Language

ADVANTAGES OF PODCASTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Dr. Seema Jain*
Farha Hashmi**

ABSTRACT

The modern era has unleashed the new ways of learning. English a global language is no more learnt in traditional classroom but in a web-based environment that ensures feasible and fastest learning amongst the learners. The modern learning setting in the ELT classroom offers such opportunities and ensures the best level of listening skills, speaking skills and presentation skills among the learners. The practicability of new techniques boosts the idea to broaden the possibility of faster learning and provides the constructive and virtual material to the learners in a virtual environment. The present paper, in particular, touches these aspects of the modern approach of teaching English as a second language and discusses the multifarious advantages of the ELT podcasts, the audio programs on the web which are usually updated at regular intervals. It sheds light on how a group of English language learners, which was encouraged for listening and producing ELT podcasts in the language classroom. The paper brought forth the advantages of new methods to be adopted in teaching-learning a 'Target language'. It also gives details of modern learning settings which conduce to feasible learning and captivates the mind towards addressing and focusing on revision of old teaching methods and unfolds the idea that students' learning in Target Language should be viewed in a new perspective. Besides these, the paper also presents many undeniable reasons for using podcasts along with related activities in a language classroom to learn English easily, quickly, and automatically.

Key words: Foreign Language, Listening Skills, Spoken Skills

Introduction

Foreign language acquisition is a skill, more than a body of facts, acquired with practice; therefore, sustaining motivation and promoting lengthy practice outside the classroom are key factors. The urge to communicate is very strong in humans and is what ensures first language acquisition in the first place (*Pinker, 1994*); therefore, creating the desire to communicate in the target language will also be a strong motivator for its acquisition. This paper presents a study on using Podcasts for developing listening and speaking skills amongst the learners in second or target language. **Podcasts** are audio programs on the web which are usually updated at regular intervals. A podcast can be uploaded automatically to your computer using RSS (really simple syndication), *podcatching* software. It can cover a wide range of topics and can include music and video. It can last anything upwards of a few minutes to an hour or more. Podcasts are popular for their authentic listening progmamme prepared by the proficient speakers and are extremely helpful for the learners to produce the natural speech as by the native speakers. Podcast directories are best place to start looking for podcasts. The authentic podcasts ranging from vocabulary practice to idiomatic expressions to phrasal verbs to general English are easily available in plenty at podcast directories. Learners can click on a category and scroll through

*Dr. Seema Jain is the Principal of R.G.P.G.College, Meerut, U.P.

**Farha Hashmi is a Research Scholar at Mewar University, Gangrar, Chittorgarh, Rajasthan.

a list of podcasts, listening to and subscribing to any that interest them. A podcast directory aimed specifically at teachers and learners of English is *Englishcaster* (http://www.englishcaster.com). New episodes can be listened to on the computer, or download to an MP3 player or iPod for later listening. Another example of a general podcast directory is http://www.podcatalley.com/. *Stanley* (2006) points out that podcasts offer students a wide range of possibilities for extra listening both inside and outside the classroom. More advanced learners can be encouraged to listen to authentic podcasts. This web-based environment effectively narrows the gap between the formal English which dominates most second language classroom and the informal English used in most real –life communication events. ELT podcasts cover a wide range of subject matter. Here are some examples of ELT podcast topics:

- Podcasts based on comprehension activities, interviews and vocabulary.

- Podcasts based on idiomatic expressions with their usages.

- Podcasts containing conversations between the native speakers.

- Podcasts based on that encourage careful listening by the learners.

- Accompanied by the text of the lyrics.

- Podcasts containing vocabulary with their pronunciation.

- Story-based podcasts followed by listening comprehension questions.

In addition to provide the extra listening practice, teachers can also create their own podcasts or guide their students to produce their own. With the advent of information and communication technology, it is now easy for teachers and students to produce podcasts. This follows the simple procedure explained below to help them produce their own podcasts: Using a free podcast site like Podomatic (www.podomatic.com), the teacher can set up a podcast page. The podcast page provides a website for learners to post their podcasts. To record a podcast, the teacher needs a computer and Internet connection, and a microphone and speakers or a headset. Podcast sites are extremely easy to use and no specialist technical knowledge is needed. Indeed, learners get full exposure to a number of listening activities to enhance their oral proficiency. Also it improves their knowledge of the expressions as well as their usages in different contexts. Therefore, the learners must also be encouraged to create their own podcasts. For this, they could be given short text to prepare and rehearse. The more learners practice podcast texts, rehearsing them and recording them, the more proficiency will come in their speech. As *Nuan* (1995) points out that '*the ease of downloading podcasts to MP3 players and iPod means that learners can now engage in plenty of listening practice. The production of podcasts provides students with plenty of meaningful language use, which is highly desirable for second language acquisition*'.

