

Exploring Podcasting in English as a Foreign Language Learners' Writing Performance

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether giving English as a foreign language learners podcast lectures in addition to the traditional lectures help them to enhance their English language writing, and to explore and discover useful information regarding the adoption of podcasting as a learning or training tool in order to better understand and improve learning and teaching methods. This study was conducted with fifty five level two male students at the scientific section of the Preparatory Year in King Saud University. They were assigned into the experimental and control group randomly. The experimental group listened to podcast lectures as well as the in-class traditional lessons. Meanwhile, the control one was given traditional classroom lessons only. To assess the performances in the pre- and post-tests, analytic scoring rubric was used. To answer the research's questions, a within group two paired samples t-test was computed. In addition, a survey questionnaire was administered to the podcasting group to explore their attitudes towards using podcast instruction to improve writing ability.

The results showed that the students in the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group. There was a significant decrease in spelling, punctuation and capitalization errors. Questionnaire's results reported that EFL learners in the experimental group mostly conveyed positive attitudes. The current study recommended that EFL learners need to be familiarized and trained with the use of podcasting technology in language learning in order to get better gains. EFL teachers are suggested to integrate podcasting lectures into their EFL writing teaching.

Keywords: Mobile learning, Podcasting, Writing accuracy, Attitudes.

1. Introduction

The evolution of mobile technologies is at the basis of significant changes in the teaching and learning of languages. Language learning is obviously witnessing a shift in research area from Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), whose purpose is to investigate the impact of the use of computers in the teaching and learning of both maternal and foreign languages, to Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) which is defined by Moura and Carvalho (2012) as any type of language learning that takes place anywhere and anytime, supported by mobile devices.

The entry of mobile technologies paves the way for a new research era in language learning and teaching. Hsu (2012) argue that studies on mobile assisted language learning (MALL) are still needed. The mobile digital technology devices such as MP3 players, iPods, iPads, and smart mobile phones could offer their users the opportunity to access information almost anywhere, at any preferred time and at their own pace (Schwabe & Göth, 2005). Increasingly, the use of such mobile devices in language teaching is gaining more admiration. Through integrating mobile technologies into the curriculum, language learners are offering more innovative supporting tools.

The use of mobile phone technologies brings new promises for the teaching and learning of languages. There are noteworthy potential gains that these mobile advices can bring to language learning (Oberg & Daniels, 2013). Features such: the expansion of mobile communication networks; ease of handling; the multiplicity of resources; the affordable price; and the continuous evolution of mobile technology are favorable to their investment in the language-teaching context. Learners are already motivated to use mobiles, iPods and iPads because of the advantages they offer such as accessibility, ease of use, and portable storage capacity (Wagner, 2005), and since they can also store MP3 audio files, language teachers are encouraged to seek more innovative ways to integrate these devices into their language teaching classes (Duke, 2006).

To this end, technology offers indispensable learning spaces and venues in the field of language learning (Lai, Shum, & Tian, 2014). Podcasting, an evolving technology that supports digital recordings to be easily posted to the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player, may open broader doors to enhance language-teaching process and to effectively aid student learning. Podcast is one of mobile technologies, which is a combination of two words: iPod (Apple's MP3 player) and broadcast (Duke, 2006; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). Podcasting refers to selecting and receiving podcasts that offer the users the advantage of freely controlling where, and when they listen to audio or video content. Podcasts can be syndicated and used with the Really Simple Syndication (RSS) (Hew, 2009; Kim, & King, 2011), and can be automatically downloaded via a subscription feed (an automatic downloading process) (Min-Tun & Tzu-Ping, 2010), which in turn allows users to simply listen to the content on their devices, at their convenient time. Podcasts could be used to provide an up-

to-date, wide and extensive source of audio and video broadcasts for learners wishing to improve their language beyond the restraints of their classrooms (Cross, 2014). Thus, if implemented properly, podcasting may offer language teachers with an influential instrument for teaching content to learners anytime, anywhere (Donnelly & Berge, 2006). Podcasts are believed to offer a rich input through authentic speech (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson & Freynik, 2014).

In Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language. Although the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is accelerating day by day in the field of education, the level of achievement in learning English as a foreign language is still far below the acceptable one (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Many English language learners have difficulty in understanding course instruction, resulting in a loss of motivation (Correa, 2009). As stated by Huang (2004), another difficulty that many language learners might face is their limited understanding of classroom lectures and materials. Similarly, in Saudi context, students barely find any opportunity to practice the language except of language classroom sitting (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Huang argued that effective listening might help ESL students improve their understanding and learning of the lectures and materials. Beheler (2007) claimed that teachers might implement podcast as an effective teaching tool by delivering podcast lectures to classroom websites and inviting their students to access the websites to expand their learning. Students can optimize their self-learning by either listening to the podcasts online or downloading the podcasts for later use outside the classroom. Podcast lectures could be used to enable learners to review course materials at their convenience, which may be helpful for EFL learners.

