International Conference on Current Trends in ELT

Lexical Development Through Podcasts

Hamid Reza Kargozari\textsuperscript{a}, Narges Zarinkamar\textsuperscript{b, }* \\
\textsuperscript{a}Tabaran Institute of Higher Education, 9177967495, Mashad, Iran  
\textsuperscript{b}Islamic Azad University of Semnan, 3581865585, Semnan, Iran

Abstract

The application of different technologies has changed modern language classes drastically compared to traditional classes. These days we come across with different terms such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) or Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). A new technology used in language classes is called podcast. The present study aimed to investigate the effect of using podcasts on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL university students. Furthermore, it aimed to report about learners' attitudes toward using podcast as a tool to enhance lexical items. The paper describes the pedagogical usage of podcast in learning English as a foreign language. The participants of this study were 32 EFL learners majoring TEFL. They were randomly assigned into two groups, experimental and control. All participants took a pre-test and a post-test. The participants of experimental group were exposed to some podcasts containing some highlighted words. However, the participants of the control group were taught new lexical items traditionally. A mixed method was used to gather data both qualitatively and qualitatively. T-test was used as statistical means. The findings showed a significant difference between two groups lexical development.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Urmia University, Iran.

Keywords: Podcasts; Vocabulary Learning; EFL; TEFL

1. Introduction

Lexical items play a significant role in language acquisition. Nobody can deny the importance of them in both receptive and productive skills. However, the teaching and learning lexical items have been undervalued until recent

* Corresponding author.  
E-mail address: narges_zarinkamar@yahoo.com
years. Traditionally, the first priority of language classes was grammar and little attention was paid to vocabulary, but an expansion of interest in vocabulary studies has been observed recently (Carter 1987, Carter and McCarthy 1988). As the result of this expansion, new strategies have been proposed and new methods have been devised to improve vocabulary learning. Perhaps one reason to this improvement is the advent of new technologies specially computer. Computer has opened new horizons in language development in general and in vocabulary learning in particular. The importance of applying technology in language classes has been revealed during a few years ago. The growth of the Internet and the evolution of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies have changed classes completely. All these technologies provide new opportunities for all to learn language without any confinements. Among these technologies there is podcasting. This study aims to investigate the effect of podcasting in lexical development. It is going to answer the following questions:

Q1. Do podcasts develop vocabulary learning among Iranian EFL learners?
Q2. How do Iranian EFL learners feel toward applying podcasts in their classes?

1.1. Podcast and Its Characteristics

Podcast is an audio file in mp3 format that can easily be downloaded from the Internet. Different devices can be used to listen to podcasts such as laptops, personal computers, mobile phones, tablets and even MP3 players. This characteristic makes podcast a unique device. One significant feature of a podcast is that it provides a situation in which a teacher can expand the borders of classroom by delivering on-demand audio files via the web. Another unique feature of podcasts is accessibility to them without any limitation of time and place. Podcasts became popular in late 2004. Within popular culture, podcasting has become an innovative way of broadcasting information on a range of subjects, from news-based items to educational subjects. However, within an educational context, podcasts provide innovative and creative opportunities to support learning more.

1.2. Podcasts in Language Classes

These days making use of the electronic devices as a realia in order for integration of CALL in to the classrooms is a need for teachers to highlight the role of modernism in language teaching classes. As far as ignoring this role would end to focalization of the teaching methods, day by day traditional teaching methods are moving backward and the new technologic methods are stepping forward (O’Brayan & Hegelheimer 2007). Actually it is for a while that web based language teaching is appreciated by the up to date teachers as Rezapour et al 2012 focuses on the impression of such applications for EFL classes. Podcast is considered as one of those applications which is finding its important place in curriculums. Podcasting involves “the authoring of, and subscription to, audio and/or video files on the internet for downloading to the user’s personal computer” (Lim, 2005: 34). Kargozari and Tafazoli (2012) found podcasts as a supportive tool in listening classes. The end was so approximate to that of Lord 2008 who worked on podcasting communities and second language pronunciation. But the usages of these devices is not summarized to the receptive skills such as listening and the focus is not only on sub skills such as pronunciation, Kargozari & Tafazoli 2012 had another research on the writing skill as a productive one with the use of vodcasting a kind of video podcasting. Observing any equipped language classes with such web based easily achieved devices show that even assignments of the students are drastically better and more beneficiary for them, more engaged and easily assessed (Gale & Kung, 2009).

2. The Study

2.1. Participants

Participants of the study were thirty two (N=32) TEFL students in Tabaran Institution of Higher Education and Azad University of Mashhad. They were attending Reading course. Two intact classes from both universities were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The subjects in both groups were all native speakers of Farsi.
Their age range was 23–32. The results of pre-test revealed that the participants of both groups enjoyed the same level of proficiency.

