehensible speech. Comparing these models to the recordings of one's own voice, as is done in this podcasting module, can help learners identify the parts of their own speech that still require more practice (Rosell-Aguilar 2007).

Nonetheless, defining the aspects of speech that contribute to intelligibility and comprehensibility has proven to be a difficult task and a clear list does not exist. For example, Munro and Derwing (1995a) could not arrive at a clear consensus on the specific errors that affect the intelligibility of one's speech. Furthermore, as Albrechtsen (1980 in Munro and Derwing 1995a) pointed out, the type of errors a speaker makes does not matter as much as the frequency of errors when discussing intelligibility. The aspect of practicing repeatedly is again of importance here, as frequent practice can decrease the amount of mistakes made, diminish anxiety caused by speaking in a foreign language and make learners more sure of themselves when speaking.

As the old saying goes, practice makes perfect. Considering this, the way in which foreign languages, especially English, are taught in the Finnish school system can emphasize other language skills over oral practice. A majority of the 6 mandatory and 2 voluntary national English modules in upper secondary school mention interaction as one of the objectives of the module whereas only a handful specify oral practice in these objectives (LOPS 2019). Although schools and teachers have a relative freedom to modify the ways in which the objectives are met, the amount of oral practice can, in some cases, be undervalued.

To remedy the possible lack of oral practice, this voluntary podcasting module will provide learners with the opportunity to use the target language in various different ways. Although the module does not target any one specific aspect of speaking skills, the approach to use the language as a tool in order to create the end product causes learners to practice their speaking comprehensively, which consecutively leads to them being more familiar with the language and thus, increases their fluency and certainty of speaking.

### 3.3 Using podcasts to practice speaking

As with other aspects of language skills, podcasts can be used to teach speaking skills but the way in which they are utilized varies. Podcasts offer learners a variety of authentic input and the process of making a podcast allows them to produce output.

Possible ways to use podcasts for teaching speaking include for example debates, audio essays, recorded story hours, presentations and reports (Sze 2006). These could be mere audio files or include visual material, depending on the purpose of the podcast. For example, debates or presentations might benefit from being in video form to provide the audience with additional information. Bigger podcast projects such as these follow Lennon's (2000 in Lintunen et al. 2020) theory of high-order fluency and target speaking skills from a wider perspective of overall oral proficiency gained with extensive practice instead of focusing on a certain aspect of speaking. This is also reflected in the material package as it is a project based module.

However, podcasts can also be used to teach more limited aspects of speaking skills, such as pronunciation (Fouz-González 2019). For instance, when learners create their own podcasts they are often asked to evaluate and give feedback to each other on certain aspects of the podcast, be that pronunciation, grammar, or fluency. Focusing on the output of others might make the learners more perceptible to similar aspects of their own output and if given the opportunity to revise and re-record their podcast, learners might improve in their speaking skills (Fouz-González 2019). Furthermore, according to Yeh et al. (2021), the process of podcast creation improves the learners' speaking fluency although the gains can be marginal depending on the learner. The metacognitive skills required in making a podcast and giving peer feedback on others' podcasts help learners' pay attention to their own work and the aspects of it that need improving (Yeh et al. 2021).

## 4 Language and anxiety

Since speaking in a foreign language tends to cause anxiety in many learners, it should be taken into account in the planning of a fully oral language module. In the following sections I will introduce the concept of foreign language anxiety and the aspects it consists of. I will then deepen the focus on foreign language speaking anxiety as the aim of the material package is to provide learners with comprehensive speaking practice during the module. Lastly, I will discuss the different views that researchers have shared on how using podcasts might affect learners' language related anxiety.

### 4.1 Foreign language anxiety

According to Horwitz et al. (1986, 125) anxiety is defined as 'the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system'. They elaborate that anxiety can be divided into general anxiety and situational anxiety or specific anxiety reactions. The difference between these categories lies within the words general and specific. Where general anxiety exists and can be experienced by a person regardless of the situation, specific anxiety reactions are restricted to certain situations that trigger them (Horwitz et al. 1986). Drawing from this separation of definitions, foreign language anxiety and specifically speaking anxiety belong to the latter category.

Horwitz et al. (1986) state that foreign language anxiety is closely related to communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. They explain how communication apprehension takes place in situations where one is required to communicate with other people. Therefore, it is not surprising that using a foreign language might evoke feelings of apprehension if a person is prone to shyness in communicative situations. Test anxiety refers to the worry and apprehension experienced in situations where one's performance is being evaluated (Horwitz et al. 1986). As a traditional classroom setting for studying a foreign language often includes word tests and quizzes in addition to the usual exams, test anxiety tends to be present in causing foreign language anxiety. The last related theory, fear of negative evaluation covers a broader range of situations compared to test anxiety. In a foreign language classroom, the constant assessment of one's command of the language on part of the teacher but also one's peers can induce the fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al. 1986). The above-mentioned performance anxieties are all present in forming

the theoretical basis for foreign language anxiety and its subcategory foreign language speaking anxiety.