Podcasting is an innovative mobile technology, and scarce research existed prior to this study regarding best practices for its effective use within foreign language teaching context. Initial investigation indicated that no previous research, as far as the researcher knows, has a focus on the effects of podcast instruction in ESL writing courses in Arabic context, and only one study with foreign-born learners in American context (Nguyen, 2011), reflecting a research issue and knowledge gap in the field of EFL teaching. Therefore, this study intended to integrate podcasting into an EFL writing class to explore the impact of using podcast instruction on learners' writing ability. The research focusing on the effects of podcast instruction in EFL learning, might provide useful information for instructors who plan to use podcasts as teaching tools, which might enhance students learning in ESL and EFL courses.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The focus of the present study was to investigate the effect of using podcasts to help EFL learners enhance their vocabulary and grammar awareness and achieve better writing ability. The challenge remains how to best improve EFL learning and teaching. The use of podcasts is quickly expanding into a popular educational tool for education and training. New learning and teaching technologies are introduced at such a fast pace that EFL instructors are pressed to become aware of new technological advances. Effective and efficient learning strategies need to be developed, implemented, and continuously improved. Research should be unremittingly performed to better understand the effectiveness of those innovative technological advances and their implications in the educational field.

Sengupta and Jepsen (2006) asserted that most ESL students experience challenges in achieving English proficiency. Saudi EFL students at Preparatory Year may face difficulty to comprehend course lectures and instruction, which may result in a lack of fruitful involvement in classroom activities. Woodrow (2006) believed that ESL students often experience anxiety when interacting with native English speakers; when listening to native English teachers, ESL students may be hesitant to ask inquiries and request further amplification that may support them in gaining deeper understanding of lectures and course materials. Podcasting in EFL learning is to some extent novel, and little was documented regarding the effectiveness of podcasting within EFL writing skills prior to this study. Understanding the effect of podcast lectures on EFL students' writing ability may encourage curriculum developer and language instructors to organize and promote podcast instruction in EFL courses. The current study is intended to explore the potential effects of podcast lectures on English writing skills as well as gaining more insights regarding the attitudes towards their implementation.

1.2 Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. Is podcast instruction effective in improving the writing skills of EFL Saudi learners?
 - 1.1 Is there a statistically significant difference in writing achievement (at the 0.05 level) between the pre-test and the post-test results of EFL students exposed to traditional writing instruction?
 - 1.2 Is there a statistically significant difference in writing achievement (at the 0.05 level) between pre-test and post-test results of EFL students exposed to traditional writing instruction and podcast writing instruction?
 - 1.3 Is there a statistically significant difference in writing achievement (at the 0.05 level) between the post-test results of EFL students exposed to podcast and traditional writing instruction and those exposed to

traditional writing instruction only?

2. What are the attitudes of the students toward the use of podcast instruction to improve writing ability?

2. Literature Review

The advent of wireless networks paved the way for the provision of the new applications of mobile learning. Mobile Learning offers learners a valuable opportunity to study at their own time and pace. As stated by Lee & Chan (2007), teachers may support their students via the use of podcasts and help them better invest their time in learning during waiting moments in public transportation or waiting for a flight. Through the emerging of the influential Web 2.0 technological applications (Ushioda, 2011), podcast lectures can be seen as a very powerful teaching and learning instrument, which fruitfully can involve various media features such as photos, texts, audios, and videos.

2.1 Podcasting Technology

Podcasts are audio or video files that are posted as series on the web and distributed via the assistance of a Rapid Simple Syndication feed (RSS feed) (Deal, 2007; King & Gura, 2007; Lafferty & Walch, 2006, Rosell-Aguilar, 2007, Huang, 2013). RSS feed allows podcast programs to obtain the up-to-the-minute episodes of the series instantly upon their publication. Podcast series can be transferred and downloaded to various types of electronic portable devices such as MP3, or mobile phones, and then can be watched or listened to at any time or any place (Evans, 2008). The term 'podcast' is defined as a multimedia file distributed via networks using rapid simple syndication feeds, to be played or downloaded on electronic devices (Kidd & Chen, 2009). It is now a common term that refers to audio or video recordings posted online or downloaded to electronic devices (Kennedy, Hart & Kellems, 2011). While the vast majority of podcasts consist of authentic texts, there are an increasing number of podcasts that is semi-authentic, i.e. modified authentic texts for second language users (Robin, 2007). In addition, podcasts are often accompanied by links to topic-related written texts or transcripts of the listening texts. This availability of a vast range of authentic, and semi-authentic podcasts with available supporting material means that teachers can go beyond the confines of course content (Lee, 2009), to address the developmental learners' needs of varied interests. Moreover, with directions, language learners who have an access to the technology can autonomously employ and exploit podcasts to build on their classroom learning whether at home, or on the move, which in turn helps them increase their exposure to the target language and culture, and improve their language skills.

