The effect of podcast on vocabulary learning of elementary EFL students

Saeid Angouti

Nanjing University of Science and Technology,
200 Xiaolingwei, Nanjing 210094, P.R China.
saeid279[at]outlook[dot]com

Abstract- *The present research which is within the domain of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) will try to show the effect of using podcasting on vocabulary learning of elementary EFL learners. In this experiment, the researcher will go through a pretest-posttest control group design to find out the effect of using podcasts on an experimental group in comparison with a common way of teaching vocabulary in the control group where the teacher presents a list of the same words by writing on the board, repeating and translating them. The participants of this study will be at the elementary level. In order to have relatively the same level of language proficiency, an Oxford Placement test (OPT) is going to be used at the beginning of the research. At the end of the semester (after 2 months), both groups will be examined by the same multiple-choice test to assess their performance on the material. The results will show whether using podcast has any effect in developing knowledge of vocabulary.*

Keywords- *Elementary level, Podcast, Vocabulary, EFL, Traditional approach, Posttest, Instruments*

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology is an increasing part of the social and academic lives of students in recent years. Dudeney and Hockly (2007) mentioned that learners are using technology more and more and teachers are often far less skilled and knowledgeable than their own students when it comes to using current technology. The term 'podcast' is the combination of the popular brand name of ('iPode') and 'broadcast'. Podcast is a modern digital technology that can be used effectively for language learning purposes (Evans, 2007). A podcast is a series of audio files on web which can be freely downloaded to a computer (Cochrane, 2005). The effective ways of using this new technology in and out of the classroom should be examined in order to see its impact on language learning. Regarding learning benefits of podcasts, it seems that this new technology can have a positive effect on vocabulary learning of language learners. In the past, vocabulary teaching and learning were often given little priority in second language programs, but recently the status of vocabulary seems to be changing. It has been suggested that in the initial stages of learning, knowing more vocabulary plays a primary role in communication and acquisition. In addition, access to lexical corpora has made it possible for applied linguists to access huge samples of language in order to find out how words are used, both by native speakers and by second language learners. (Richards & Renandya, 2002, pp. 255-256).

Regarding the importance of vocabulary, Cook (2008) mentioned that we all know people need a large number of words to speak a language and vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write. Similarly Richards & Renandya (2002) declared that without an extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, learners often achieve less than their potential and may be discouraged from making use of language learning opportunities around them such as listening to the radio, listening to native speakers, using the language in different contexts, reading, or watching television.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching and learning vocabulary have not always been an interesting work especially in classes where the teacher uses techniques such as memorization, repetition, translation and so on. The researcher has noticed this boring situation of applying the above techniques in his classes as well as his colleagues'. According to cook (2008), acquiring a word is not just linking a form with a translated meaning in a wordlist. It is acquiring a complex range of information about its spoken and written form, the ways it is used in grammatical structures and word combinations, and diverse aspects of meaning.

Abraham and Williams (2009) pointed out podcasting could be one of the best techniques in bringing about more achievements in listening comprehension in the classroom and there would be a strong likelihood that such a technique would prove effective in teaching vocabulary. The improvements made by the help of podcasts in listening skill led the researcher to investigate podcasting techniques and examine their relative effect on the development of elementary students' lexicon.

3. REVIEW OF LETRITURE

Technology has been widely used in language learning and education: podcasting is one means of learning and refers to an exciting new audio medium that gives you the freedom to listen to the audio programming of your choice (Cochrane, 2005). Every day around the world, people are creating their own audio shows on a wide range of topics — from music to technology and everything in between. Scrivener (2011) pointed out that get your students to download podcasts you recommend or record your own short podcast for the students so they can listen to them at home. Podcasting is a novel approach to teaching vocabulary which has recently become very popular. It would be useful for all learners especially for the ones who have lost their motivation with the conventional way of teaching vocabulary (Dudeney & Hockly,2008). Putman and Kingsley (2009) pointed out Podcasts can be valuable tools when used to reach students outside the normal school day and enhance their science vocabulary.

Harmer (2007) talked about the importance of modern podcast in giving students many more learning opportunities than ever before. He pointed out that the number of podcast sites are growing and it could be a good source for students extensive listening.

Miller and Hlas (2010) in their article mentioned that it is rare today to walk on a college campus without seeing headphones draped around students' necks. Between class periods, people walk while listening to music and podcasts. Maximizing the popularity of this new trend by using podcasting in educational settings could be advantageous (O'Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007).

