Podcasting Tasks and Students' Aural-Oral Skills

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Abstract: Traditional approaches to language teaching and learning have been challenged by new and innovative approaches based on the latest advances in computer and internet technology. With this, the study is conducted to ascertain if podcasting tasks are effective in addressing the limited opportunities for practicing students' aural-oral skills in English classes. Moreover, pre - post tests are conducted to determine the entry and exit proficiency levels of college students before and after integrating podcasting tasks. Their affective dispositions were also drawn through the interviews conducted by the researcher. Results of the study showed that students exit proficiency levels in both aural and oral skills improved significantly after podcasting tasks. Students also noted high level of engagement as well as interest in the different tasks. It is recommended that educators as well as administrators should look into the curriculum and incorporate more tools, like podcasts specifically as it relates to the techno-drenched atmosphere of 21st century learners.

Key Words: podcasting tasks, aura-oral skills, podcasts

Introduction

The heightened interest in English language around the world has given priority to finding more effective ways to teach English. Traditional approaches to language teaching and learning have been challenged by new and innovative approaches based on the latest advances in computer and internet technology. This has led to large scale, government-sponsored research initiatives that are redefining the role of language teachers and looking for ways to use technology to increase efficiency (Knowles, 2004). MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning) for example, is an emerging force in language education giving way for handheld devices to become teachers' partners in teaching and learning. Contrary to the belief that technology may replace the teacher's role, they may actually be "a potential solution to language learning barriers in terms of time and place" (Alda, 2018).

For the past years, the inclusion of technology in education and research has completely transformed the Education system. Development in computers, communication and multimedia has changed the classrooms into Smart rooms and teachers have become Techno-Teachers (Rajpal and Devi, 2011). Teachers' role and responsibility is becoming more crucial as they are expected to integrate technology in their instruction. On the other hand, new discoveries find their ways into education, regardless of their places of origin, an example of which is "podcasting". Since 2005, rapid advances in podcasting have been seen (Selingo, 2006 as cited in Cenin, McCullough & Reynolds, 2008).

The word "podcast", created by former MTV VJ Adam Curry, resulted from the joining of the terms "iPod" and "broadcasting". According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, a podcast is "a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player." Podcasting was originally for conveying information and entertainment. Soon, however, educators saw the huge potential it has for teaching and learning (Gribbins, 2007; Ducate, 2009).

The process of implementing the use of podcasts in speech classes may start from encouraging students to listen to podcasts on a variety of topics that interest them. After being exposed to several podcasts, students can now create audio products at home or in school and post these for sharing with the class or bigger listeners via the internet. The entire process of listening and creating podcasts has provided students opportunities to use the language, to listen and analyze their peers' podcasts, and to assess their own listening and speaking skills. It is through these activities that students are able to listen to themselves, hear their own mistakes and watch their own progress.

Apart from the technicality, technology (Podcast) is created by two important communicative skills: Listening skills and Speaking skills (Rajpal and Devi, 2011). In one of the research studies related to different skills, an analysis by Rivers and Temperly (as cited in Garcia, 2010 and Cenin et al., 2008) has found that in the different aspects of communication a person does in his daily routine are as follows: Listening skills – 45%, Speaking skills - 30%, Writing skills - 16%, Reading skills - 9%. Among all these communicative skills, listening and speaking skills play a very important role; but Listening skill still shows the greatest share in communication. Mobile, iPhone, MP3/MP4 players, etc., are the great sources of communication directly focusing on these skills, more on listening and to some extent on speaking. A highly educated professional or an illiterate person, a businessman or if we talk about a youngster, everyone starts their day with a mobile or iPhone in their hand or in their pocket. As what Robert Craven, coordinator of the Orange County Department of Education in California, says, "They've got them, they're bringing them to class; let's find a way to use them" (Meng, 2005).

Considering the limited opportunities for practicing listening and speaking skills of the target language in a traditional classroom environment (Erben, 2009; Juana and Palak, 2011), podcasts in this study is used in teaching speech communication. It is assumed that podcasting technology helps improve students' listening and speaking skills in the target language for three specific reasons: (1) podcasting made the distribution and sharing of audio files or recorded speech files extremely easy; (2) podcasting eased student anxiety about speaking in the target language and provided convenience as well as flexibility as to when and where students could listen and practice English; and (3) podcasting suited the lifestyle of the 21st century students with its ease of distribution and flexibility of listening to audio anywhere at any time. It provided a great alternative to the traditional method of listening and recording audio within the four walls of a typical second language classroom environment. Furthermore, the researcher

believes that teachers should not teach the way they were taught. As what John Dewey said, "If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." Teachers need to adapt to the changing times as they also try to meet half-way with their students who are now considered as "digital natives"; with of course, the principle that all efforts and innovations are geared towards students' development.