The paper aims at presenting the enriched learning experience that English learning students had while listening to ELT podcasts in the language lab. They were also offered training to produce their own podcasts. The study was carried out with a group of English learning students of a College. This study investigated the attitudes of students towards developing listening and speaking skills through podcasts.

Aim of the Research

- To motivate learners to learn new expressions via podcasts normally used in communication.

- To upload the podcasts, listen to them carefully, and improve their listening and speaking skills.

- To design activities based on podcasts that encourage students to respond to each other in target language.

- To offer valuable opportunities to the students to develop foreign language skills in an improved

environment which promotes cooperative and autonomous learning and engage learners in a countless communicative activities in a congenial and stimulating environment?

The study would also serve as a model for a future wider research study. The participants in the study had no previous knowledge of Podcasts. They were offered the opportunity to attend a lecture on the use of podcasts for language learning. Twenty students attended the lecture at the language lab. The students were asked to log on the various podcasts sites, listen to them carefully and prepare a report what they had listened to. They were also asked to note down the important expressions and vocabulary used along with their usages. The students were supposed to follow the correct pronunciation and natural accent of the expressions used by the native speakers. The learners were also engaged in different language learning activities based on podcasts. The students were randomly divided into five groups of five students each and asked to complete the above-mentioned assignment. Each group was allotted two hours for completing the task. Each group was allowed only two computers with Internet access.

Some of the Podcasts Sites used by the students were-

http://wwwbbc.co.uk

www.eltpodcat.com

http://breakingnewsenglish.com

www.likely.podmatic.com

www.esl.about.com/od.englishlistening

http://www.englishcaster.com

http://www.podcatalley.com/.

http://www.e-poche.net/conversation

http://phoneticpodcast.com

http://www.englishthroughstories.com

http://englishpodsong.blogspot.com

http://mylcpodcasts.blogspot.com

The students vigorously made a quick search on the podcasts sites provided to them. They uploaded various ELT podcasts ranging from a wide variety of topics, from vocabulary items to discussion on topics of interest to jokes and to learning songs. They also performed related activities such as writing a summary of what they had listened to, noted down idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs, tags and important words strange to them. They were also asked to use them in various situations. These activities proved to be realistic as most of the expressions are relevant to learning of the target language. Also the learners used these expressions in most natural way like the native speakers.

 After completing the assignments, the students came together and shared the expressions they found while listening to podcasts. This creative method of learning English language in classroom enabled the students not only to develop listening and speaking skills effectively but also build up their confidence in learning correct pronunciation and accent of second language by using modern technology. The relevance of podcasts in learning English language has also been cherished by many studies conducted to elicit the information about the attitude of EFL students towards the integration of podcasts in English language classroom or outside the classroom. ELT podcasts can be used for interactive and extensive listening activities. However, ELT podcasts are particularly suited for extensive listening, for the purpose of motivating student interest in listening to English, and providing them with exposure to native speakers' speech (*Rost,* 1991).

Podcasting as new technology has huge potential in enhancing second learners' listening and speaking skills. *(Stanley*, 2005). This activity is also suited for less confident learners, since it reduces the anxiety brought about by real-time interaction (*Gardner, Day, & MacIntyre*, 1992).

To answer the main question (How students respond to the use of podcasts in language learning) a questionnaire containing fifteen items in it was distributed to the students during class time after listening podcasts. They were allowed twenty minutes to answer. Included in the questionnaire were items relating to different aspects concerned with podcasts use, such as enriched language learning, motivation, web-based environment, improved communication skills and achievement. The questions asked in the questionnaire were as follow

- I would like to keep on listening to podcasts.
- I would like to know more about ELT podcasts.
- I enjoy listening to dialogues on podcasts.
- I like the application of podcasting.
- I prefer the web-based environment.
- I enhance my English proficiency by listening to podcasts.
- I use different expressions in more natural way via podcasting.
- I wish to learn effective language with podcasts.
- Podcasts help me to improve listening and speaking skills.
- I enjoy podcasts -based activities in the classroom.
- I improve my language skills by producing my own podcasts.
- I rev up my confidence by listening to podcasts.
- I improve my communication skills via podcasts.
- I like to study in a virtual environment.
- I appreciate the idea of introducing new learning tools in classroom.