Many teachers have already started to do so by using podcasts to disseminate   course information (Huann & Thong, 2006; Meng, 2005), to create new course material (Sathe & Waltje, 2008), or to distribute missed information to an absent student (Tavales & Skevoulis, 2006). For example, iPods were distributed at Osaka Jogakuin College in Japan in spring 2004 and at Duke University in the United States to expose students to lectures on-the-go (McCarty, 2005).

Finally, podcasting in education allows a unique opportunity to build on an already popular student behavior (Godwin- Jones, 2005; Thorne & Payne, 2005), and podcasts in general are easy to produce either by instructors or by students (Warlick, 2005).

4. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

4.1. Elementary level

This is the level at which students learn how to communicate in a basic way by reading the writing and expressing themselves verbally and in a proper way. They can connect some sentences together, construct a simple story, or take part in simple spoken interaction (Harmer, 2007). Students get to this level of education after they are done with pre-school. Elementary level includes grade 1-8 where students are prepared for higher learning.

4.2. Podcast

A podcast is a portable device used to play audio files and has sounds. A podcast, in this scenario, is a series of digital media file found on the internet that can be played online or downloaded so that the user can use them for learning purposes. The word "podcast" is a combination of the word broadcasting and the name of the popular MP3 player from Apple Computer called the "iPod". (Salmon, Edirisingha, Mobbs & Dennett, 2008).

4.3. Vocabulary

Vocabulary can be defined as the words in the language that some people have difficulty in pronouncing or explaining their meanings (Ur, 2012). Languages consist of words. Vocabulary is the collection of words that an individual finds hard to understand because most of the time they are found in their second languages (Linse, 2005).

5. SIGNIFICIANT OF THE STUDY

It seems almost impossible not to consider the power of words. Perhaps the greatest tools teachers can give to their students for succeeding, not only in their education but also more generally in life, is a large, rich vocabulary and the skills for using those words. One's ability to function in today's complex social and economic world is mightily affected by our language skills and word knowledge. In addition to the vital importance of vocabulary to success in life, it can also be mentioned that the power of words in getting high levels of reading achievement. Thus, the researcher is seeking for the most recent ways of helping language learners to get the most out of their eager efforts in struggling to acquire such benefits namely vocabulary. As Dudeney and Hockly (2007) mentioned Podcast is one of recent ways of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools that can give learners exposure to and practice in all of the four main language skills. The motive that using podcasts brought about the researcher in learning vocabulary made him enthusiastic to investigate the case in a more scientific way. The researcher has decided to run an experiment to gain the advantage of using podcasts with the hope of adding some spice to this job and hopefully make vocabulary learning more enjoyable. What this study will pursue is to provide an explanation regarding how to use podcasts in order to build learners' lexicon and make it richer.

The domain of CALL in some countries is in need of more research. To the researcher's best knowledge, studies about computer-based instruction in those countries are not so many especially for research through English language learning. Few studies about using podcast in teaching listening to EFL learners have been conducted but there is not any research for learning vocabulary through podcast

and this is somewhat the first research in this field, so it is novel in this field.

It seems that this study will encourage English language teachers to use technology devices in language learning in general, and in learning English vocabulary in particular. This study also attempts to bridge the gap between the theoretical and practical sides of using CALL in teaching vocabulary.

Therefore, the findings of this study may be prominent for different categories of people; it can be helpful for English language teachers whose students have problem with learning vocabulary and are bored by learning English vocabulary in traditional ways. There are many English learners who are looking for some ways that could learn English by their own; conducting this research makes the people familiar with podcast and its abilities. Even some English teachers do not know podcast; it is hope that reading this thesis will familiarize them with the podcast.

Finally, this study may encourage other researchers to conduct further studies on the same topic, or maybe on other sub skills or skills of English.

6. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research will employ the qualitative design of collecting data. The qualitative method will be essential in this dissertation because of the use of actual information that can be used to give reliable data. Owing to gathering information that was not biased, the random sampling method was used to collect the specimen that would be used to compare data collected in the near future to establish how a podcast can be used to impact positively on learning the vocabulary of elementary EFL students. The data will be collected using the pretest-protest control group design to compare and validate the results that will be obtained from the research.

According to the research question and hypothesis, the following design is selected as the most appropriate design for this study. This experiment will help to establish the effects of podcast on learning vocabulary of elementary students. The slightest changes will be identified as soon as the individuals make any improvements on their vocabulary.

