



# Podcasts in Higher Education

This is a summary from a literature study on the uses of podcasts in Higher Education, their educational value, benefits, issues and disadvantages.



## *How podcasts are used in Higher Education*

A number of uses of podcasts were identified in research studies / papers, for example:

1. **to distribute different types of information**
  - a. **to students** (e.g. record lectures [2,3,4,5,6], protocols and technical demonstrations[5], pre-clinical and advanced clinical procedures[5], pre-course material [6], supplementary and supportive course materials [4,6,7];
  - b. **to patients / alumni** (e.g. post operative instructions for patients, home care instructions; potential continuing educational programmes [5])
  - c. **to staff** (e.g. support staff development by providing short *how to* sessions on a range of topics [2])
  - d. **to prospective students:** (e.g. using podcasts as a marketing tool [4])
2. **to communicate** (lecturer  $\leftrightarrow$  student [3,4,5]);
3. **to promote learning** (e.g. to enhance experience and facilitate self-directed learning, to reflect on learning [3,4,5]);
4. **to provide feedback and evaluations** [6];
5. **to create and sustain a (academic) community** [2,3];
6. **by students to:**
  - a. be creative [3];
  - b. do reflection on their learning [2];
  - c. record lecturers themselves [6];
  - d. publish an e-news letter [2];
  - e. do presentations [5];
  - f. record interviews [2];
7. **to complement rather than replace lecturers** [3,5];
8. **at induction programmes in the library** [2,4];
9. **to provide virtual tours to prospective students** [2];
10. **to do / support staff development** [2]; and
11. **to support special needs of students** [4].



## *The educational value of podcasts in Higher Education*

The value that the use of podcasts had on **STUDENT LEARNING** in different studies can be summarised as follows: It

- a. promoted conceptual [3] and self-directed learning [5];
- b. enabled students to reflect on their own learning [3];
- c. stimulated critical thinking as well as technology skills when creating their own podcasts [3];
- d. enabled direct communication and interaction with students [4];
- e. catered for diverse student needs by enabling repeated learning and offering an opportunity for effective use of time [4];
- f. created a culture of knowledge sharing and interdisciplinary collaboration [4];
- g. promoted teacher and learning support [2].



## **Benefits of using podcasts**

The benefits are grouped according to the advantages or benefits with regard to learning, technology, cost and convenience.

### **1. Learning (educational) benefits:**

- a. Provides a facility to push information or content to distance (*scattered*) students [3];
- b. Useful to supplement material or give explanations [3];
- c. Enables enhanced support for student learning [6];
- d. There is the possibility for design interactivity;
- e. **Intrinsic** advantages that podcasts hold for students [1]:
  - i. Learner control promotes learner motivation and engagement;
  - ii. Improved cognition;
  - iii. A novel way of presenting information and instruction;
  - iv. Enabling learning to take place in multiple learning spaces;
  - v. Fostering learning discussions, and accommodating different learning styles;
- f. The ease of producing, publishing and accessing podcasts enables educators to address student needs rapidly and timeously [7];
- g. Podcasts can be a significant learning aid for auditory learners [7] and visually impaired learners;
- h. In online classes podcasts can provide a conversational voice that may enhance learning [7].

### **2. Technology benefits:**

- a. Many students already have iPods or portable media players and Internet access – making it a natural way to disseminate information [3];
- b. Podcasts are simple and user friendly [5];
- c. Podcasts are easy to produce, publish and access on-the-go [7].

### **3. Cost benefits:**

- a. Production is relatively inexpensive and provides a low-cost method of distributing timely audio content seamlessly [7].

### **4. Convenience benefits:**

- a. Podcasts are digitally available online [5];
- b. Provides additional opportunities to learn course content [7];
- c. Podcasts provide any time and any location (spatial and temporal flexibility) convenience for students [6,7].



## **Issues and disadvantages when making podcasts for students**

### **1. Student learning issues:**

- a. Do podcasts contribute to student learning? [3]
- b. The challenge to understand their effectiveness as a learning tool still exists [7].
- c. To what kind of content would students like to listen? [3]
- d. Would they skip classes when they know that lectures are posted online? [3,5]
- e. Podcasting is essentially a passive learning experience – other interaction is necessary [5].

### **2. Time issues:**

- a. Participants indicated that they do not have the time nor the right equipment to create their own audio material [2].
- b. For how long will students listen to podcasts [3]?
- c. Shorter podcasts with accurate descriptions may simplify this process, although this puts an additional burden on the individual creating and posting the podcast, in terms of listening to, editing, trimming or slicing the audio prior to posting [3].

3. **Technical issues:**

- a. Podcasting requires significant staff resources and support [2].
- b. Podcasting has limited usefulness for the hearing impaired [7].

4. **Confidence:**

- a. Students felt that they needed preparation time before they recorded anything [2].
- b. Students preferred privacy – they felt uncomfortable recording in front of others [2].
- c. Similar concerns were expressed by staff – especially with regard to podcasting of live lectures [2].

5. **Format issues:**

- a. In most cases audio is sufficient [2].
- b. The **full potential of subscription and feeds** to podcasts is rarely used [2].
- c. Users **do not** want to do truly **live podcasting** – they want to edit or review their work before releasing it to students in podcast format [2].
- d. Staff are happy to deliver streamed **video** content rather than **actual podcasts** [2].
- e. Students viewed the podcasts via a web browser [2].
- f. There is a need to offer podcasts in a variety of formats suitable for playback on a variety of devices [2].

6. **Student feedback**

- a. One of the biggest concerns is the impact on class attendance but the studies indicate that students would **not skip class** because they know that they can download a podcast based on the course lectures [3].
- b. Students indicated that if they took a course where additional **materials** were made available for download as a podcast, they would listen to them [3,7].
- c. **Short podcasts can supplement course lectures** but do not take the place of them [3].
- d. There is **added value** in participating actively in the classroom process, an element that is missing when a student simply watches or listens to a recording of it [3].
- e. Most used podcasts to **clarify a point**. Others used them to **supplement their learning alone** or with their **study groups** [3].
- f. It was found that a series of informal, talkback radio-style audio clips, delivered in a **timely** fashion through podcasting, **reduces** in-class **anxieties** [7].



## References

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