## 4.2 Foreign language speaking anxiety

Horwitz et al. (1986) state that foreign language anxiety seems to center around listening and speaking. Since language teaching currently emphasizes the communicative aspects of the language, learners who suffer from foreign language anxiety might experience difficulties in their language classes, especially concerning oral exercises (ibid.). Foreign language speaking anxiety consists of several different factors that have been widely studied.

Research on the deeper reasons behind foreign language speaking anxiety reveals several factors that might be the cause of learners' anxiety reactions. Horwitz et al. (1986) mention the fear of not understanding others as one of the reasons. They describe how anxious learners tend to fear that they do not understand the teacher or their peers. This is mirrored from the point of view of teachers in Yildiz's (2021) study where the 8 non-native university teachers from different universities, who used English as the medium of instruction, reported feeling anxious due to not understanding what their students were saying. The fear of not understanding others is a significant factor in causing foreign language speaking anxiety but it is certainly not the only one.

According to Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022), inadequate vocabulary and fear of being misunderstood were among the biggest reasons for learners' apprehension towards speaking the target language. The study was conducted in an Algerian university with 16 students, half of whom were first year undergraduates and the other half third year undergraduates. The participants in their study were concerned of not being able to express themselves due to a lacking vocabulary, which could lead to misunderstandings. They felt that speaking was a way to show one's personality and not possessing the skills to express their opinions negatively affected the image they presented to others. This led to the students feeling anxious about speaking out loud. These findings concur with Horwitz et al. (1986), who state that revealing oneself to other people by speaking one's views is connected to feeling self-conscious and anxious.

The fear of being misunderstood is closely related to the fear of negative evaluation discussed in section 4.1. If one feels they are not able to bring their point across or are misunderstood, they might also feel judged by their peers or the teacher. Although in reality

they might not be judged, the fear of such situations might keep learners from even trying to speak in the target language as a way to avoid anxiety inducing situations.

### 4.3 Podcasts and language anxiety

The use of podcasts in language learning in recent years has generated opposing views on their usefulness and functionality. The large body of research on podcasts includes various different views and research methods and the results are not always in accordance with each other. Although many studies suggest that learners have benefited from the use of podcasts, Saeedakhtar et al. (2021) emphasize Phillips' (2017) counsel on not taking any study at face value.

According to Phillips (2017), the main critique of using podcasts relates to anxiety that stems from the novelty of the medium. This critique can be supported by Daly's (1991) hypothesis on how the novelty of the situation affects the level of anxiety experienced by the learners. Although podcasts as a medium have been around for a while now, learners are not automatically familiar with them. This unfamiliarity might result in apprehension towards podcasting tasks (Phillips 2017, Saeedakhtar et al. 2021). Moreover, drawing from the notion of apprehension caused by the novelty of the situation, the topics chosen can affect the level of anxiety in learners. When learners are put to the task of creating their own podcasts, the teacher should first familiarize them with the medium with less challenging introductory tasks and provide necessary training. This will ensure that the creating process does not face an immediate resistance due to the learners' lack of knowledge or understanding of the process (Saeedakhtar et al. 2021). The material package has been created with this in mind. To reduce the anxiety experienced by learners, they are given a rather free range with their choice of topic. Thus, they get to work with a familiar subject matter. Furthermore, the material package is divided into two sections, the first of which focuses on introducing podcasts as a medium before proceeding to the creation of learners' own podcast episodes.

The novelty of podcasts is not the only possible factor making learners feel anxious. The creation process of a podcast requires learners to listen to their own voice, which might make them feel self-conscious (Phillips 2017). In addition, sharing a podcast learners have created themselves might generate feelings of vulnerability and shyness (Bueno-Alastuey and Nemeth 2022). A sudden requirement of oral production might also cause the learners to feel anxious or apprehensive about the task and by extension towards speaking the target



language altogether (Harmer 2001 in Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi 2022). To avoid this, the module allows the learners to practice with simpler and less productive tasks before moving on to more creative and productive aspects of making a podcast.

The above-mentioned factors support the critique on using podcasts in language teaching and there is no question they should not be taken into account when designing a podcasting module as they offer helpful guidelines on what to avoid. However, podcasts offer different ways to relieve learners' foreign language anxiety. In contrast to a traditional language classroom, a productive podcasting module allows for a more casual environment for the learners to use the language. While producing a podcast, learners need to complete several different steps of action, each of which builds on the previous tasks and provides a different type of practice in using the target language. Writing a script and practicing the delivery of the script is one of those steps and it gives learners time to prepare themselves for the speaking situation beforehand (Phillips 2017, Armstrong et al. 2009). Having something concrete, such as a script to rely on in the speaking situation might also reduce learners' level of anxiety. In addition, making a recording allows for repetition and correction of pronunciation mistakes in the final product, which can lessen the anxiety otherwise caused by public speaking (Amorati et al. 2022).