2.2 Podcast as an Innovative Teaching Tool

The implementation of podcasts in education is growing, and personal devices, such as iPods and iPads, are being widely used in a variety of teacher-centered and student-centered ways (French, 2006), however the use of podcasts is still limited in some EFL contexts (Celik, 2013). Copley (2007) stated that podcasting technology could be seen as a new innovative way of teaching and empowering the interest of a variety teachers, and researchers. Rosell-Aguilar, (2007) illustrated a group of advantages of podcasting for learning such as being portable, attractive, motivating, easy access, and publicity. Researchers believe that podcasting technology is an effective method for teachers to deliver valuable instruction to their students and to improve learning process (Beheler, 2007; Copley, 2007; Lord, 2008). Podcasts are believed to enhance literacy learning in a multimodal way (Li, Snow, Jiang & Edwards, 2014). Increasingly, more and more universities and colleges incorporate podcasting tool to deliver course lectures to supplement their courses (Copley, 2007; Hollandsworth, 2007).

Educational podcasting lectures that are distributed by the instructors on the course website allow learners to review, listen to, and download them to their own personal digital devices (Copley, 2007). Such podcast lectures can provide students flexibility since they can listen to and review the course lectures at their convenience, which in turn empowers them to practice the self-learning process (Beheler, 2007). Another use of podcasts is as a supplemental resource (Huntsberger & Stavitsky, 2007) to support textbook materials and to engage learners (Edirisingha & Salmon, 2007). Kurtz, Fenwick and Ellsworth (2007) reported that learners, who received podcast lectures as a tool to review lessons, outperformed those who just took the ordinary classroom lessons. McKinney, Dyck, and Luber (2009) conducted an experimental study in which the control group of the students was given PowerPoint slides of their class lectures, and the experimental group received the podcast lectures and the PowerPoint slides of the same lectures. When both groups were assessed, the experimental group showed better results than the other one.

2.3 Perceptions and Attitudes toward Podcasts

Generally, motivating students outside the class can be a difficult mission; however, the implementation of podcasting can support this issue (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007; Asoodar, Marandi, Vaezi & Desmet, 2014). A group of studies concluded the positive effect of podcasting on the students' positive attitudes toward learning through podcasts (Kavaliauskienė & Anusienė, 2009; Chan, Chi, Chin, & Lin, 2011; Fernandez, Simo, & Sallan,

2009; Lord, 2008; Kim & King, 2011; Evans, 2008; Heilesen, 2010). In a survey study, Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė (2009) explored learners' perceptions of listening to podcasts. The study found that seventy six percent of the subjects showed positive attitudes toward the use of podcasting to enhance listening skills. Similarly, Chan et al. (2011) explored the effect of two podcast courses intended to supplement classroom teaching for Chinese and Koreans as foreign languages. The results found that participants who used podcasting had significant positive attitudes towards this tool. Heilesen (2010) concluded that students' attitudes were mostly positive towards the implementation of podcasting and there were very few participants who reported rejection towards podcasting. Lord (2008) evaluated a joint project on using podcasts for an undergraduate phonetic course in order to evaluate students' pronunciation and attitudes. The findings reported that the majority of the participants enjoyed the project. Similarly, Evans (2008) found that students were much more satisfied with studying and reviewing their subject matter by the use of podcasts than course notes. In a later study, Fernandez, et al. (2009) made judgments about the reactions of some participants who used podcasts. According to their findings, they stated that podcasting was not a substitute for traditional learning system; however, it increased their motivation. Kim and King (2011) claimed that their findings noticeably showed that the implementation of podcasting into the classroom was interesting, and influential. In addition, they agreed that attitudes toward podcasts varied depending on their previous experiences with various types of computer technologies.