Research Design and Methodology

The study used the quasi-experimental design using the pre-test and post-test data. One group of college students served as the respondents in this study. On the first day of class, students' entry level was determined by conducting a pre-test based on a 40-item standardized test (Barrons' The Leader in Test Preparation Exercises for TOEFL 2007) in listening and speaking. For the succeeding meetings for three months, an implementation plan with a lesson by lesson description of how podcasting is done was implemented. These steps took place over the course of three months with a 90-minute schedule twice a week. Podcasting in this case is integrated in the existing teaching-learning activities of the teacher.

After podcasting implementation, students took the post-test and a survey to determine students' reaction and perception on podcasting tasks was also given. The results were interpreted to determine students' proficiency level both in listening and speaking.

Results and Discussions

Students' Entry Level and Proficiency Level in Listening (Aural) and Speaking (Oral)

Table 1 presents the entry proficiency level of students in listening and speaking. The data reveal that in totality the respondents' entry level in both listening and speaking is "poor".

Table :1
Students' Entry Level and Proficiency Level in Listening and Speaking

Macro Skill	*n*	Mean	SD	Grade	Interpretation
Listening					
PRE-TEST	28	20.54	4.45	2.91	Poor
POST-TEST	**28**	**26.07**	**4.93**	**2.29**	**Good**
Speaking					
PRE-TEST	28	20.64	5.12	2.89	Poor
POST-TEST	**28**	**29.43**	**6.00**	**1.95**	**Very Good**

The table below shows the respondents' entry and proficiency levels in both listening and speaking. The interpretation "poor" in student's entry level means that they have difficulty listening and understanding a native speaker. In the case of speaking, it means that students

cannot talk in a direct and well-organized manner, cannot express a complete thought, and cannot be understood. This is quite alarming since the respondents were already in the third year and it is expected that at this level, they have already the command of the language. This problem may have occurred because of the following reasons: students were not exposed to the native speakers of the language; the number of school days allocated towards learning may be insufficient; students may not have the time or the motivation to practice English outside of the classroom. The result of the pre-test on the listening skill has somehow strengthened the opinion of Cenin (2008), Kavaliauskiene (2009) and Ducate (2009) that the listening skills in language teaching have been neglected and shifted to a secondary position after speaking and writing.

On the other hand, their proficiency level in listening after the intervention was "Good" and "Very Good" in speaking. Podcasting has provided the learner with massive and varied oral input to overcome the non-native context handicap. It motivates students' interest in listening to English, and provides students with exposure to native speaker's speech. As they have listened to varied podcasts in and out of the classroom overtime, students have developed a strategy on how to easily catch up and understand the native speakers' words. In the process of making their own podcasts, students were also given the opportunity to record and edit, listen and record again, listen again and revise as necessary. Many of the students revised and re-recorded their podcasts multiple times, in effect increasing the amount to time devoted to using the language. In addition, this also increases students' time allocated to language learning and, while doing so, provides a meaningful experience that is motivating, stimulating and useful for a language learner.

The Significant Mean Gain of the Pre-Post Tests Results of the Listening (Aural) and Speaking (Oral) Skills of the Respondents

Table 2 shows significant improvement after comparing the post-test result to that of the pre-test score. The major factor that affects the performance is podcasting.

Table 2:
Significant Mean Gain of the Pre-Post Tests Results of the Listening and Speaking Skills of the Respondents

	n	**Mean**	**SD**	**T-Value**	**P-Value**	**Decision**
Listening						
Pre- Test	28	20.54	4.451	*6.87***	*0.000*	*Reject HO*
Post-test	28	26.071	4.929			
Speaking						
Pre- Test	28	20.64	5.12	*10.26***	*0.000*	*Reject HO*
Post-test	28	29.43	6.00			

** - highly significant at $\alpha = 0.01$

The central goal of language teaching is for students to have improved their ability to communicate in the target language. The presented results proved that podcasting has significantly helped improve students' listening and speaking capabilities. The ease of downloading and creating one's own podcasts means that learners can now be engaged in plenty of listening and speaking exercises. Their ability to reach large audiences in different parts of the world is a big motivator for students producing their own podcasts. Furthermore, the production of podcasts provides students with plenty of meaningful language use. This also implies that educators can leverage technology to create an engaging and personalized environment to meet the emerging educational needs of the current generation.

The Respondents' Affective Disposition towards Podcasting Tasks

In the context of today's increasingly fluid, interconnected, and complex world, educators need to re-examine current practices and address their deficiencies. This does not mean that they have to displace the traditional, core learning of reading, writing and arithmetic, but rather, engages students in a deeper, engaging manner with relevant tools, technologies, and methodologies. Furthermore, since students bring with them these "gadgets" to class and become more inclined to accessing information from the internet through computers and cellular phones, educators can leverage technology to create an engaging and personalized environment to meet the emerging educational needs of our current generation. Educators need to work with the kind of brains they got now; teachers need to speak their students' language as well in order to be understood. In response to the fifth research question, - students' affective disposition towards podcasting tasks, the results will be qualitatively discussed here.