Several studies support these claims. For example, Hamzaoğlu and Koçoğlu (2016) studied whether using podcasting as an instructional tool would reduce Turkish EFL learners' speaking anxiety. The 30 participants were divided into an experimental group and a control group with 15 students in each group. Many of the 15 ninth-grade elementary level students in the experimental group admitted to having less anxiety about speaking English aloud in the classroom after having created podcasts during the course. The podcasts in question were created at home where the students could feel at ease and not worry about anyone hearing them speak, which decreased the amount of speaking-related anxiety. These results are mirrored in a study by Amorati et al. (2022) in which they examined how project-based podcasting affects learners' linguistic skills. The 24 participants, who were university students studying different majors in an Australian university, mentioned rehearsals in the recording studio as well as at home to be influential factors in feeling more confident about their speaking skills.

## 5 Experiential learning

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (LOPS 2019) states that its foundations lie within a learning conception that draws from the constructivist idea of building knowledge on previously existing knowledge via active participation and experiences. This material package adheres to The National Core Curriculum and thus, relies heavily on the theory of experiential learning (ELT) introduced by Kolb (1984). To understand how the material package draws from ELT, I will first introduce the basics of the theory. I will then give examples on how experiential learning and the experiential learning cycle are present in this material package and briefly present the relevance of the package in relation to The National Core Curriculum.

### 5.1 Experiential learning theory and podcasts

In essence, experiential learning can be described as a way of learning in which the learner is in concrete contact with the subject they are studying instead of only reading about it (Keeton and Tate 1978 in Kolb 2014). ELT was formulated by Kolb but over the years, there have been many researchers who have had an impact on his work. According to Kolb (2014) the work of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget have influenced ELT as it is known today the most, which is why in this section I will briefly introduce the main elements of their work and how they are visible in ELT today.

As Kolb and Kolb (2017) state, Dewey's view of education and learning as something that should not be done in pursuit of a future life but as something that is constantly present influenced the framework of ELT. In addition, Dewey (1879 in Kolb and Kolb 2017) emphasizes that experiences function as guides for subsequent reflection of the experience, which will, in turn affect the following experiences. This view is clearly visible in Kolb's (1984) theory of the experiential learning cycle discussed in more detail below.

Lewin was the founder of the t-group research method in which learning experiences are discussed in a group of observers and the people being observed (Kolb and Kolb 2017). Similar to Dewey's view, this method begins with an experience, which is then reflected on through discussion. The data collected from the discussion will form a new foundation for the following experiences. Thus, the Lewinian model is a continuous circle of experiencing and learning through feedback (Kolb 2014). The experiential learning cycle relies heavily on the

Lewinian model, as it consists of four similar phases: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb and Kolb 2017).

The essence of Piaget's work relating to ELT lies within constructivism, as his theory of developmental psychology is one of the two fundamental constituents of constructivism (Driscoll 2000 in Szabó and Csépes 2022, Kaufman 2004) and constructivism played a great role in forming ELT (Kolb 2014). To put simply, constructivism could be defined as building knowledge based on one's previous experiences (Szabó and Csépes 2022), which is deeply present in the principles of ELT and the experiential learning cycle.

## 5.2 Making a podcast - a learning experience

As Atkinson (2006 in Armstrong et al. 2009) states, instead of learning from podcasts, the rising trend appears to be learning via the creation process of podcasts. For example, Armstrong et al. (2009) and McLoughlin et al. (2006) support the argument for creating a podcasting module in which learners have a notable degree of autonomy over their learning and can be viewed as the knowledge constructors. Armstrong et al. (2009) list several skills that are improved during the process of producing a podcast, communication, teamwork and organization being amongst them. They echo the view that teamwork and active participation in project creation have proved to be beneficial pedagogical approaches, which is also reflected in The National Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (LOPS 2019).

In making a podcast, learners are required to provide information on their chosen topic, which means they are actively participating in searching for and creating knowledge as well as producing texts in different formats (Yeh et al. 2021), which are objectives listed in the mandatory English modules (LOPS 2019). From a constructivist view, the creation process allows the learners to produce authentic material that is meaningful to them (Amorati et al. 2022) and by doing so, they can create new knowledge based on their previous understanding of the subject. Project-based-learning that relies on the principles of ELT teaches learners skills needed in working life. In the next section I will take a closer look at the ways in which ELT actualizes in the material package.

## 6 The framework of the material package

This material package provides the teacher with a template of 10 lessons that can be used either to form a full module as they are or as supplementary materials for the ENA3 English module that focuses on language and culture as tools for creativity. During the module students will be introduced to podcasts as a medium, different types of podcasts and the conventions that separate them. These introductory lessons and tasks build the basis for the students to create and produce their own podcasts. The length of one upper secondary school module in the new National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (LOPS 2019) is determined by how many credits it is worth (Finnish National Agency for Education). As the majority of modules are worth two credits and one credit equals 19 x 45 minutes, an average module consists of 22,8 x 75 minute lessons (ibid.). In the framework of this thesis, the creation of a full upper secondary school module was not feasible, which is why this material package provides only a template to be used in the upper secondary school context. The 10 lesson plans in the module have been created with different levels of detail with the first 5 lessons being the most detailed ones. From the sixth lesson onwards the lesson plans include a rough outline of the lesson to allow the students to work on their podcast with a flexible schedule. In the following sections I will describe the overarching aim of the material package, define the target group, give examples on the types of tasks included and explain the criteria for the assessment of the module.