2.4 Podcast Lectures for ESL and EFL Learning.

Previous studies on podcasts in language learning have explored its effectiveness in developing various learners' language skills (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007; Li, 2010). It is argued that podcast can foster students' language acquisition in various language areas (Chan et al. 2011). In a case study by Lebron-Lozada (2012), the results showed that the use of podcasts that were generated by students themselves obviously helped them in improving their conversational abilities by producing fewer mistakes and better pronunciation and more fluent speech. In the same line of thought, Lord (2008) stated that podcasting is valuable in enhancing foreign language learning. Podcasting could be employed to learn the culture of the language as well (Comas-Quinn, Arcos, & Mardomingo, 2012; Shih, 2013). The likely advantages of podcasting in the foreign language learning may include ease of use, listening practice, and easy access to supplemental materials. Ashton-Hay and Brookes (2007) argued that podcasting could aid self-paced learning and give weaker learners a supportive remedy for their language gaps. Ducate and Lomicka (2009) found that podcasting could be implemented as a tool for enhancing learners' pronunciation. In addition, podcasting allows language teachers to make materials available to students anywhere (Lord, 2008) and provide them the opportunity to record and share class discussions or projects. In a study by Edirisingha, Rizzi and Rothwell, (2007), findings reported obvious benefits of integrating podcasts into first year college students on English language and communication. Six podcasts were established to enhance students' learning and study accuracy and to provide guidance on portfolio development and presentation accuracy.

Moreover, podcasts provide students the opportunity to experience authentic forms of the language and get personal involvement to learn various skills of English language. Alm (2013) argued that the personal access to podcasts offers a different aspect of authenticity to second language learning. Participants of Li's (2010) study expressed their interest in listening to podcasts and stated their readiness to adopt toward this innovative technology in enhancing their language skills. Podcasts as supplementary materials can be used to help learners pay attention to their instructional material on the podcast content (Hawke, 2010). Hawke developed an independent listening course based on podcasts to explore how science students can develop their scientific English listening skills through podcasts. Findings of Hawke's study showed that post-test scores were significantly higher than the pre-test scores as a result of using podcasts. Similarly, Ashraf, Noroozi and Salami (2011) examined the impact of podcasts on the listening ability of some EFL second-year college students. The researchers concluded that podcasts could be used to enhance ESL learners' listening ability. In Saudi EFL context, Al-Qasim and Al-Fadda (2013) conducted a quantitative study to examine the impact of podcasting on the listening comprehension of forty-six female Saudi EFL learners in higher education. The results indicated significant differences between the two groups of the study, favoring those who employed the podcasting tool.

In an exploratory case study of a Japanese learner of English as a foreign language, Cross (2014) explored the effect of giving guidance and feedback on meta-textual skills and aspects of metacognitive instruction on listener's autonomous use of podcasts. The results showed some signs of performance improvements. Istanto (2011) developed five podcasts to be provided to language learners as supplementary materials in order to improve their listening ability and their awareness about grammatical rules. The findings showed that the podcast implementation could develop students' listening ability and grammar familiarity as well as their cultural awareness of the target language. Knight (2010) studied the use of podcasts for phonetics exercises. The sample of this study found podcasts very efficient for developing their phonetics accuracy. The impact of using podcasts was found to be beneficial in the acquiring of language vocabulary. Borgia's (2010) study concluded that podcast instruction could significantly enhance language learners' vocabulary. In a

consistent study, the findings of Putman and Kingsley's (2009) study also showed that podcasts could obviously improve science vocabulary learning.

2.5 Podcasts for Teaching Writing Skill

English as a foreign language teachers may find that writing is the most difficult language skill to teach. This could be justified, as writing is a productive skill that involves the organization of the writer's knowledge into a written format. Writing is challenging for EFL students, especially in college-level academic classes (Hu, 2009). In an analytical study of the obstacles of writing skill that face Saudi students, Raja and Zahid (2013) stated that academic writing is considered the most difficult skill. EFL learners face difficulty in English writing because of the difference between English and their native languages (Hu, 2009). Furthermore, Aryadoust (2010) highlighted that the difficult tasks of learning vocabulary and grammar contributed to the EFL students' English writing skills. A typical fluent English learner may possess between 10,000 and 100,000 words, whereas an average ESL learner knows only between 2,000 and 7,000 words, which may indicate a large gap in English writing abilities (Mathews-Aydinli, 2006).

