

PODCAST WITH PEER ASSISTED LEARNING: DOES IT REALLY AFFECT STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS?

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ABSTRACT

Integrating Podcasts with Peer-Assisted Learning into English classes might be able to improve the listening abilities of EFL students. This system is ideal for senior high school students, who mostly still experience difficulties with listening comprehension, to be more enthusiastic in the learning process. This research aimed at determining the effect of using Podcast with Peer-Assisted Learning on students' listening comprehension, discovering the possible difference between male and female students in achieving better results in learning listening comprehension and figuring out their motivation in learning with this treatment.

Keywords: *Podcast, Peer Assited Learning, Listening Comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

One of the essential parts in learning a language is listening comprehension: If students cannot catch the points which are provided when listening, then it will be a big problem for them, (Osada, 2004). In addition, Buck (2001) revealed that, when listening, students are required to notice what they hear, the acoustic signals and to understand the information they hear or listen to, as a link in communication, but they might have problems during the listening process, as they may not be able to understand what the speakers are

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talking about or the speed that the speakers use in speaking may be too fast for them to focus on comprehending what they are talking about.

To alleviate those kinds of problems faced by the students in the listening processes, they need to experience many things in listening. A lot of researchers have stated that one way for the students to gain experience is by providing them with authentic listening materials. Vandergrift (1999) has mentioned that authentic listening materials give the students a chance to know a language as used by the native speakers, and to learn at the speed that native speakers use to communicate with each other, and they can motivate the students to become autonomous learners especially without having any tasks to complete. In brief, providing interesting, authentic listening materials might be one solution to improve students' listening comprehension abilities.

Nowadays, the internet, as the most sophisticated communications system, used by billions of people around the world, can support teachers to provide their students with authentic listening materials easily, for example: watching films, news, talk shows, listening to songs, radio news, chatting with foreigners, even playing games using a target language especially English. The teacher can ask each student to choose an activity that they like most so that they will enjoy learning EFL and will not feel stressed. Besides, those activities can make students more willing to learn EFL listening skills. One of the apps that might help students to enhance their listening skills are educational Podcasts. A Podcast is an app that can be downloaded from the internet using a computer or a modern android mobile phone. They have numerous episodes and many different topics in English. After downloading the app, the students can easily choose any episode or topic that they like and they can then listen and watch whenever they want without any pressure, (Al Qasim & Al Fada, 2013).

By doing pre-observations at SMAN 7 Aceh Barat Daya, the researcher found that the EFL listening skills of the students were not good, this was supported by the data from their listening scores at school. There were two factors that might have influenced their listening performance, first, the limited supply of listening materials, and second, they did not practice their listening at home. For this reason, podcasts were chosen as a bridge to help them and to motivate them to sharpen their listening skills.

Research Questions

1. Will there be a significant difference in listening comprehension skills between the tenth grade students at SMAN 7, Aceh Barat Daya, who are taught by using Podcasts with PAL and those who are taught by using Podcasts individually?
2. Will there be a significant difference in listening comprehension between male and female tenth grade students at SMAN 7, Aceh Barat Daya, who are taught by using Podcasts with PAL and those who are taught by using Podcasts individually?
3. Will there be a significant difference in motivation for listening comprehension between tenth grade students at SMAN 7, Aceh Barat Daya who are taught by using Podcasts with PAL and those who are taught by using Podcasts individually?

Research Objectives

1. To find out whether there will be a significant difference in listening comprehension between the tenth grade students at SMAN 7, Aceh Barat Daya, who are taught by using Podcasts with PAL and those who are taught by using Podcasts individually
2. To find out whether there will be a significant difference in listening comprehension between the tenth grade, male and female, students at SMAN 7, Aceh Barat Daya, who are taught by using Podcasts with PAL and those who are taught by using Podcasts individually
3. To find out whether there will be a significant difference in motivation for listening comprehension between the tenth grade students at SMAN 7, Aceh Barat Daya, who are taught by using Podcasts with PAL and those who are taught by using Podcasts individually

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening Comprehension

According to Schwartz and Beichner (1998), the most important key for learning a language is listening comprehension; learners are advised to memorize information by gathering their own background and linguistic knowledge. In addition, Hasan & Hoon (2013) have explained that listening comprehension allows the listener to give responses to the speakers during the learning process. To get those

kinds of opportunities the students really need to practice and improve their listening comprehension. However, many students are uneasy when they have to practice listening skills because they have to listen hard, focus, comprehend and remember what they have heard at the same time, (Graham, 2006).

Strategies for Learning Listening Comprehension

There are two categories of listening strategies, first: cognitive strategies which can be presented in bottom-up or top-down processes (Carter & Nunan, 2001). Bottom-up processes use the smallest unit of a text to find the meaning of the whole text. Schwartz (1998) has explained that scanning for specific details and recognizing cognates or the arrangement of word order are part of bottom-up processes. Meanwhile top-down processes start by knowing the background knowledge to interpret the messages using inferencing or predicting the information from the listeners' background knowledge and expectations. In other words, it can directly influence the students' comprehension. Second, meta-cognitive strategies are indirect strategies used during listening processes for example: planning, monitoring and evaluating learning are top-down strategies (O' Malley & Chamot, 1990). In addition, Vandergrift (1999) has said that the more cognitive strategy is used the more metacognitive strategy improves. In conclusion, both types of strategies can be used and may positively influence students' listening comprehension.

