RESEARCH ARTICLE

HOW PODCASTING CAN AFFECT STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AT ARAB OPEN UNIVERSITY?

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Podcasting being a simple process of capturing audio events, speech or mix of sounds into a digital sound object has paved different creative ways of practicing language skills. It has a wide acceptance in English language field as a teaching and a learning tool. The paper analyses a study about podcasting, conducted at Arab Open University with Foundation level-2 language students. Students were given a project of producing their own storytelling podcast using the software Audacity. The study aims at analyzing the practicality of students produced podcast by assessing students' perceptions and teachers' attitude of integrating podcasting activities in English Language teaching. students had a favorable opinion about podcasting as the task helped them to improve their language skills despite the difficulty in handling the software. Teachers' findings about the implementation of podcasting in their classrooms was interesting and inspiring in terms of the learning engagement and the challenges they faced.

INTRODUCTION

Integrating technology in our classrooms has become the latest trend in English Language Teaching for over a decade. Such practice is believed to enhance students' learning experiences and provide them with the most innovative learning environment and modern setting. A popular and widespread mobile technology amongst students is the digital audio "Pod" that can be played in a mobile device according to their pace. The process of recording educational materials has led to the recognition of the podcasting in education (Palmer & Hall, 2008). As a matter of fact, this transcending tool has seen an expansive amount of growth among ELT educators in higher education, hence a remarkable increase in the number of ELT podcast on the Web. Podcasting being a simple process of capturing audio events, speech or mix of sounds into a digital sound object has paved different creative ways of practicing language skills. There has been a significant amount of research carried out to stress the pedogeological and technological benefits of podcasting in language classes as both, a learning and a teaching tool. The educational aspects of podcasting are to assist auditory leaners and enable educators to use the language in real setting, and thus developing students' pronunciation and speaking skills. Availability of ELT podcast with a wide range of subject matters enables language tutors to integrate podcasting in their teaching process. Moreover, students can also be encouraged to produce their own podcast which lead them to prepare and rehearse a short text for a given topic (Training, 2016). The present paper analyses a study conducted on Podcasting activities at Arab Open University with Foundation level-2 language students. Arab Open University consists three levels of foundation studies for English.

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The students of foundation level have basic language skills and require active practice of different activities that can help them to develop their skills. Technology integrated language learning is always inspiring and challenging for students. Foundation students at Arab Open University have proved themselves as creators of artistic work through the digital stories they created as a part of their project(Nassim, 2018). The students need active involvement in their learning process which can be achieved through different tasks provided by their tutors. Students creating their own podcast will be an interesting task for the students as it demands literary and artistic skills from students and team management to make it a successful one. Podcasting, being a new experience for the students will unravel their latent talents and skills in producing their own podcasts. The study aims at analyzing the practicality of students produced podcast by assessing students' perceptions and teachers' attitude of integrating podcasting activities in English Language teaching.

Questions:

- What are the students' perceptions about producing their own podcast?
- What is the teachers' feedback towards integrating podcasting in their teaching process?

Literature Review

Relevant studies on Podcasting have shown the effectiveness in accelerating students' language skills in a self- paced manner (Hasan & Hoon, 2013).After analyzing 20 journal articles on podcast in Language learning environment, the findings suggest that the podcasting activities are enjoyed by the students and they like the podcasting activities provided to them by their respective tutors (Hasan & Hoon, 2013).

Students get an authentic form of language experience and are engaged in the learning process through podcast technology. It is an easy mode of adding supplementary material to students' learning concept and a highly recommended tool for English learners to get familiarized in technology-based language learning environment (Bamanger, 2015). In an empirical study conducted, students after listening to the podcast from the given websites could write a journal entry based on it. The students admit that the podcast listening helped them to improve their language skills(Li, 2010) . (Kavaliauskienė & Anusienė, 2009) also reiterate the same opinion in their study saying that podcasting is an innovative way of practicing students' listening skills in a self- paced manner and an opportunity to listen to native speakers through different authentic podcast taken from the websites. It is a motivating tool for English Language learners that provide limitless authentic resources to digital learners without restriction of time and place(Prof & Yaman, 2016). Students also learn new vocabulary from the web enabled environment(Jain, n.d.). There are several podcasts which provide students a chance to listen to stories narrated by native speakers which provide a rich and meaningful context of language learning (Morikawa, Tsukahara, Inaba, & Morikawa, 2007). Integration of podcasting activities benefitted both teachers and students in their teaching – learning process. Students developed their listening and speaking skills with technology experience while teachers were able to perform a creative instruction in classroom setting(Program, 2018). Podcasting activities increased students' satisfaction and their perception towards learning though it didn't reflect in their academic performance (Munns, 2014).