### 6.1 The aim of the material package

Oral skills are one of the features of English language skills that are evaluated in upper secondary school with a specific module dedicated to teaching oral skills (LOPS 2019). Although the ENA8 module is voluntary, many learners choose to take it since the grade of the oral exam taken at the end of the module serves as a certificate of one's oral proficiency in English (LOPS 2019). However, as the amount of English that learners get to use in communicative situations can vary greatly, some might feel inadequate in their oral skills and wish for more practice before the official oral skills module. This material package aims to provide learners with that extra practice in their oral skills and to lessen the anxiety caused by speaking English.

The podcasting module consists of two major sections, first of which is dedicated to introducing the concept and genre of podcasts as well as the function of the medium. The second section focuses on the actual process of creating and producing a podcast episode. This process includes not only the planning and execution stage but also receiving feedback and improving on the final product based on the received feedback. The whole module has been created with ELT and the experiential learning cycle in mind and its different aspects can be seen in each state of the podcast production process.

The idea of gradually introducing the main concept of the module, podcasts, draws from the theory of constructivist pedagogy, in which learners construct new knowledge based on previous experiences and already existing knowledge (Kolb 2014). Some of the learners might not be familiar with podcasts previous to taking the module, which is why instead of immediately diving into the creation process, the module begins with simpler tasks that draw on more general information about podcasts as a genre. Thus, if the module were to be compared to the experiential learning cycle, the first section begins with reflective observation and abstract conceptualization that build the base for future experiences.

The second section of the module relies on experiencing and learning through feedback. When creating podcasts that are available to their peers, as in this module, learners receive feedback on their work and can improve on it based on the feedback. The creation process illustrates the concrete experience, whereas listening to and giving feedback on the first draft of the podcast episode quite literally represents the observations and reflections in the experiential learning cycle. The final stage of the learning cycle, active experimentation in new situations, can be seen in practice when the learners revise their podcast episode according to the received feedback.

The experiential learning cycle is also visible in the values mentioned in the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (LOPS 2019). According to the National Core Curriculum (LOPS 2019), the current conception of learning sees learning as the product of students' active participation in the educational activity. Teamwork, learning from and with one's peers and participating in different projects are also emphasized to be an important part of learning (ibid.), which is actualized in the material package as most of the tasks require working in a group to achieve a common goal. Moreover, the National Core Curriculum (LOPS 2019) encourages teachers to link the learning material to the students' own experiences and current events. In the material package, this is seen for example in the choice of podcast topics, which should derive from the students' own interests.

The above-mentioned collaborative skills are listed among the transversal competencies ingrained in all upper secondary school subjects. Another such competency is digital multiliteracy (ibid.), which can be interpreted in different ways. In regard to this material package, digital multiliteracy can be explained as the skill to comprehend and produce different digital texts. The module introduces the students not only to podcasts in audio form but to all the different texts closely related to the creation process of podcasts, such as scripts and catchphrases but also the visual branding of a podcast. Thus, as can be seen from these examples, the material package is built on the foundation of the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education in several ways.

As mentioned above, the way in which teachers choose to use the material package depends on whether they want to use it as a template for a voluntary English module or if they deem the tasks better suited to be used as supplementary materials for the ENA3 module. The principal goal of this material package is learning about and creating podcasts and thus, it is expected that the creation process will take its time. This should be taken into account when deciding on the ways in which to use the materials.

## 6.2 Target group

The material package is targeted towards second and third year upper secondary school students as it is inspired by the goals of the English modules ENA3 and ENA8, which are typically studied during the second and third years of upper secondary school. However, the material package could also be utilized in tertiary or adult education with some modifications. The tasks and lesson plans include finished materials and slide shows, which provide the basic structure for free modification if needed. The module is planned with English as the language of conduct but it could be modified to fit other languages as well. While the module itself is meant for the students, the website containing the lesson plans and materials is aimed primarily for the teachers as they are the ones teaching the contents of the module. In this case, the target group is both the upper secondary school students as well as their teachers.

Little research exists on the use of podcasts in secondary education and even less in primary education. As many of the case studies concerning podcasts and their use in language learning have been executed in tertiary level education, that is, in universities and universities of applied sciences, one might question the choice of the target group. Regardless of the context in which podcast use has previously been studied, researchers have listed several

benefits of using podcasts in language learning. Learning to listen to different ways of speaking the target language (Saeedakhtar et al. 2021), getting used to speaking in the target language (Hamzaoglu and Koçoğlu 2016, Yeh et al. 2021), using more complicated structures (Kassaie et al. 2021) and increasing one's vocabulary (Mashhadi, Hayati and Jalilifar 2016, Kargozari and Zarinkamar 2014, Bueno-Alastuey and Nemeth 2022) can be counted among these. With a few adjustments into the ways in which podcasts are used, they can be as beneficial in secondary education as in tertiary education.