The obtained results were quiet positive and responsive. Most of the students enthusiastically answered all the questions and showed their willingness to integrate podcasts into their classroom learning practice, and as *Kenneth Beare* (2005) points out, *'podcasting is especially interesting for English learners as it provides a means for students to get access to 'authentic' listening sources about almost any subject that may interest them.'*

Salient features of student podcasts

- Podcasts can be accessed easily and quickly by the learners. This motivates them to participate in various ELT classroom activities. Also, it offers them opportunity to enthusiastically respond to teachers and the levels of their learning speeds up desirably.

- The rehearsal of texts for producing podcasts gives learners full exposure to hone their language skills. The more they undergo plenty of practice, the more their listening and speaking skills improve.

- Podcasting is unique for its collaborative skills that it offers to its learners. They work in group and share multiple information on various topics of their interest. Thus leading them towards a collaborative learning and improving their communication skills. As the learners get exposure to the listening programmes

and related activities in new and interesting ways in the language classroom, the other three skills i.e., speaking, reading and writing automatically go hand in hand. Because podcasts provide authentic oral language materials, an important aspect of language teaching which has often been neglected in the past in favour of text-based activities. Thus the learners confidence rev up in learning second language at the fastest speed via podcasting.

- A podcast can be created by different students according to his or her capability. Thus less confident learners also get opportunity to develop their listening skills through listening and producing podcasts. This makes podcast learning superior to traditional classroom learning.

- The principal motivating force behind Podcasting is that it allows students to reach large audiences. Producing Podcasts in class contributes to wider listening activities. It also helps to augment the motivation level of learning second language among the learners. Besides, the advanced learners can also be encouraged to listen to authentic Podcasts to narrow the gap between the native speakers and the non-native speakers.

Considering the advantages of creating and listening English podcasts in the classroom, it must also be pointed out that

I. Students were motivated to search the podcast directories and to quickly and accurately find best ELT podcasts material of their interest. They were given prompt support to upload podcasts from the web, and the best search engines available to them were Google for wide searches over a large database of websites and Yahoo for a more theme-based approach.

II. Most of the students keenly liked the idea of uploading ELT podcasts on provided websites.

III. Students enjoyed and gained confidence in learning English language with the new technology.

IV. Most of them expressed their full satisfaction on using podcasts and showed improvement in their communication and language skills.

V. The students learned new expressions in web-enabled environment and simultaneously jotted down the vocabulary they found difficult to understand.

VI. By Listening podcasts, the students really had the rich experience of learning English language easily, quickly and naturally.

To conclude, it can be stated strongly that English Language Teachers may use podcasts in the classroom: (a) as an interesting activity in which students learn communication skills, (b) to teach English in a simple and easy way, (c) to teach students how to be an effective listeners as well as good speakers since most of the available ELT podcasts are designed by the proficient speakers and the native speakers on a wide variety of topics, (d) to teach language with the help of diverse activities based on podcasts, (e) to enhance competency in the use of technology, and (f) as a motivational technique to keep students on task. The positive outcome of the study positively supports the idea of incorporating technology in the language classroom. It also points out that ELT podcasts hone their potential to learn English faster and promote effective and collaborative learning, motivation, and better communication and boost up the achievement level among English language learners.

References

1. Beare, Kenneth (2006). *Introduction to English learning Podcasts.* Available at http://esl.about.com

2. Dudney and Nicky Hockly (2008). *How to teach English with technology.* 98-102.

3. Gardner, R.C., Day, J.B., & MacIntyre, P. D (1992). *Integrative motivation, induced anxiety, and language learning in a controlled environment.* Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 14(2), 197-214.

4. Nuan, D. (1995). *Closing the gap between learning and instruction.* TESOL Quarterly, 29(1), 133-158.

5. Pinker, S. (1994). *The language instinct: The new science of language and mind.* London: Penguin Books.

6. Rost, M. (1991). *Listening in action: Activities for developing listening in language teaching.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

7. Stanley, G. (2005). *Podcasting for ELT.* Retrieved January 17, 2007, from http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/resources/podcast.shtml

8. Stanley, G. (2006). *Podcasting: Audio on the Internet comes of age.* TESL-EJ, 9(4). Retrieved on January 17, 2007 from http://www-writing.berkely.edu/ TESL-EJ/ej36/int.html