Focusing specifically on writing skills, podcasting can be seen as a promising tool, not only because of its availability for enriching vocabulary, but also because of its features such as providing more exposure to authentic language, a good tool for reviewing lessons, and offering language learners with samples of real language and authentic materials. As different learning styles entails the use of various human senses (Clark & Mayer, 2008), language teachers may employ podcasting lectures to match any learner's ability level or interest, through offering them with the suitable worksheets to help their learners concentrate on the key words, and grammar structures. In a study by Shahramiri, and Gorjian (2013), the researchers investigated the impact of podcast transcription on learners' writing accuracy of intermediate and advanced groups among Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. Fifty students participated in this study. The participants received grammar lessons to enhance writing accuracy, supplemented by podcast transcription materials. The results showed that advanced learners outperformed the other groups in gaining higher scores in writing achievement post-test. Nguyen (2013) conducted a quantitative quasi-experimental study, using a pretest-posttest design, to determine whether podcast lectures have an effect on college-level ESL students' writing skills, mainly grammar and vocabulary. Results indicated a significant difference between the experimental and control groups on students' grammar skills, especially in the proposition category. No significant differences existed between the vocabulary skills of the groups.

Summary of Literature Review

Reviewing previous studies suggested that learners generally enjoy using podcast lectures, and like to listen to them at home. Attitudes towards the use of podcasts have been examined and the findings of the most of them were positive. The majority of the students stated that the implementation of podcast lectures could help enhance their language learning process. The implementation of Web 2.0 technologies in language teaching is novel and needs to be investigated. More studies are needed to explore the impact of podcast lectures on EFL writing learning. In addition, the scarcity of related studies in Saudi Arabia is also a main reason that makes this study valuable in the field. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study until now have tested the effect of using podcasts in learning writing in English as a foreign language context, and especially with Arabic learners. Thus, this study aimed to incorporate a Mobile-learning tool (podcast) into a Saudi EFL writing to explore the impact of podcasting instruction on learners' writing skill.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted with fifty-five, second level male students at the scientific section of the Preparatory Year in King Saud University. They were given twenty weekly hours of English language course. Within their admission in the Preparatory Year, students were assigned into groups according to a placement test. The students were selected using a simple random selection, and assigned into two groups, one as the control group and the other as the experimental group, randomly. There were twenty-six students in the experimental group and twenty-nine students in the control one. With their Arabic mother tongue, most of the participants had been learning English as a foreign language in Saudi schools for approximately six years. The participants in the current study had learned their English essentially in an instructed sitting and they had almost no chance to practice the language for real communicative purposes outside their schools. They were between nineteen and twenty-one years old. They could be described as having roughly equal language proficiency.

3.2 Materials

The main podcast selected for the present study was Grammar Girl" quick and dirty tips for better writing ". Grammar Girl podcast offers short, interesting tips to enhance writing. As stated in its website, this podcast

illustrate grammar rules and vocabulary expressions that may confuse language learners. Grammar Girl could help learners easily understand complex grammatical rules with exciting tricks to support learners remember and practice those confusing grammatical expressions. (<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl/#sthash.fYAA4T6y.dpuf>). The podcast presents valuable advices in spelling and word choice. Furthermore, it offers a large number of easy to follow illustrations of English language expressions and grammar rules in an interesting but instructive tactic.

The second podcast used in the current study is ESL Podcast. This podcast was selected with intention to enhance learners' vocabulary and English language expressions. These podcast series are providing diversities of everyday life issues, that learners might find interesting and very close to their needs. Both podcasts could be supplied by transcriptions to support learners notice any difficult vocabulary items they might face. These podcasts were short in length, instructive, and interesting. The podcast themes were chosen according to the students' syllabus.

3.3 Instrument

3.3.1 Pre-test and Post-test

To explore the effect of the podcast lectures on the students' writing performance, the researchers used a pre-test to measure the learners' performance in writing prior to the treatment. Later, a post-test was administered to the control and experimental groups. In both the pre- and post-tests, students were required to answer an essay question requiring the participating students to write a short paragraph about general topics. The topics were slightly different in order to avoid the effect of practice. The essay questions were in a similar level of challenge and close to the students' interest.

3.3.2 Questionnaire

Another research instrument used was a researcher-designed survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire aided in allowing the podcast lectures group (the experimental group) to state their views of, experiences in using podcasts to enhance writing skill, and to explore their attitudes towards the use of podcasting. The questionnaire consisted of nineteen items. Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The participants were asked to respond to each item as: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) no idea, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree.

3.3.3 Validity and Reliability

The instruments were reviewed by five teachers specialized in language teaching and curriculum so the content validity was confirmed. The researchers conducted a pilot study in which the instruments were administered to a sample of students in order to detect any problems related to the instruments and their use. The reliability test for the pre- and post-tests produced a Cronbach Alpha of 0.902, and for the questionnaire, Cronbach α value was 0.89, which can be considered highly reliable.