## 6.3 Example tasks

The module consists of 10 lesson plans that each include a lesson plan with task explanations and links to the needed materials and slides. As I have mentioned above, the tasks move from introductory and teacher-led tasks to students working independently on their own podcasts. Each activity within a lesson is named a task regardless of whether the students are solving a task or whether the teacher is introducing a new topic with the help of a slideshow. In this section I will give examples on the types of tasks included in the material package and draw connections between the theoretical background and the tasks. The tasks containing slideshows are not included in the examples as they place the students into a more passive role and the goal of these example tasks is to describe the different ways the tasks engage the students. The tasks have been divided into 5 categories, which are warm-up tasks, introductory tasks, group discussion tasks, speaking practice tasks and project work tasks.

### 6.3.1 Warm-up tasks

The first category of tasks is called warm-up tasks as these are mainly situated in the beginnings of different lessons to help the students change into a creative mindset for the lesson. Each warm-up task has been chosen with the lesson's goals in mind and the aim is to awaken and use the skills needed in the following tasks. Having warm-up tasks serves as a way to honour the students' individual relationships with creativity. In addition, a slow introduction to each lesson's theme can alleviate the possible anxiety the students might otherwise feel when faced with a new situation. In the following sections I will describe two of the warm-up tasks found in the material package. The first one is more general in nature and it is included in almost each lesson whereas the second is more specific to its lesson's themes.

## Lessons 2-10: Vibe Check



Figure 1. An example of the picture grid used in the Vibe Check task.

From the second lesson onwards each lesson begins with a Vibe Check task. It is a simple yet effective way for the teacher to see how the students are feeling that day. The task includes a grid of 9 pictures depicting different emotions (see Figure 1) from which the students choose the one that describes their feelings the most. The images in Figure 1 are only an example of the kind of pictures that could be used. The teacher has the freedom to modify the images as they wish. This could be done, for example, by choosing a different theme for each lesson. The task itself takes only a few minutes.

Present in all lessons excluding the first one, this warm-up task creates a certain routine for the module, which in turn builds a familiar and safe environment for the students. The simple nature of the task requires the students to recognise and share their emotions but they are not obligated to elaborate further or give reasons if they do not wish to do so. Since creating podcasts is a highly creative activity in nature, being more in tune with one's emotions can help the students to feel more creative or understand why they do not feel as creative on certain days. This approach to the creative process aims to show the students that it is safe to have and show emotions and that they can be useful for creating. Furthermore, building a safe environment is in line with the goal of making the students feel at ease with speaking in English and thus, alleviating the anxiety related to speaking in a foreign language.



## Lesson 4: Mirror Drawing

The fourth lesson begins with a Vibe Check task, which is followed by a more specific introduction to the theme of the lesson: visuals. Until lesson 4, the module has focused more on the auditive side of podcasts and thus, it is important to begin the lesson on visuals with a warm-up task. In the Mirror Drawing task the students will first write their name with both hands at the same time. The right hand writes normally while the left writes from right to left as the mirror image of the student's name. After this, the students are asked to draw a picture of themselves in the same way beginning from the middle of their face so that the right hand draws the right side of their face and the left hand draws the left side of their face. Students are given a time restraint of 8 minutes. After the task students can share their drawing with a partner if they want to and answer some self-reflection questions by discussing with a partner.

As mentioned above, lesson 4 focuses on the visual side of making a podcast, which is important in creating a brand around the product. Students are required to think about the visuals of their podcast relatively early on as envisioning the brand is helpful in inventing the goal for the podcast episode they will record and edit later. However, thinking visually can be more difficult for some people than others, which is why the lesson begins with a mirror drawing task that allows the students to exercise their visual thinking without any requirement of a perfectly finished drawing. In fact, the time restraint of the task is chosen in order to limit the students' need to produce a perfect product. The task is meant to challenge the students' command of their hand-to-eye coordination enough that they forget to worry about the end result. As with the previous warm-up task, the nature of this task aims to eliminate the anxiety factor that can sometimes be linked to creative activities.

### 6.3.2 Introductory tasks

Warm-up tasks and introductory tasks can usually be counted under the same category. However, within this module, the warm-up tasks act more as a way to awaken the students' creativity whereas the introductory tasks already include material that is relevant and important for the project learning. In a way, the introductory tasks already aim to further the learning of a certain topic instead of merely rousing the students' energy. The following tasks are placed in the beginning of the module as the first two lessons focus more on familiarizing the students with podcasts as a genre and medium and thus, require more introductory tasks.

## Lesson 1: Types of Podcasts

One of the first tasks in the first lesson is the Types of Podcast task in which the students need to match different podcast type descriptions to podcast types. These podcast types form the selection from which the students can later choose what type of podcast they want to make. In the task the students work in pairs. Each pair is given two stacks of cards. One stack has the names of different podcast types on them while the other stack has descriptions for the podcast types. The students are asked to match the podcast type to its description. After matching the types and descriptions the task students discuss which type of podcast they'd be most interested in making and why. On the Path to Podcasting website there is a suggestion for how the task could be modified:

*“The task could be improved further by introducing descriptions of actual podcasts and students would have to place them in the correct category based on the description. These descriptions could also be the same ones that are used in the next lesson. In the listening task there are 5 podcasts, here the task requires 7 but not all of them would be used in the listening task.”*

This task follows the principle of familiarizing the students with the new topic before requiring them to actively produce material themselves and is in line with the suggestions made by Phillips (2017). Having the students engage in introductory tasks removes the novelty of the topic and lowers the threshold for active participation later on.