Apart from improving students' language skills, Podcasts are widely used by the instructors for distributing lectures or supplementary materials to the students. This allows students to listen missed out materials or any uncomprehensive ones (Hew, 2009). Listening to lecture podcasts provides mobility and flexibility for the students as they can access these materials at home with their computers(Paper, 2007). Students can also produce their own podcast which can be used for recording activities, note collection or as reflection of learned concept ("7 Things You Should Know about Podcasting," n.d.). It gives them a platform to develop their literary skills, speaking and listening together with their technical skills. it also fosters team skills among students ("podcast25.pdf," n.d.). This type of students produced podcast promotes working skills through collaborative learning for script writing, podcast recording and editing process. Students' podcast can also be used for self-learning and distant learning as a flexible cost - effective tool (Kemp, Mellor, Kotter, & Oosthoek, 2011). Students are motivated to produce their own podcast to review and study their own materials rather than depending on external podcasts (Aristizabal, Sc, & Ed, n.d.). Students' podcast can enhance their speaking skills when they are provided a theme to discuss upon and to give their own opinion on it. (Journal & Volume, 2017) states about the attitude of students in producing their own podcast. Most of them responded positively claiming that the podcasting activities helped them to improve their speaking skills which was very difficult for them. It also motivates less confident students to perform because it enables them to work at their own pace without any stress of time and place. Peer learning as a highly recommended practice in language learning is promoted through podcasting activities along with the development of 21st century technical skills which is widely appreciated worldwide(Aristizabal *et al.*, n.d.). English language tutors have got a wide scope of podcast application in their teaching process and a creative way of developing students' language skills. Though studies have shown the effective part of podcasting, there are some barriers which prevent the tutors and students to use podcast in their teaching – learning process.Students found difficulty in finding and selecting a suitable podcast and feel reluctance in doing so as it is time consuming and monotonous. Some podcasts were lengthy enough for them to grasp the idea and sometimes they must listen to uninteresting topics. They also felt difficulty in understanding a concept without visual images which requires further reference and clarification of the topic (Hew, 2009; Li, 2010). Technical incompetency was another challenge that students faced while doing podcasting activities. They were anxious about the production of their own podcast with the new technology that they had to use (Journal & Volume, 2017). Teachers also require technical training in terms of integrating educational technologies into their instruction. The teachers may have the basic knowledge of podcasting activities, but the lack of required equipment refrain them from conducting such activities (Acosta &Garza, 2011).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was about students creating their own podcast. Chain story telling process was selected for podcasting activity. It is a speaking activity for students to tell stories using pictures, prompts, different objects etc. Students in this study selected a story and the story was taught by their tutor. The students used the summary of the story to make a podcast of their own by telling the story in several turns.

Tools: An evaluation rubric was developed to assess students' podcasts. It was a guideline to measure the determined criteria of the work done by the students. They were on a scale of 1-5 in four domains:

  a) Pronunciation
  b) Reading Efficiency
  c) Vocabulary
  d) Quality

Each domain consisted of sub-domains:

Domain (a) consisted of accuracy, assimilation and stress.
Domain (b) consisted of fluency and confidence.
Domain (c) consisted of appropriateness and proficiency.
Domain (d) consisted of breach and equal distribution.

A survey was conducted to evaluate students' perception and teachers' attitude about podcasting activities.

Participants: English Foundation level 2 students were selected for the study. There were 17 students divided into 6 groups consisting of 3 members.

Software: Audacity software was used to record the students' podcasts. The software has a user-friendly interface where all students can use without difficulties.

Implementation: The study was undertaken as a project for the students to be done as part of their portfolio task. 10 weeks were allotted for completing their project. The project was carried out in the classrooms and the task was done under the

supervision of the tutor. The implementation process involved three different stages:

1) Studying the story (4 weeks)
2) Summarizing   (3 weeks)
3) Podcasting   (3 weeks)

Students were asked to select a story for doing chain story telling podcasts. Students selected the story Kidnapped by Robert Stevenson, and the story was taught in the classroom by their tutor. Proper practice of vocabulary and comprehension questions were done after each chapter and the teaching process took four-week time to complete. After the teaching process, students were divided in groups for the task and each group was asked to submit the summary of the respective story. Three weeks were allotted for the summary process as the final draft for recording was produced after detailed correction by the tutor. The remaining three weeks were allocated for producing students' podcast. Students had three rounds of recording their story into podcast. Tutors' feedback and practice using online oxford dictionary were given after the first two podcasts and the final podcast was evaluated against the criteria mentioned in the evaluation rubric.