3.4 Procedure

The entire study conducted in a six-week period during the second semester 2014. In the first week, the participating learners in both groups (the experimental and the control groups) were given a pre-test prior to the treatment, to make sure that the two study groups were at the equivalent level of proficiency; in order to measure the learners' writing proficiency level prior to the treatment; and ensure that any enhancement in the writing performance would be due to the experiment. Prior to the start of the study, subjects in the podcast group were shown how to access, play and save podcasts to their mobiles. In the following four weeks, students in the experimental group listened to podcast lectures assigned by the instructor, as well as the in-class traditional lessons. Whats-up group was created, and all the students in the experimental group joined the group. Podcast links were sent to learners via the Whats-up group, so that the teacher made sure the experimental group learners did not face any difficulty playing the podcasts. Learners were encouraged to support each other regarding the technical issues, as well as to discuss the new expressions in the podcasts. In the same time, the control group was given classroom lectures only. In the sixth week, the two groups were given the post-test. Moreover, the questionnaire survey was given to the experimental group as a post-project evaluation, to explore the EFL learners' attitudes toward the use and the effectiveness of using podcast lectures to enhance their English writing skill.

The present study involved a quantitative method with an experimental pre-test and post-test design. Since the purpose of the study was to examine the potential effect of the use of podcast lectures (independent variable) on the students' post-test scores (dependent variable), the experimental research method was appropriate for the current study. To assess the participants' performance in the pre- and post-tests, an analytic scoring rubric was implemented. The analytic scoring is a form of assessment commonly recommended in the evaluation of language writing skill where each participant's performance is given a separate score. This method supports the raters in the course of the evaluation of the writing performance of each student, which in turn results in a high level of reliability of the instrument. It permits for further detailed facts about the test-takers'

performance in several writing characteristics (East, 2009; Hyland, 2003). Moreover, the analytic scoring scheme was found to be more reliable than the holistic scoring scheme (East, 2009; Weigle, 2002; Bacha, 2001). In addition, an inter-rater scoring was used as two experienced English teachers rated the writing performances of the participating learners and then the researchers rated them again with very high consensus and consistency between the scores (the agreement level was 97%). The analysis stage included also the analyzing of the survey data using descriptive statistics.

As stated earlier, in order to assure that the participating subjects in this study were at the same writing proficiency level prior to instruction; a t-test (Independent Samples Test) was run using the pre-test scores.

Table 1. Independent Samples (t) test results for the Group Equivalence

Group	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.(2-tailed)	T value
Experimental	26	1.16421	34.92	0.916	0.107
Control	29	1.31213	37.68		

As could be seen in Table (1), the results showed that the means of the participants' scores for the experimental (M =1.164) and control (M =1.312) groups were almost similar. There was no statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level among the two groups' results in the pre-test [$t = 0.107$, $p = 0.916$].

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study aimed to explore the effects of using podcast lectures on English as a foreign language learners' writing performance. Descriptive analysis and paired samples t-tests were conducted to examine the effect of podcast writing instruction and to find out whether the study's groups, experimental group and the control one, achieved any writing performance enhancement as a consequence of the treatment, and to explore if there was any significant difference between the post-test and the pre-test scores. The pre-test scores of the two groups showed statistically no significant differences between the experimental and the control groups.

Table 2. Shows paired samples T-Test results for pretest and posttest for the control group.

Group	Test	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.	T value
Control group	Pre	29	2.3103	1.31213	0.798	0.258
	Post	29	2.4138	2.07910		

The results showed better writing performance in the post-test scores for the participants in the control group. The improvement could be justified as the consequence of the in-class writing teaching. The control group produced more enhanced writing performance in the post-test scores (M =2.4138) than in their pre-test (M =2.3103), however this progress was not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level [$T = (0.258)$, $p = 0.798$] (see table 2).

Table 3. Shows paired samples T-Test results for pretest and posttest for the experimental group.

Group	Test	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.	T value
Experimental group	Pre	26	2.3462	1.16421	0.001	3.837
	Post	26	3.6154	0.37653		

The table above indicates that the students from the experimental group showed better performance in the post-test (M = 3.6154) than in the pre-test (M = 2.3462). A statically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group was found at the $p < .05$ level [$T = (3.837)$, $p = 0.001$], proposing that the writing performance of the experimental group was significantly enhanced because of the podcast writing instruction and the traditional one. Notably, the enhancement between the mean scores in the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group is obviously higher than that of the control one.

In order to answer the third research question, a t test (Independent Samples Test) was run using the post-test scores of the experimental and the control groups.