## Lesson 2: Rate the Podcasts

In the Rate the Podcasts task the students work in small groups. Each group is given a link to 5 short audio samples of different podcasts as well as written descriptions of the podcasts. The students need to organize the samples in order from best to worst. After the groups have the samples in their selected order they are asked to present them to another group and give explanations for why they chose this particular order.

It is noteworthy to mention that there are no right or wrong answers. Rather, the goal is to make the students think about their reasoning and see if other people share their way of thinking. If for example, there are similarities between the two groups' sample orders, it might give an indication as to there being certain aspects of that podcast that are considered to be a mark of good quality. As an introductory task, this task aims to guide the students' attention towards the building blocks of a functional podcast, which is information they will need to draw from in later tasks and during the creation process. Thus, the Rate the Podcast

task requires the students to form abstract concepts from the learning material that they will need going forwards, which links the task to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle.

### 6.3.3 Group discussion tasks

Many of the lessons include different types of group discussion tasks. The prompts for discussion vary depending on the topic but otherwise they follow a similar pattern, which is to compare, formulate or share ideas either in pairs or groups. For this reason, I have included only one example task in this category.

#### Lesson 3: List of Topics

Lesson 3 is dedicated to forming topics for the podcasts. Since the overarching theme for all podcasts created during the module is culture, the task requires the students to make a mind-map about the theme of culture, more specifically about the question: What comes to mind when you see/hear the word culture? After the mind-maps are completed, the students will share them with the class and the teacher constructs a list of different topics picked from the mind-maps. This will be the list from which the podcast topics are chosen.

The group discussion tasks in the material package often work as preparatory tasks for other tasks as is the case with the List of Topics task. In addition to specific speaking practice tasks, the group discussion tasks allow the students to use the language as a tool for communication in a meaningful way. The way they use the language is not under evaluation, which can alleviate the anxiety that can be caused by the requirement to speak in a foreign language. Here, English functions as a means to come up with the actual substance of the task, the topic for each podcast. Moreover, as Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle depicts, learners use the abstract conceptualizations formed through reflection on previous experiences as the basis for future experiences. In this regard, the List of Topics tasks follows the experiential learning cycle accurately as the students need to reflect on their previous experiences concerning culture and form understandable concepts for their mind-maps that can be then used to choose the topics for their podcasts.

### 6.3.4 Speaking practice tasks

The whole module targets the students' speaking skills, although from a wider theoretical perspective instead of focusing on certain parts of oral skills as explained in sections 3.1 and 3.2. The speaking practice tasks are created to especially complement the aims of the module, one of which is to create a functioning podcast episode. Linking the speaking practice tasks firmly to the project goal aims to lower their level of intimidation. The next sections describe two different speaking practice tasks from the module shortly.

#### Lesson 2: Engage with the Audience

From the audience's perspective, it is important that podcasts are interesting and engaging. However, since podcasts are usually in audio form, the listeners cannot see the hosts' faces, their expressions or gestures. In the Engage with the Audience task the students are given an opportunity to practice different ways of engaging their listeners without the help of typical visual cues.

The students work in groups of 3. Each person in the group comes up with a short anecdote related to their own life. It is emphasized that the anecdote should be something the students feel at ease to share with the rest of the group. If they feel anxious about coming up with a personal anecdote, there is a list of prompts that they can choose from and the anecdote does not need to be about themselves. Students are allowed to write the anecdote down in short sentences.

Each group is given a list of tips that help to engage with the audience even when the audience cannot see the person speaking. After writing the anecdotes the students take turns to tell their story to their groups. The student telling the anecdote is facing away from the audience. The story is told 3 times, first in the most boring way possible after which the other people in the group will choose one suggestion from the list of actions and the one telling the story will have to tell the anecdote again and try to incorporate the new action to make the story more engaging and compelling.

The main goal of the task is to practice public speaking as it is a skill needed in making podcasts. To match the directive of the module, the student telling the story faces away from their audience, which helps in simulating a podcast recording situation. In addition, this aspect of the tasks exist to make the task less anxiety inducing as the person speaking does not need to see the people listening to them. The intention behind telling the first version in the most boring way is to create space between the story and the storyteller

and to direct the following suggestions and tips towards the ways in which stories can be told rather than towards the person or their personal anecdote. Moreover, these specific tips to make the story more engaging takes the pressure off from the audience as they do not need to analyze the performance of their peers but can choose from a ready-made list.