Podcast

The term Podcast was derived from the words 'iPod' and 'broadcast' and was first utilized in 2004 (Kavaliauskienė & Anusienė, 2009). In 2005, the editors of the New Oxford American Dictionary announced it as the word of the year, and subsequently defined it as "a multimedia digital file made available on the Internet for downloading to a portable media player, computer, etc" (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2005).

Language experts have defined a Podcast as a series of media files which can be automatically downloaded through subscription to an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013). Software called 'podcatchers' regularly read the RSS Feed of a subscribed Podcast in order to download the new episodes onto a computer or a portable device. Podcasts are generally composed of

audio files which are easier and cheaper to produce and to download than video. Podcasts (vodcasts) (Al Qasim & Al Fadda, 2013).

Peer Assisted Learning

Peer-assisted learning (PAL) is a classroom program that is designed to improve and develop listening skills such as fluency and listening comprehension, especially of the weaker listeners. In addition, the PAL process focuses on working with peer groups or pairs which provides opportunities for positive social interactions.

Motivation

Motivation refers to “the reasons underlying behavior” (Guay, 2010). Broussard and Garrison (2004) broadly define motivation as “the attributes that move us to do or not to do something” (p. 106). Intrinsic motivation is motivation that is animated by personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure. As Deci et al. (1999) observe, “Intrinsic motivation energizes and sustains activities through the spontaneous satisfactions inherent in effective volitional action. It is manifested in behaviors such as play, exploration and seeking challenges that people often do for external rewards” (p. 658). Researchers often contrast intrinsic motivation with extrinsic motivation, which is motivation governed by reinforcement contingencies. Traditionally, educators have considered intrinsic motivation to be more desirable and to result in better learning outcomes than extrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was a quantitative one using a quasi-experimental research model: The independent variable was PAL, and the dependent variable was listening comprehension. The research location was SMAN 7, Aceh Barat Daya, located on Jalan Nasional Blangpidie-Meulaboh in Babahrot sub district of Aceh Barat Daya which is the only senior high school in the area.

The population of this study was the entire tenth grade at SMA N 7 Aceh Barat Daya in the academic year 2017/2018. The tenth grade students were taken as the sample based on the recommendations of the English teacher and the school principle. This was based on the assumption, that, if teaching EFL listening using Podcast with PAL can significantly improve students' listening ability, the 10th grade will be a

good point to start the implementation of such a strategy for their benefit as 11th and 12th graders later on. The population comprised 76 students with 25 male and 51 female students.

The sampling technique used in this study was a cluster random sampling technique, since the selection of groups or clusters of subjects rather than individuals is known as cluster random sampling. Cluster sampling was used since there were difficulties in selecting a simple random sample of students due to the administrative of the school. Accordingly, the 10th grade students were grouped into clusters; cluster *X Mipa 1*, cluster *X Mipa 2* and cluster *X Mipa 3*. By using a lottery draw, cluster *X Mipa 1* was selected as the experimental group (EG) and *X Mipa 2* as the control group (CG). The data for this research study was gathered from the students' answers to the questions on a listening comprehension test and their responses to the study questionair

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusse the findings from the study compared to relevent theories dealing with the implementaion of Podcast with PAL in listening instruction. It covers the main results: the students listening achievements after the experimental teaching, the comparison of male and female listening scores and the motivation of the students in learning listening comprehension.

The pre-test average scores from both the CG and the EG were about the same with the EG 7 points higher than the CG. In the post-tests, after the treatment (teaching listening by using Podcast with PAL) the EG increased by 16 points only 2 points more than the CG at 14. Table 1, below, clearly shows the results:

Table 1. CG and EG Mean Scores

	Pre-tests	Change	Post-tests
Experimental Group (EG)	56	+16 —————→	72
Control Group (CG)	49	+14 —————→	63

The EG performed significantly better than the CG in both the pre-tests and the post-tests: However the EG, who were taught listening by

using Podcast with PAL did not improve significantly more than the CG students who learned listening through Podcast individually.

The podcasts did, however, have a positive effect on the students listening competence. Podcasting provided the English teacher with the opportunity to easily broadcast engaging audio content, which her students could then listen to at any time, wherever they were which hence enhanced their listening time and thus their listening skills. The authentic materials on the Podcasts introduced the students to natural EFL speech patterns and also familiarized them with plenty of typical, colloquial vocabulary and collocations that native English speakers use in real communications. Unlike fabricated materials that are commonly used in EFL classrooms which primarily focuss on grammar and formal language features, Podcasts provide real English language listening practice.