2.2. Procedures

In the beginning of the experiment both experimental and control groups were pre-tested. They were given the same vocabulary multiple choice item test. All the vocabularies were those which were supposed to be covered during the term. Participants of both groups had the same reading text book titled: Inside Reading, The Academic World List in Context1. The participants in the experimental group were exposed to lists of new words by listening to EFL podcasts. All the podcasts were downloaded from http://www.podbean.com/. Each podcast introduced at the most 10 new words. The participants could have the audio files to listen whenever they liked. However, the control group participants were exposed to the same lists of words traditionally. It means the teacher prepared a pamphlet out of the same lists of words. Both groups had the same types of activities to practice the new worlds. Totally both groups were exposed to 150 new words.

At the end of the study, both groups took the same test as post-test. After the post-test, the participants in the experimental group were to fill a questionnaire aimed at finding out students' attitudes and ideas toward using podcast in language classes.

3. Data Analysis and Findings

Both groups' scores in pre-test and post-test were converted into percentages. Different descriptive statistics such as mean, median, standard deviation, standard error and range were computed for both experimental and control groups. A T-Test was run on pre-test scores to determine whether there was a difference between vocabulary knowledge in both groups. Table (1) shows the results. As it is clear both groups enjoyed the same level of vocabulary knowledge and there was no significant difference between them. (T = 6.65, Df = 161, P<.05).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>45.08</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15.63</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>28-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>43.61</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15.12</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>29-67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table, table (2) demonstrates that the score of typical student in the experimental group is higher than that of typical student in the control group (medians = 82% and 70% respectively). It also demonstrates less variations among students in the experimental group (SD=11.80) than those in control group (SD=18.50).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>80.44</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>11.80</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>56-95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experimental and Control Groups in Percentages

To find out the effect of the instruction on both groups, a within group paired \textit{T-test} was calculated for each group to recognize whether there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of each group (Table3). \textit{Paired T-test} results indicate a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental group at the .05 level. The findings support the fact that participants in experimental group outperformed the participants in control group as the result of exposing to new lexical items through listening to podcasts (\textit{T}=16.05, \textit{Df}=15). A significant difference between the pretest and post-test mean scores of the control group was also found at the .05 level. The results show a significant lexical growth among the participants in control group as a result of the traditional vocabulary learning (\textit{T}=7.7, \textit{Df}=15). But compared to experimental group, development in control group was less.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Group & \textit{T} & \textit{DF} & Mean Difference & SD Difference & \textit{P} \\
\hline
Experimental & 16.05 & 15 & 27.78 & 18.24 & .05 \\
\hline
Control & 7.7 & 15 & 8.72 & 12.23 & .05 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Results of the T-test for post-test and pre-test mean scores of Experimental and control Groups}
\end{table}

To gather data qualitatively, a few participants in experimental group were interviewed. It was a kind of unstructured interview. They were asked about their experience in using podcasts and language learning hand how they felt about them. All of the interviewees showed positive reactions toward using podcasts. They claim "it was a different experience" or "using podcasts was really exciting" or "they felt no limitation for time and place of leaning". When they were asked whether they like to use podcasts to learn other skills or elements of language, all of them replied affirmatively. The results of qualitative data showed positive attitudes toward using podcasts, and revealed that podcasts could affect participants in the experimental group.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of using podcasts on vocabulary learning. The findings of the study showed both quantitatively and qualitatively that participants in experimental group who were exposed to podcasts outperformed the participants of control group in vocabulary learning. Using podcasts as instructional devices in vocabulary learning was significantly more efficient than using traditional techniques. Seemingly, applying podcasts in language classes can improve learners' progress in EFL situations and it was confirmed by a significant improvement in post-test scores of participants of experimental group. The observed development in vocabulary learning as the result of using podcasts and participants' positive attitudes toward using them in this study are consistent with findings of the other studies (Huntsberger & Stavitsky, 2007; Kargozari & Tafazoli 2012; Lee & Chan, 2007). As a result, EFL teachers are highly recommended to apply podcasts in their classes. Since students can download podcasts on their cellular phones, personal or laptop computers, they can use instructional materials anywhere and anytime they like. They feel no limitation in accessing the materials. Another advantage of using podcasts is for absent students. They will not worry if they miss the classes because the instructional materials are available to them and they can compensate their absence. Other researchers and language teachers are recommended to apply podcasts for other skills and elements of language. Podcasts seem to be valuable in development of reading, listening, speaking, pronunciation and grammar. To find out this, further studies are needed to investigate the application of podcasts in other aspects of language.
References