

Podcast-mediated language learning: levels of podcast integration and developing vocabulary knowledge

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Abstract. Podcasting is being exploited incrementally by teachers as a tool for presenting educational content and encouraging language learning outside traditional classrooms. This paper reports on an investigation of three levels of podcast integration sustaining on the Iranian learner's lexical knowledge learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The learners were divided into three groups with high, low, and no integration of podcast into their syllabus. Data were collected from vocabulary pre- and post-tests administered to the sample: 90 intermediate students between 20 and 30 years old. The findings of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences between groups with podcast integration and the one with no integration regarding their lexical knowledge in the way that the former outperformed the latter. The findings revealed that the improvement of the students in the high integration group is more than in the low integration group. On administering an attitude survey before and after the project, we found that they unanimously preferred podcasts as an interesting pedagogical tool.

Keywords: podcast, English vocabulary, integration, attitude.

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1. Introduction

Before technology expansion, teachers used to teach vocabularies through methods such as translation, synonym and antonym, memorization, picture exploitation, and definition. But, with the emergence of computer-assisted language learning, there has been a growing interest to integrate technology in the process of language learning.

Podcasts offer “language learners with samples of real language and authentic materials (Thorne & Payne, 2005). [They can be used] as a supplement to their textbook materials (Stanley, 2007)” (Hasan & Hoon, 2013, p. 129). Hasan and Hoon (2013, p. 129) further point out that Warschauer and Healey (1998) underlined the integration of podcasts as providing language learners with real, meaningful, authentic situations. This has also been theoretically supported by the socio-cognitive view of language learning which emphasizes real language use in a meaningful, authentic context.

Podcasting is being exploited incrementally by teachers for presenting educational content and encouraging language learning outside traditional classrooms. As mentioned by Hasan and Hoon (2013),

“[r]esearch studies on podcasting have already acknowledged its potentiality and have documented much evidence that podcasts can greatly help develop learners’ language skills, especially in developing learners’ speaking and listening skills (e.g. Ashton-Hay & Brookes, 2011; O’Byrne & Hegelheimer, 2007)” (p. 128).

The results of the study by Evans (2008) indicated

“that students believe that podcasts are more effective revision tools than their textbooks and they are more efficient than their own notes in helping them to learn. They also indicate that they are more receptive to the learning material in the form of a podcast than a traditional lecture or textbook” (p. 491).

Tan, Lim, and Goh (2013) also showed that the use of podcasts as a learning tool was beneficial and podcast-based learning can be implemented as one of the creative ways to teach or learn a foreign language. Ducate and Lomicka (2009), however, concluded that students’ pronunciation through making podcasts did not significantly improve with regards to accentedness or comprehensibility, although the attitudes changed toward pronunciation over the semester.

The major purpose of the study is to find out the impact of three levels of podcast integration on sustaining the Iranian EFL learner's vocabulary knowledge. The learners' attitude toward weekly podcast-based tasks was also investigated.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

To accomplish the purpose of the present research, 120 students who were taking English classes at Shokouh English language institute in Tehran were selected. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 30 years. After analyzing the data from the proficiency test, 90 participants were equally divided into three groups of 30 students. Simple random sampling was used to put the students in three groups with high, low, and no integration of podcasts into their syllabus.

2.2. Procedure

In order to conduct the research and to fulfill the purpose of the study, the following steps were taken. The Nelson language proficiency test was administered to the subjects to find out the homogeneity of the students regarding their English language proficiency. After data analysis, 60 participants whose scores were at the modified percentile level were selected as two experimental groups and 30 as a control group.

In the high integration group with 30 participants, learners were required to listen to audio files from online podcasts and were expected to do some podcast-based tasks such as recording a dialogue or monologue content using new vocabulary items from the podcast files which were introduced and taught by the teacher. Learners were first required to make their own recorded audio files using the new words. Then, they were supposed to listen to podcasts created by other learners regularly and leave comments for them. On the other hand, the learners of the low integration experimental group were allowed to have access to podcast audio files and listen to them if they wanted. But they were not required to do the recording task or to comment on the podcast audio files.

The third group with 30 learners was considered as the control group (no integration group). In the no integration group, learners only listened to files in the classroom as their listening comprehension task. Their listening process did not deviate from the conventional listening process; that is, they only had access to podcast files as a CD package.

An achievement vocabulary test was designed by the researchers for pre-test and post-test. It consisted of 50 multiple choice items to measure their vocabulary knowledge and was administered before and after the treatment sessions in all three groups.

In both high and low integration groups, an attitude survey was also administered at the beginning and end of the semester in order to find how much students' attitude toward the use of podcast in class changed.

3. Discussion

The main concern of this study was to investigate whether or not the podcast integration had any significant positive effects on EFL learner's vocabulary knowledge. To assure and determine any significant change in the vocabulary knowledge of our subjects, after receiving the treatments, the performance results of each group were analyzed applying one way ANOVA.

The results of the analysis reveal that podcast integration significantly improved the learners' knowledge of vocabulary. Besides, the attitudes of the students toward the use of podcast in class turned out to be more positive. The findings are consistent with [Rosell-Aguilar \(2007\)](#), who stated that podcasts as one of the helpful means of language learning in the class should be encouraged since bringing podcasts and social media into language learning courses can lift learning to a whole new level.

Moreover, the results of this paper concerning the manipulation of podcast in increasing the personal abilities of the language learners is in accordance with the findings of [Onsrud \(2009\)](#), who acknowledged that the exploitation of podcasting as a delivery tool compared to the traditional in-class presentation establishes a learner-centered environment which encourages an active real-life communication.

4. Conclusions

The results revealed a significant increase in the performance of subjects in the integration of podcasting. It is believed that learners who had more contact with mobile learning through podcasting were more motivated to learn the language. The improvements can also be partly due to the fact that students are more attracted by the glamour of the online atmosphere. Also, it suggests that technologies of this type can provide opportunities for the learners to learn at their own pace.

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