### Lesson 5: Recording Task

During lesson 5, students are familiarized with the different platforms they are going to use in recording and editing their podcast episodes. The lesson consists of tasks that allow the students to learn how to use these platforms without the requirement to produce a properly finished podcast episode yet. The recording task follows an instructional slideshow given by the teacher, meaning that the students already know the fundamentals of working with the chosen platform. The directive of the task is for the students to interview each person in their group or pair in such a way that each person has the chance to both be the interviewer and the interviewee. To help with the interview, the students are given 10 interview questions they can use and there is a time restriction of 20 minutes to record all of the interviews. The time should be divided equally depending on whether the students are working in a group or with a partner. The instructions additionally remind the students that it is acceptable to have more than one take per person as this task simulates the actual recording situation in which several takes are also accepted.

As with the previous Engage with the Audience speaking practice task, the Recording Task attempts to eliminate possible anxiety related to speaking in a foreign language. It does this by giving the students time and resources to practice public speaking in the target language without the, for a lack of a better word, threat of being evaluated based on their language output. Furthermore, in the Recording Task the students can already learn how to use the recording platform needed later with the knowledge that these recordings are for their own benefit. This follows the principle of gradually moving to more and more active and independent tasks as the module advances.

### 6.3.5 Project work tasks

As almost half of the lessons in the module focus on the project work of creating a podcast, I find it important to showcase some examples of the tasks that the students work on more independently and on their own schedule. The above-mentioned warm-up and introductory

tasks together with the group discussion and speaking practice tasks have prepared the students for taking responsibility for their work in the latter section of the module. Nevertheless, the project work focused lessons do still include teacher-led tasks with slideshows that set the pace for the project and preface each independent task. Since creating a podcast is one of the main goals of the material package, I have chosen to describe two different tasks from various stages of the process in the following sections.

#### Lesson 4: Logo and/or Catchphrase

Podcasts that are published on a regular basis often have a logo or a catchphrase that makes the podcast memorable for the audience. In the aptly named Logo and/or Catchphrase task the students create a catchphrase or a logo for their podcast. They are allowed to choose whether they wish to create only the logo or the catchphrase but can also create both if they so wish. Regardless of the choice, the creations should reflect the topic the students have chosen for their podcast. The teacher provides the students with links to websites that could be used in the creation of the logos and catchphrases. Most of the websites use an AI program that can generate a complete logo or a catchphrase, which is why it should be emphasized that these websites are supposed to be used only as tools for inspiration.

Working on the visual side of the brand for the podcast takes the project on a different level as until this point everything relating to the students' own podcasts has been mostly theoretical. Thinking about what aspects of the podcast could be used in the logo or catchphrase can help in slowly formulating a more concrete idea for how the students want to approach their chosen topic. Creating the visuals is the first more concrete step towards a finished podcast episode and similarly the first step in the experiential learning cycle by Kolb (1984) is using previously formed abstract concepts in subsequent experiences.

#### Lesson 6: Writing the Script

One of the important preparatory steps in making a podcast is writing a script. Before the students begin the writing process, the teacher introduces the conventions of podcast scripts, which differ noticeably from movie scripts. Since each student is required to speak in the final podcast episode, the script should indicate clearly who is taking the lead in each section. The script can be as detailed as the students want it to be and there is no time restraint for this task. Whenever the students feel content with their script they can move on to rehearsing it with their group or pair.

The goal of making speaking in a foreign language less anxiety inducing is visible in many of the tasks in the material package and can be seen in the Writing the Script task as well. Podcast scripts have a relatively great amount of freedom in how they are constructed. Therefore, this task caters to the students' individual needs concerning public speaking and planning. Instead of having to invent everything spontaneously in the recording situation the students can plan what they are going to say in as much detail as they feel is necessary making the ultimate recording situation less new and thus, lessening the anxiety caused by new situations (Daly 1991). The scriptwriting stage is additionally a more concrete step in the process of working on a podcast, which is in accordance with the later stages of the experiential learning cycle, namely gaining new experiences (Kolb 1984).

## 6.4 Assessment

The overall assessment for the module draws from the goals of two existing upper secondary school English modules, ENA3 and ENA8 as well as the standardized language skill scale based on the Common European Frame of Reference (CEFR). Contrary to comprehensive schools where the assessment of students' language skills relies more on grades, the upper secondary school language evaluation utilizes the standardized language skill scale (Finnish National Agency for Education, LOPS 2019). Depending on whether the students have studied English as their A or B1 language, the target level of proficiency in the language at the end of upper secondary school is either B2.1 or B1.2 (LOPS 2019). As the material package is targeted towards upper secondary school students it follows that this module should likewise utilize the CEFR scale in its assessment.

The assessment of the material package is composed of several aspects. Since one of the main goals of the module is to have the students create and produce their own podcasts, the final podcast is emphasized in the assessment with 60% of the grade being dependent on how the final podcast episode fills the requirements set for it. These requirements include among others a clear structure, comprehensible language and being able to share the workload equally among the people working on the podcast. All of these requirements have been practiced repeatedly during the module. Another aspect present in the assessment is the students' overall participation in the module, which makes up 40% of the grade. As one of the main theories for the material package is the experiential learning cycle, which encourages the students' active participation in their learning, it is only fitting that participation be given value in the assessment of the module. When evaluating student

participation, the following requirements should be taken into account: giving space to others' opinions, being vocal about one's own ideas and being able to negotiate.