Pretest-posttest control group design

G1 R O X O
G2 R O O
G1: stands for an experimental group
G2: stands for control group which will not receive the treatment
R=Indicates they will be randomly chosen
O= Indicates they will be pretested prior to training
X= Indicates they will receive the treatment
O= Indicates they will be post-tested after training

In this design, a list of the words from the episodes of the podcast to be taught is given to the participants as the pre-test. The same pre- and post-test will be used for both experimental and control groups (See Appendix A).

6.1. Research question and hypothesis

This study aims to explore the effect of podcast on vocabulary learning of elementary EFL Students, it tries to provide answers to the following research questions:

- Is there any statistically significant difference between learning vocabulary through podcast and through traditional approach with provision of a list of words and asking for repetition and translation to EFL learners?

Given the aforementioned research question, the following hypothesis is formulated and investigated in this study: There is no statistically significant difference between learning vocabulary through podcast and through traditional approach with provision of a list of words and asking for repetition and translation to EFL learners.

6.2. Investigation Subjects

To accomplish this study, one control and one experimental group will be chosen and homogenized according to their scores in initial placement test which is going to be an Oxford Placement Test. A pretest including the list of elementary new words from some episodes of podcast from English Pod website will be given to two classes. To see if the words to be taught are really new, the researcher will ask participants to translate the list, and the result will show if the words are new or not. After the test is applied, one group (control) will be taught the vocabulary using the common strategies for teaching vocabulary like writing the words on the board with their translations and repeating them and the other group (experimental) will be taught the same words using the podcast from English Pod website .To gain the final result in the groups, a vocabulary multiple choice test (MC) will be applied as the post test. In order to decrease the effect of answering question by chance, the researcher will use the minus scoring trick.

Before administering the posttest to the participants, 35 students from other third graders with the same level of proficiency, who are not the subject of the study, will take the test in the pilot study. Item facility (IF) and item difficulty (ID) of the test will be determined. According to Farhady, Ja'farpur, and Birjandi (2009) items with facility indexes above 0.63 are too easy and those items with facility indexes below 0.37 are too difficult and should be deleted from the test. Items that their facility is acceptable will be chosen as the final items of MC test. The researcher also will investigate the reliability of the test. Kurder-Richardson Formula 21 (KR-21) will be used to calculate the reliability of the MC test.

6.3. Participants

Using table of Morgan, this study will be conducted with 60 male EFL learners from 4 junior- high school third

graders. In order to have relatively the same level of language proficiency an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) is going to be applied at the beginning of the research.

6.4. Procedures of the Research

Out of the two classes with elementary language proficiency, one experimental and one control group will be chosen randomly. The study will be carried out working on a particular episode of podcast from English Pod website in each session. This site provides a lot of conversations for different levels of proficiency. According to the students' level, elementary lessons will be chosen to practice in this project.

The conversations will be repeated three times by the podcast makers with the average time of ten minutes. It is at normal speed the first and third time that the students hear it, but the second time, the conversation is at a slower pace. For the slower version, they speak at an unnaturally slow pace while trying to maintain the phonological features of quicker conversation. The study will be done in a period of 15 sessions working on a particular episode of the mentioned podcast with almost seven new words in each session. It will be lasted about two months, two 1-hour sessions per week. In both classes half of the time will be spent on the experiment and the other half on the school's syllabus. At the end of the semester, a multiple-choice test of vocabulary knowledge will be designed from the words which were taught during these sessions and administered to both groups of participants. Finally, the researcher will contrast their scores to see whether there is any difference among learners of experimental group and control group.

For the present study, the researcher is going to examine the knowledge of vocabulary of elementary EFL learners by comparing two different instructional approaches, namely podcast and traditional approach in which the teacher presents a list of words and asks for repetition and translation.

First, 90 participants of the study are identified from 4 junior-high school; they will be administered a placement test (Oxford Placement Test) in order to determine their present level. Then, about 60 students will be selected as the subjects of the study whose level is elementary.

After determining the level of participants, 60 selected elementary students will be given a pretest which consists of 40 multiple-choice items from some episodes of podcast from English Pod website to students. In order to decrease the effect of answering question by chance, the researcher will use the minus scoring trick. Before administering the

pretest to the participants, 35 students from other school with the same level of proficiency, who are not the subject of the study, will take the test in the pilot study. Item facility (IF) and item difficulty (ID) of the test will be determined. According to Farhady, Ja'farpur, and Birjandi (2009) items with facility indexes above 0.63 are too easy and those items with facility indexes below 0.37 are too difficult and should be deleted from the test. Items that their facility is acceptable will be chosen as the final items of MC test. The researcher also will investigate the reliability of the test. Kurder-Richardson Formula 21(KR-21) will be used to calculate the reliability of the MC test.