Table 4. Independent Samples t test results for the post-tests of the groups

Group	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.(2-tailed)	T value
Experimental	26	3.62	1.920	0.031	2.218
Control	29	2.41	2.079		

The preceding table shows that the participating learners in the experimental group remarkably outperformed those in the control group in terms of writing performance. The experimental group had a higher post-test mean score (M = 3.62) than the control group (M = 2.41). These findings indicated that the podcast as a writing teaching tool was effective in teaching writing, that the subjects in the experimental group enhanced their writing performance significantly more than those in the control one at the $p < .05$ level [$T = (2.218)$, $p = 0.031$].

To explore the attitudes of the English as a foreign language learners toward implementing podcast lectures in teaching writing, descriptive statistics of the means and standard deviations of the experimental group participants' responses were computed.

Table (5) shows the responses of the podcast participants to the end-of-course survey.

No.	Survey items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I think podcast is an engaging teaching tool.	3.5000	0.98995
2	I think podcasts can support me improve my language.	3.3462	1.01754
3	I listened to podcasts before this course.	1.7692	0.95111
4	Podcasting is not effective for language teaching.	1.8462	0.67482
5	Podcast topics do not suite my language learning needs.	1.8462	0.73170
6	I found no difficulty in playing the podcasts.	3.9615	0.99923
7	I think podcast is an effective language teaching tool.	4.0769	0.56022
8	I found the topics relevant to my language learning.	3.3077	1.04954
9	I would recommend using podcast in other English language learning classes.	3.4231	1.10175
10	Using podcasts is waste of time.	2.1923	1.16685
11	Podcasts are useful for learning new vocabularies.	4.1923	0.84943
12	Using podcasts is possible everywhere and every time.	3.4231	1.17211
13	Access to podcasts transcripts could enhance my language.	3.8077	0.63367
14	I felt my writing improved at the end of the course.	3.2308	0.99228
15	I would recommend my friends to use podcasts.	3.8846	0.71144
16	Podcasts helped me improve my use of English grammar.	3.8077	0.93890
17	It was a good experience to use podcasts.	3.1154	0.95192
18	Podcasts could be an effective preparation tool for exam.	3.3077	1.08699
19	I will continue to use podcasts after this writing class.	3.8077	1.02056

The questionnaire results notably indicated that the participants thought that podcasts are useful for learning new English vocabularies, which got the highest mean score ($M = 4.1923$). They also thought that podcast lectures is an effective tool for language teaching purpose, with the second highest mean score for this item ($M = 4.0769$). Regarding the usability of the podcasts, participating learners expressed no difficulty in playing the podcasts ($M = 3.9615$). The fourth highest mean score ($M = 3.88$), indicated that participants intended to recommend their friends to use podcasts as they felt podcasts were beneficial in their learning. The results revealed that learners thought that podcasts helped them improve their use of English grammar ($M = 3.8077$). With high mean score, participating learners stated that they would continue to use podcasts after the end of their writing class ($M = 3.8077$), and that their access to podcasts' transcripts could enhance their language ($M = 3.8077$). In addition, learners thought that podcast is an engaging teaching tool ($M = 3.50$). They stated that they would recommend to use podcasts in other English language learning classes ($M = 3.4231$). The participants concurred that using podcasts is feasible everywhere and every time ($M = 3.4231$), and thought that podcasts can support them improve their language ($M = 3.3462$). For exam preparation, learners agreed that they could use podcasts as a preparation tool ($M = 3.3077$). Regarding the podcasts used in the current study, learners showed almost complete agreement about their relevancy to their learning ($M = 3.3077$). At the end of the writing course, the participating learners felt their writing was improved ($M = 3.2308$), and that they found it a good experience to use podcasts ($M = 3.1154$). Most of the learners did not agree that using podcasts is waste of time ($M = 2.1923$). Surprisingly, participating learners stated that they did not listen to podcasts before the course ($M = 1.769$). Being reverse items, the mean score ($M = 1.8462$) clearly highlights the learners' disagreement about these two items. Learners generally disagreed that podcasting is not effective for language teaching. They also disapproved that podcast topics do not suit their language learning needs.

4.2 Discussion

The results of the present study showed that the students in the experimental group who received podcast writing and traditional lectures scored significantly higher than the control group that was taught using traditional in-class writing instruction only. There was an obvious decline in the number of errors regarding spelling, punctuation and capitalization in the writing of the experimental group.