ANALYSIS

The study was done as a project for the students to be done as a part of their portfolio task. It was a ten-week project of producing their own podcast of storytelling. The first four weeks were allotted for teaching the story and practicing the comprehension tasks. The next three weeks for submitting the summary of the story and the remaining three weeks were producing their podcasts based on their written summary of the story. This study intends to analyze students' perception about producing their own podcasts and teachers' feedback about integrating podcasting activity in their teaching process.

Students' perception about producing their own podcasts: A survey with open ended questions was conducted with the students after the implementation of the podcasting activity. It was analyzed that podcasting activity was a new experience for them. Producing their own podcast with a new technical software namely "Audacity" had given them a new learning experience unlike the conventional method. All students had a favorable opinion about podcasting as the task which helped them to improve their vocabulary, pronunciation and oral reading fluency. Students expressed their difficulty in handling the software in terms of recording, saving and retrieving the files. They were unaware about the technical arrangements of adding effects to their voice and the correct way of pausing the track. Students had a mixed response regarding the task. Students liked the task as they had an opportunity to learn a new story in their classroom and got an experience of recording a story narrated by themselves. But they faced difficulty in cohering story parts into a compact one as each one in their group must record their part of narration. The task was also time consuming and monotonous for some students as it involved several rounds of recording and feedback session before producing the final podcast. Students preferred doing podcasting in future with some other interesting activities.

Teachers' feedback about integrating podcasting activity in their teaching process: Teachers' findings about the implementation of podcasting in their classrooms were interesting and inspiring. They couldn't have found their

students' problems and attitude towards technology integrated language learning without such technical assessments. Students improved their writing and reading skills throughout the process. Students as a group submitted their respective summaries on stipulated time. Their summaries were corrected and were asked to correct the mistakes before recording their narration. The recordings were conducted in three weeks. The recordings were assessed by using the evaluation rubric with five criteria namely pronunciation, reading efficiency, vocabulary and technical quality. Feedback based on the evaluation criteria, correction and online dictionary practice were given after two recordings. The feedback helped students to improve their reading fluency, but students couldn't perfect their pronunciation despite with all the feedback and practice session. Students commit fossilized error which requires quite time of practice and drilling to improvise their errors. The task was time consuming and monotonous for students which affected students' motivation and interest in doing the activity. Some students also showed their reluctancy in doing activities which are not integrated in their course. This shows their attitude towards shifting from conventional form of learning to the technology- based style. However, students engaged in their podcasting producing process which demanded peer collaboration, cooperation and mutual understanding.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of podcasting activity at Arab Open University had brought a new experience for both students and teachers. Students produced their own podcast on storytelling despite the technical challenges faced by them. Podcasting provided them a platform to foster collaborative learning skills through group discussion, peer correction and community learning. Though students faced problems in doing the tasks, they developed their skills through proper practice and drilling. Teachers need to select the task entirely on context that can develop students learning and learning objectives should be formed according to the level of the students (Paper, 2007). In terms of students' level, the task was appropriate, but the lengthy process demotivated the students to continue with the project. The learning objective in terms of their reading fluency was reflected in students' podcast, but the pronunciation perfection needs time to improve. Extra time should be allocated for practicing pronunciation. More worksheets and drilling are required for practice. Podcasting is also a good tool for fostering autonomy learning as the students developed the skills of analyzing, critical thinking and decision making in the process of podcast production.

Recommendation

Arab Open University gives wide scope for learning irrespective of age, time and place. In such a learning environment, studies on blended learning process is highly motivated for upholding their mission of providing education to the deserving candidates. Podcast can be seen as a blended learning tool which is easy to use and apply. Students can develop self- learning skills by listening either to teacher produced podcast or form other prescribed ones. It can be used as preparatory tool for students to understand a new concept to be taken in the classroom. Thus, teachers can send podcast to their respective students before the class to prepare for it. Students can also be promoted to produce their own podcast to analyze their understanding and to review their learning. These podcasts can also be used for future references. Various studies

with different podcasting activities can be implemented to analyze the effectiveness of podcast in developing students' language skills and to ease the teaching- learning process in language classrooms.

Conclusion

Most of the articles reviewed in this paper showed the importance and benefits of using podcasts in higher education. The benefits centered on the following areas: 1) engagement and learning,2) perception and satisfaction, 3) students' perceptions and attitudes, 4) attitudes towards learning and 5) effectiveness of incorporating technology. Although this study yielded positive impact of using podcast and showed numerous and promising findings, constraints cannot be ignored while carrying out this study. Promoting ways of how to make this activity less monotonous for students and less time consuming for teachers would be considered a challenge and a winning situation at the same time. This paper has given insights of various problems faced by the students in their language learning process which will help teachers to take further steps in solving their students' problems. Applying technology in language teaching has become an important aspect of ELT in terms of developing and evaluating students' language skills. Students can explore their latent talent in their language acquisition process which can pave way to a creative digital learning process.

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