The words are from some episodes of podcast from English Pod website. To see if the words to be taught are really new, the researcher will ask participants to translate the list, and the result will show if the words are new or not. After pretest, students will be divided into two different groups randomly, 30 students in one group and 30 into another group. Each group will receive instructional materials containing the same vocabularies by two different ways. The first group is called control group and the second one is the experimental group. In both classes half of the time will be spent on the experiment and the other half on the school's syllabus.

The length of research is 2 months (generally 15 sessions, two 1-hour sessions per week). The total number of 105 vocabularies will be selected for the study. The words identified to be taught throughout the study will be selected from English Pod website. These 105 words will be presented in 15 conversations from English Pod website. The way of presenting vocabularies in this study is different for each group. For the control group, in each session, 7 words will be presented in the classroom and learners will be asked to repeat the words and memorize their Persian meaning. The way of presenting vocabularies for the experimental group, which receive the treatment, is different. The same seven words will be presented by working on a particular episode of podcast from English Pod website. The words will be presented through conversations. The conversations will be repeated three times by the podcast makers with the average time of ten minutes. It is at normal speed the first and third time that the students hear it, but the second time, the conversation is at a slower pace. For the slower version, they speak at an unnaturally slow pace while trying to maintain the phonological features of quicker conversation.

At the end of experiment, in order to measure the students' progress as a result of treatment and to determine the

efficiency of each approach, a vocabulary multiple choice test (MC) consist of 40 items will be applied as the posttest.

In fact, the posttest is the same as pretest in the number of items and level of difficulty but the order of items will be changed in posttest in order to keep the validity constant.

7. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research that was obtained from the pretest-protest control group design showed that the biggest group of student that sat for the exam to improve because of using podcast. Using podcast helped the student to learn most of the words and their translation properly. Out of the student that used podcast 24 out of 30 students were able to pronounce the words properly compared to 18 out of 30 who used the traditional way of learning of elementary EFL students who got average of 16 words. This means that using podcast for learning vocabulary was way more effective compared to the traditional ways of teaching students.

8. LIMITATION AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research, like the majority of educational researches, will suffer from certain limitations, thus the following limitation has to be taken into consideration:

The participants are all male students, so it may not be generalizable to the population including both genders. Regarding delimitations, two issues are of concern:

The study will be done on elementary learners, so learners with different levels are not included.

The study is going to be carried out in Sampad School which means the students are gifted, and it may not let the researcher generalize the result for ordinary students.

9. DISCUSSION

The reason why more students who used podcasts to learn vocabulary were able to grasp more words because they got the advantage of listening to the words three times one of which was in slow motion. Repeating the words more than two times allowed them to get a better lay hold of out of the 40 words that were supposed to be learned. The podcasts are not affected by fatigue unlike when tutors have to repeat themselves over and over again. The podcasts were also available when the tutor was not available (Alves et al, 2017). They do not suffer from illnesses because they are programmed to respond to commands from the user. This way the learners are able to access more services without necessarily having a person to help you learn the new language. Podcasts also have the options of displaying the information that the users will need them to. Those who used the traditional way of learning vocabulary were somewhat disadvantaged. In

some instances, the students were not conversant with some of the words but the tutor did not repeat them (Lee, 2016). This caused them to learn fewer words compared to those who used podcasts. The tutor did not repeat the words in a slow motion to help the students to grasp them better. Other times, the tutor had to attend to other things because of their human nature. This was also a setback that qualifies the use of podcasts for learning new vocabulary to be more effective. The words that were translated to Persian were grasped by more students who were grouped and used podcasts. The podcasts were also used by the tutors since they give the right, pronunciation of words in different languages and repeat them a couple of times to help the user to understand the vocabulary better (Morgan, 2015). The podcasts also gave the users adverts that allowed them to access more materials that would help them to ensure that they perform better in terms of learning. This was not available when the tutor was lecturing and educating the students. Authenticity when it comes to pronunciation of Persian language was accurate compared to when the tutor taught the students. Some of the tutors got the pronunciation wrong thing and passed the same to the students. Podcasts can also be used to record the content which helped the students to grab more vocabulary in the languages.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1. Major Findings of the Research

The research has come to the following findings:

- achievement motivation plays a decisive role in the application of autonomous learning strategies;
- the more autonomous learning strategies adopted, the better learning result achieved;
- all three phases of the PBL learning process have significant positive correlations with the contest result;
- all types of autonomous learning strategies should work effectively together in order to get a better contest result.