As could be seen that the control group produced better writing output as shown in the analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores which in turn indicated that the in-class writing lectures had a constructive effect on the students' writing performance. However, this improvement was not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level in terms of writing. Participating learners in the control group were not given the opportunity to explore varied authentic materials as in podcast lectures. The findings suggested that podcast lectures could enhance

participating EFL learners' writing of the experimental group better than the control group with in-class writing teaching only. These results are in agreement with Shahramiri, and Gorjian's (2013) study, which found significant differences in student performance when students were exposed to podcasts. However, Nguyen (2013) found no improvement in ESL learners' writing regarding their vocabulary skills, the researcher concluded that the podcasting group significantly outperformed the no-podcasting one regarding grammar only.

The improvement in the performance of the podcast group could be justified as podcast instruction could be seen as a good tool for reviewing lessons, and offering EFL learners with attractive samples of real language and authentic materials. Another justification for this enhancement might be the fact that podcasting lectures can match any student's level or interest, as well as supplementing them with worksheets to help them focus on key words, and grammar structures. As stated by Clark and Mayer (2008), various learning styles require the use of various human senses, which in turn could be achieved via podcast instruction. Furthermore, English as a foreign language learners could receive podcasts from all over the world, proposing the availability of enormous authentic material beyond the classroom.

Previous studies showed that using podcasting lectures could be seen as a teaching tool to enhance learning process. Podcasts can enable learners to access the lectures at their convenience, at any time, and aid them in understanding lessons better at their own pace, which, in turn results in enhanced learning (Beheler, 2007; Copley, 2007; French, 2006; Hollandsworth, 2007; Lord, 2008; O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007).

Concerning the second question in the study, exploring EFL learners' attitudes toward podcast writing instruction, questionnaire results showed that learners in the experimental group generally expressed positive attitudes. These findings are in line with former studies that found positive attitudes toward the implementation of podcasts in language teaching (Kavaliauskienė & Anusienė, 2009; Chan, Chi, Chin, & Lin, 2011; Fernandez, Simo, & Sallan, 2009; Lord, 2008; Kim & King, 2011; Evans, 2008; Heilesen, 2010; Al-Qasim, & Al-Fadda, 2013). In the current study, learners expressed their belief that podcast instruction is effective in language teaching specifically English vocabulary and grammar. This could be justified as podcasts can be employed to expose EFL learners to samples of real and authentic English language materials. Moreover, agreeing that podcasts are beneficial and easy to use, learners stated that they would continue to use podcasts, and advise their friends to use them. Learners argued that the podcasts could be implemented as a motivating teaching tool that could be used everywhere and every time, and for exam preparation as well. Similarly, in Evans' (2008) study, participants stated that podcasts were a good tool for reviewing their subject matter. Via the implementation of podcasts as a supplementary tool, language teachers could keep learners motivated to study even outside the classroom (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007). The participating learners refused to agree that podcast is a waste of time nor suitable for their learning needs. In contrast, learners stated that their writing was improved and they had good experience learning via podcasts. Notably, the majority of the learners stated that it was their first time to use podcasts, which reflects the need for more incorporation of technology in EFL classrooms.

5. Conclusion

Podcasting technology could be implemented as an effective language teaching instrument that provides teachers the advantage of extending their lectures beyond the classroom limit and allows the learners to access the language material at any time and in any place (Beheler, 2007; Copley, 2007; O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007; Shahramiri, & Gorjian, 2013; Nguyen, 2013).

The present study casted some light on the effectiveness of podcasting lectures in teaching writing for English as foreign language learners. The focus of the current study was to explore the effect of podcast lectures on EFL students' writing skill. The results showed that students who received the podcast lectures along with the in-classroom lectures achieved better writing performance than those who received the classroom lectures alone. Participating learners showed positive attitudes towards implementing podcast lectures, stating that podcasts were effective for learning English grammar and vocabulary. Unpredictably, most of them stated that they had not used the podcast before the course.

Based on the findings of the current study, EFL instructors are recommended to incorporate podcasting lectures into their EFL writing teaching. Teachers should be invited to join specialized workshops to better explore the advantages of using podcasts as a teaching tool. Language learners should be exposed to the experience of using podcast lectures to better invest this technology as an educational tool. The findings of the current study might be useful for EFL instructors in terms of the use of podcast lectures in college-level writing courses. However, further studies are required to explore the effect of podcasts in language teaching with different levels such as secondary school learners, to gain additional insights into the effects of podcast lectures on EFL teaching. Replication of the current study could provide further insights into the effects of podcast instructions on other EFL courses such as reading or speaking courses, to obtain new information that may be beneficial for EFL instructors and curriculum developers.

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