In addition to these two main aspects, the aims of the module guide the assessment process. The aims have been formulated by blending the aims of both ENA3 and ENA8 modules with the descriptions for the B2.1 standardized language skill level concerning communicating in the target language and they form the guidelines for the two main aspects of evaluation. It is advised that the teacher turn to the CEFR standardized language skill scale in assessing how the student has reached the aims.



## 7 Discussion

The metaphorical road of working on the material package was not without its complications. I had a clear vision of what I wanted to achieve with my master's thesis from the beginning but the vision derived more from my own interests than a solid theoretical background. This created some obstacles in the writing process as I was required to find enough evidence that it would be theoretically justifiable to create a podcasting module for upper secondary school students and I was fully prepared to change course if evidence had rendered the preliminary plan unviable.

The research on podcasts in language learning and teaching reflected slightly contradictory views on the topic depending on the angle from which the topic was approached. As podcasts can and have been used in foreign language teaching in various ways for different purposes, it is understandable that some research would yield results opposite to others. Moreover, much of the research on podcast use in foreign language teaching uses qualitative methods with modest sample sizes, which affects the generalizability of the results. The main takeaway however, seems to be that podcasts can be useful in foreign language teaching when enough attention is paid to the intricacies of their use instead of forcing them into the curriculum as the latest pedagogical fad.

With these implications in mind I wanted to create a module in which learning the specific aspects of the language would not be in the foreground. Rather, the focus would be on the lack of oral skills practice in upper secondary school English modules, the anxiety caused by speaking in a foreign language and the connection between these phenomena. The goal was to offer upper secondary school students the possibility to practice their speaking in a casual environment where the spotlight would not be on the students' language skills but on a creative project in which the foreign language functions as a tool.

Forming the theoretical background for the material package was a process of elimination as there were many pedagogical theories that could have applied to the module. Even now, having reached the end of the process I am certain that some theories could be perfected further but in the framework of this thesis I was required to select a few carefully chosen theories that would best apply to the material package.

The material package itself consists of two larger sections, which focus on different aspects of the podcasting project. Each section is complete with lesson plans that follow a carefully designed arch from introducing podcasts as a medium to producing actual podcasts. The materials used in the lessons have been designed to fit a wide selection of languages

although the current material package uses English as the language of conduct. Were the tasks to be utilized for a podcasting module in another language, the teacher would need to confirm the students' level in the language as the material package is aimed towards upper secondary school students with at least a B1 CEFR level in the language used in the material package. The tasks themselves use some contemporary podcasts as materials, which can render the material package slightly outdated in a few years time. This needs to be taken into account when using the material package and has been addressed in the Teacher's Manual. The teachers using the material package have the freedom to modify the tasks to fit the needs of their students in whichever way they choose to.

Linking the materials to their corresponding lessons proved to be more troublesome than expected as the platform chosen for the material package website did not allow creating links to specific blog posts. This manifests in the lesson material links leading to an archive of blog posts containing the materials for each lesson, a factor that renders the material package slightly less user friendly. Another limitation of the material package is its dependence on auditive media. As podcasts are inherently in audio form, with some exceptions, they automatically disregard students with hearing impairments. However, as this material package is designed to be used as a voluntary language module or supplementary materials, it can be assumed that students with such impairments would not voluntarily choose to partake in the module and when used as supplementary materials, the tasks are indeed that, supplementary or extra material.

Podcasts as a phenomenon are reaching the age of 20 in 2024. In other words, they have been around for a while now without many remarkable changes in their format. The technology and platforms used to record and edit podcasts have developed but podcasts themselves still follow roughly the same conventions as they did in the first decade of the 21st century when they were first created. This implies that although some of the materials used in this material package might become outdated due to the topics they concentrate on, the podcast format is unlikely to experience notable changes in the near future. If, however, some of the material needs to be updated due to the above-mentioned limitations, the website format of the material package enables the required changes to be made easily. The website also eases the distribution of the material package as it can be shared via the link to the website. The current distribution plan includes sharing the material package to social media groups used by English teachers nationwide. In addition, I will send the link to the material package with an introduction letter to a few English teachers I am previously familiar with.

Whether the teachers want to employ the material package in their teaching is left up to them. It should also be noted that the material package is designed with laptop users in mind and does not include a version compatible with mobile devices, such as smartphones or tablets.

Regardless of the limitations listed above, the material package recognizes the usability of podcasts in language teaching, especially in relation to alleviating students' foreign language speaking anxiety and allowing students to take an active part in their own learning. The package brings together the students' own interests and the goals of the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education in a creative way and familiarizes students with a medium often ignored in language teaching. Moreover, it encourages students in their artistic pursuits and demonstrates how languages can be more than the final destination of learning, they can be a tool for working towards one's ambitions.

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## Appendix

A link to the material package:

<https://minttukuitunen.wixsite.com/pathtopodcasting>