10.2. Limitations of the Research

As with any other studies, the present study has its own limitations. These limitations are discussed and recommendations for further research are offered.

First, the conclusions of the present study were drawn on the completing of one single contest. However, project purpose, project nature and the way it is completed are also considered important factors in applying strategies and generating results. As these factors may affect learners' choice of autonomous learning strategies and their final performance in the task, future studies are expected to study autonomous learning strategies in more projects with different purposes and features.

Secondly, the subjects involved in the present research are only 10 teams with 70 students, so the size of the subjects

is not large enough for the generalization of the research result. Also, this research has deliberately chosen the teams with extremely high or low achievement motivation, which may make the result not so reliable by ignoring those on the relatively high or low end. Therefore, it is recommended that more subjects with a larger range of high or low motivation are involved so as to get a more precise picture of project-based autonomous learning. Finally, the contest scores for different teams are given by different markers, the inconsistency between different markers may be high which will influence the findings of the research to a certain degree. Future studies are suggested that inter-consistency between different markers and internal consistency on the same marker be tested so that the effectiveness of findings can be guaranteed.

REFERENCES

[1] Abraham, L. B., & Williams, L. (2009). Electronic discourse in language learning and language teaching. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

[2] Alves, K. D., Kennedy, M. J., Kellems, R. O., Wexler, J., Rodgers, W. J., Romig, J. E., & Peeples, K. N. (2017). Improving preservice teacher vocabulary instruction: A randomized controlled trial. Teacher Education and Special Education, 0888406417727044.

[3] Brown, H. D. (2001). Teaching by principles; An interactive approach to language pedagogy (2nd ed). White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

[4] Cochrane, T. (2005). Podcasting: The do-it-yourself guide. Indiana: Wiley Publishing.

[5] Cook, V. (2008). Second language learning and language teaching (4th ed). London: Hodder Education.

[6] Dudeney, G & Hockly, N. (2007). How to teach English with technology. London: Pearson Education /Longman.

[7] Evans, K. (2007). The effectiveness of m-learning in the form of podcast revision lectures in higher education. Computers & Education, 50, 491–498.

[8] Farhadi, H., Ja'farpur, A., & Birjandi, P. (2009). Testing language skills from theory to practice. Tehran: SAMT Publication.

[9] Harmer, J. (2007). How to teach English. London: Pearson Education /Longman.

[10] Linse, C.T. (2005). Practical English language teaching: Young learners. New York: McGraw-Hill

[11] Richards, J. C., & Renandya , W. A. (2002).Methodology in language teaching; An anthropology of current practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

[12] Salmon, G., Edirisingha, P., Mobbs, M., & Dennett, C. (2008). How to create podcasts for education. . London: Open University Press.

[13] Scrivener, J. (2011). Learning teaching; The essential guide to English language teaching (2nd ed). London: Macmillan Education

[14] Thornbury, S. (2003). How to teach vocabulary. London: Pearson Education /Longman.

[15] Ur, P. (2012). A course in English language teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix A

R_1 ➡ 0_1 ➡ X ➡ 0_2

R_2 ➡ 0_3 ➡ 0_3
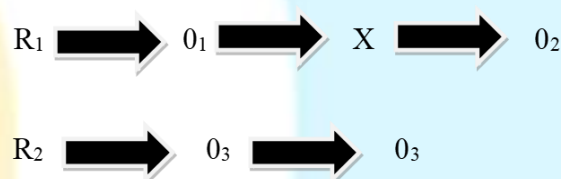
Appendix B

$$KR_{21} = \frac{K}{K-1}\left[1 - \frac{k\bar{p}q}{\sigma^2 X}\right]$$

$$where\ \bar{p} = \frac{\bar{X}}{K}\ ; q = 1 - p$$

Lee, (2016)

Author's Biography with Photo

Saeid Angouti was born and raised in the Miyaneh, Iran. He was an English inspector before starting his study in China. He finished his associate and bachelor degree in "Teaching English as Second Language" in Iran and then graduated in major of "International Trade" from Nanjing University of Science and Technology" in Nanjing, China. He is living in China to keep continue hi study to get Ph.D. in English Language field. He can be contacted at saeid279[at]outlook[dot]com