The researcher found that Podcasting was able to encourage students in both the EG and the CG to participate enthusiastically. Listening to the real speech of native speakers discussing interesting topics excited and encouraged them to concentrate more in the learning process. Even though it was quite challenging for them to understand the speech of native English speakers at their very first meeting, an audio transcript assisted them a lot in comprehending each topic as well as enhancing their vocabulary and pronunciation.

The slightly higher student learning outcomes from the EG were not significant enough to claim that the EG students who got Podcasts with PAL experienced more effective learning as had been planned. While the Podcasts used were taken from the BBC Learning English programs which are specifically designed for learning English, many of the sample students were still struggling with matters relating to linguistic features such as unfamiliar words, the speed of the speech and pronunciation. This was most likely due to the previous lack of using authentic materials and the fact that in the past their EFL teachers had always just used textbooks as the material for their teaching-learning resources. On the other hand, peer-assisted learning (PAL) instruction benefitted all the students that participated in it. The teacher did not have to plan additional activities for separate groups of students with different learning abilities in the class. Partner work gives teachers a way to structure learning opportunities that address most of the unique learning needs of all English, EFL learners. It also gives them a way to address the learning needs of all the students in their class. Students who are low performers, as well as average and above-average

students, will be assisted by working with partners in a structured way, if the activities are organized and carried out appropriately.

The issue highlighted in these discussions is teaching listening comprehension using Podcasts to both an EG and a CG. Although the listening scores of both groups increased by similar amounts, both groups were still not able to achieve the minimum passing grade set by the school. This indicated that the score increases of the students who learned listening comprehension either using Podcasts individually or with PAL still need to be evaluated comprehensively.

Another issue the researcher looked at was the relationship between the student's gender and their achievements. Female students in both the EG and the CG had higher scores than their male counterparts. The CG females scored 6 points higher than the males and 1 point higher in the EG and the females also gained 1 point more than the males in both groups in the post-tests. The underlined fact is that the CG ladies improved more than those in the EG. The lady learners tended to set higher achievement goals in the Podcasts with PAL than the males, hence they had better learning achievements.

However, the statistical analysis shows quite different results. The results from both male and female participants were not significantly different as far as their listening comprehension results were concerned. This finding resonates with the research results of Papastergiou (2009), where male learners were found to exhibit a higher preference for PAL and have better engagement and learning performance compared to female learners; however, female learners displayed higher cognitive abilities in the game content and learning objectives.

The results concerning the gender differences in their motivation to learn English showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the gentlemen and the ladies in their motivation to learn English language. The results from this study contradict those from the research studies done by MacIntyre et al. (2002) which reported on the significance of gender as a variable in second language motivation. The present study also contradicts the results from Sung & Padilla (1998) who found significantly higher motivation amongst females than their male counterparts.

The results from this study might be affected by the limitations of the study: First, the small size of the population who only came from one grade, the tenth grade at SMAN 7 Aceh Barat Daya, Second, the different levels of the students' proficiency. Third, the treatments (teaching listening by using Podcast) were only done for a short period

covering 4 meetings with four topics. Finally, this study only centered on teaching listening by using Podcast with or without PAL. Although these are shortcomings, this study has demonstrated the benefits of using Podcast with PAL. Further studies should be done for longer periods with more topics and larger groups.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This research was conducted in the first semester of the 2017/18 school year with students from the tenth grade at SMAN 7, Aceh Barat Daya. It was aimed at investigating the significance of using Podcast with PAL for teaching-learning listening comprehension, comparing male and female students' achievements after the treatment and discovering students' motivation for learning listening comprehension with the method. After analysing the results using SPSS 23, the researcher came to the following conclusions:

1. Teaching listening comprehension by using Podcast with PAL was effective for improving the students' listening comprehension achievements. Using an independent samples t test, the sig. 2-tailed value $(0,008) < \frac{1}{2} \alpha (0,025)$ confirmed that H_a was accepted and H_o was rejected, which meant that there was a significant difference in the listening achievements between the students who were taught by using Podcast with PAL and those who were taught by using Podcast individually. In other words, students who learned listening by using Podcast with PAL got significantly higher achievements than those who learned listening by using Podcast individually. Therefore, Podcast with PAL can be considered as an effective alternative technique for improving students' listening comprehension achievements.
2. The listening comprehension achievements of both male and female students, either the EG, who learned by using Podcast with PAL, or the CG, who learned by using Podcast individually, were not significantly different. The sig. 2-tailed value for the two way ANNOVA test result was $0,127 > 0,05$ which meant that H_a was rejected and H_o was accepted, which meant that there was no significant difference between the gentlemen and the ladies in both the EG and the CG in terms of their listening comprehension achievement. In conclusion, both genders performed with equal listening comprehension competence.

3. The motivations of those students who were taught-learned using Podcast with PAL compared with those who only used Podcast individually were significantly different. Referring to the independent samples t test, the experimental sig. 2 tailed value (0,804) was greater than 0,025 which meant that Ha was accepted and Ho was rejected which meant that there was a significant difference between the results from the EG with those from the CG regarding motivation. In other words, students who learned listening comprehension by using Podcast with PAL got significantly more motivated than those who learned listening comprehension by using Podcast individually.

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