Based on the survey, 13 out of 28 students or 46% of the sample population dreaded listening exercises at the beginning of the semester. There were also 10 or 36% who feel that although they can understand several words in the listening exercises, yet they still feel very confused; and 68 % or 18 out of 28 said that they understand half of the words but still not completely comfortable with the listening exercises. When the researcher began the podcasting listening tasks, students appeared to be overwhelmed. They would listen to the podcast the first time and feel that it was too fast for them to hear. Some even complained that they cannot understand some of the words. However, after listening to series of podcasts for several meetings, fewer complaints were heard. Students appear to be more engaged in listening and seemed to have found a strategy how to easily understand the words they hear. This observation is consistent to the result of the post-test conducted where students' listening skill has significantly improved after podcasting. Furthermore, 75% or 21 out of 28 respondents agreed that listening to varied podcasts in class has improved their listening skill and to some extent made them more comfortable with listening exercises. There were also 20 students or 71% of the respondents who said that they feel positive about and enjoy podcast listening exercises. All in

all, they enjoy using the technology and with their interest sparked, their perceptions and attitudes toward the entire process of listening changed.

On the other hand, there has also been a great change in perceptions and attitudes toward speaking exercises after podcasting. At the beginning, the researcher observed that students were afraid to speak. They do not seem to like doing speaking exercises and seem to be embarrassed to do them in front of the class. This observation is consistent to the result of the survey wherein 39% or 11 out of 28 respondents said that they feel negatively about speaking in English; 57 % said that although they want to speak in English, but their skills are not good. Nonetheless, the first time that they did a published radio podcast, the researcher observed that they have prepared well although there were still grammar mistakes and words mispronounced. Somehow listening to varied podcasts gave them an idea on how they are supposed to prepare and deliver their own podcast. After listening to their own podcasts, the researcher observed that students seemed excited and motivated. The second time they did their own individual podcasts, almost everyone was more rehearsed and there were very few mistakes on grammar and pronunciation. They have also incorporated background music and other enhancements in their work. It should also be noted that students write their own "I Believe, I Can" essay for their podcast. They seemed to sound like "real podcasters". It is also worth mentioning that when the teacher asked for a soft copy of their podcast, almost everyone saved the file in their iPods or mobile devices though they didn't receive such instruction from the teacher. This attitude clearly shows that the students have understood what podcasting really is. This also shows strong motivation that has come in part from the introduction of podcasting in the class. In addition, students were able to create their own website, where they have published their own podcasts and where their classmates and relatives and/or friends have listened to and commented to their podcasts.

Through podcasting, some of the negative attitudes, perceptions as well as anxieties that students experience when they are faced with listening and speaking exercises were removed. Students were afforded the opportunity to use a device that they already enjoy using to further their skills in the language. More specifically, though the use of IPods or any mobile device they were given many more opportunities to practice both their listening and speaking skills. This was true not only in class where they listen to podcasts and work to create their own, but also at home where they had downloaded it to their IPods or mobile device, recorded their own voices using audio software and published it in their website to gauge their own speaking skills. They were also given the opportunity to use their creativity in designing their own website and coming up with their website's name, banner and tagline. Indeed, PODCASTING IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION CLASS could boost the listening and speaking proficiency of language learners and could encourage independent learning necessary to develop critical-thinking and interpersonal communication skills.

Finally, it was not surprising that 96% or 27 out of the 28 respondents believed that undeniably podcasting had helped improve their listening and speaking skills; thus, they highly

recommend integrating podcasting in Speech classes. Interestingly, this study has also provided support for earlier studies like that of Cenin et al. (2009), Kavaliauskiene (2009), Swanson (2010), Juana and Palak (2011), and Rajpal and Devi (2011) that podcasting as a new technology has a huge potential in enhancing second language learners' listening and speaking skills.

Indeed, podcasting has given the teacher an opportunity to use something that students already love (IPods, mobile devices) to help them learn something that they previously hated (listening and speaking exercises in the foreign language). Based on the results, podcasting has been a positive experience for all involved, both students and teacher have benefited.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that technology integration like that of podcasts in language classes can enhance the listening and speaking proficiency of language learners. This is affirmed by the Recursive Hierarchical Recognition (RHR) Blended Model of Knowles (2004) that the most efficient language learning approach is a blend, with well-designed multimedia programs (such as podcasting) and coordinated classroom activities working together. It is recommended that educators as well as administrators should look into the curriculum and incorporate more tools, like podcasts specifically as it relates to the techno-drenched atmosphere of 21st century learners.

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