Abstract

The ever-changing global environment of language teaching and learning sees new learning and teaching approaches and technologies being introduced, constantly. This pressed English as a Second Language (ESL) educators, to also constantly pushed themselves and explore other options and alternatives available that are best to maximise ESL learners’ language practice and experience. Podcast in language teaching and learning is the current talk of the town among ESL educators. The appealing factors of Podcast in language learning, are that it can be used to introduce and expose students to authentic language contents and its features; learners have the autonomy to pick and choose their own learning time and engage themselves in the audio materials provided through the podcast. This study explored the impression of the students to the introduction of podcast in ESL teaching and learning process. It was found that the ESL students showed promising attitudes towards the integration of podcast-based learning as part of their language learning tool.

Keywords: Podcast, language learning, ESL, mobile learning, attitude

Introduction

In the present development in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching and learning climate, a significant shift is currently happening that emphasize on language learning that takes place anywhere and anytime (Moura, Carvalho, Mourn, & Carvalho, 2012). Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) showed great promise in promoting language learning that not only conducive, but also accessible to the language learner. Oberg and Daniels (2013), noted on the same potential gains from the introduction of mobile technologies in language learning. Many ESL educators worldwide jumped into this bandwagon of utilizing mobile technologies in their language classrooms, and podcasting is one of the innovation being brought into ESL lesson to further enrich students’ language learning process and experience.

Podcast – a term first coined in 2004 – a portmanteau of the word iPod and broadcasting, is a form of audio publication via the internet. A podcast, or a digital recording can be uploaded online and the audio file can be access or listened to, or downloaded, to any electronic portable devices such as MP3, or most commonly on the mobile phone, at the convenience of the listener. Peoples ang Tilley (2011), identified podcasts as audio or video file that are uploaded online, and are accessible to electronic devices; ready to be played or downloaded. The length of each podcast may vary from few short minutes...
to an hour long. The bonus point of a podcast is that, the same material can be listen to repeatedly by the listener (Evans, 2008).

Podcast is suggested as a valuable teaching and learning tool due to its accessibility; learners can listen to the audio content at any given place or pace, and also the flexibility of the content, which support and ease learners’ experience with the target language (Jowitt, 2008). Many ESL educators vouched on the success of podcast on language learning, as shown by numerous studies done on this subject. Andersen, Carper and Zhang (2009), research shown that podcast helps to lessen stress in language learning and also promotes students’ cooperation.

ESL educators are constantly on the lookout of the next big thing to introduce to their ESL classroom. Perhaps with the introduction of new instructional technology to the language teaching and learning process, such as podcasts, students’ interest and motivation in their language acquisition can be promoted even further. It is deemed constructive to investigate this aspect of podcast-based learning in ESL classroom.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The aim of this study was to explore the potential influence of podcast in ESL learning as well as gathering more understandings on students’ perceptions and attitudes towards podcast-based learning in ESL classroom.

Certificate-level students in Kolej Komuniti Pasir Salak currently undergoing a minimum 26 hours of contact hours per semester of their Communicative English course, which is a required module for the students to complete their Certificate. The limited and somewhat restricted curriculum hinder the students from exploring other real and meaningful communicative situation. Students are often restrict themselves from actively participating in a language lesson, as the majority of ESL learners are reluctant, and unwilling to participate in an oral language task in language classroom (Savaşçı, 2014). This problem could be boiled down to the very fact that many L2 learners are plagued with issues of language anxiety, due to lack of knowledge of the L2 and most importantly, the fear of being ridiculed for a mistake (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

This apprehensive situation carried on outside their language classroom, as the students carried and practiced almost zero of their target language; the English language. This is due to the fact that the students are not surrounded with a conducive environment for them to practice their English language, as most of their surrounding – media, friends and family – do not revolve around the incorporation of the language (Śpawę & Fauziah, 2013). This further contributed to hamper the rich language learning that the students should immerse themselves into.

Perhaps, ESL educators should look into this void by introducing a teaching and learning tool, which could be utilize both in and outside the designated language classroom and time. ESL educators are constantly on the lookout for a novel, favourable and interactive language teaching and learning tool that could be introduce and implemented in ESL teaching and learning. Perhaps, podcast-based learning is able to offer variety thus enrich students’ learning experience, due to its feasibility in terms of students’ learning pace and time.

1.2 Research Questions

This study addressed the following research question;
1. What are students’ perceptions and attitudes towards the use of podcast in ESL teaching and learning process?

2. Literature Review

   Previous studies conducted on the subject of podcast-based learning were leaning towards the notion that podcast was feasible as a teaching and learning tool (Evans, 2008; Hulsmann, 2009; Moura et al., 2012). Majority of the research subject considered podcast as a valuable learning resource and many also agreed that they benefitted from podcast as it added additional value to the overall experience of their language learning.

2.1 Podcast as a Language Teaching Tool

   Podcast-based approach in language teaching and learning adapted authentic text, or it is modified to suit learners’ proficiency level and their learning needs. This allowed the second language learner to review materials thus making themselves comfortable with the target language (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). The flexibility of podcasts permitted language learners’ to autonomy in the language learning. Learners are able to utilise podcast to add to their language experience, and take it further than the four walls of their classroom. They can listen to the audio materials at home, or anywhere that suits them, thus increase their exposure to the English language and its culture and principles. Consequently, it may help to improve their English language proficiency and skill.

   The ultimate package of the benefits of podcast is ESL teaching and learning may intrigue to ESL educators. Podcast is lauded as portable, flexibility and motivating (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). Podcasts were being deployed by ESL educators around the globe in various means. Some used it to deliver classroom instruction, others supplement their lectures or course content through podcast, some educators encouraged their students to review lesson materials through podcast while some also employed podcasts as a mean to support textbook materials.

   Ashton-Hay and Brookes (2011), championed the advantageous of podcast as it helped weaker students to learn the language materials at their own pace and also it offered learners the opportunity to remedy their language gaps. Ducate and Lomicka (2009), found that the teaching and practice of pronunciation is best done through podcast.

2.2 Students’ Perceptions and Attitudes towards Podcast in language learning

   Gardner (1985), defined the recipe for motivation in learning as a combination of effort and desire to achieve the goal of learning the language. He also stressed on the importance of students’ to sustained favourable attitudes towards learning the language, in maintaining motivation to acquire a language. Few language researchers thought that podcast offered support to achieve this notion (Ashton-Hay & Brookes, 2011; O’Brien & Hegelheimer, 2007).

   A study conducted by O’Brien and Hegeleimer (2007) found that the learners were more receptive of the learning material in their language classroom, once it was introduced as an audio file (podcasts) rather than the conventional lectures or in a form of text book. Lord (2008), observed that the students were far more enthusiastic towards their language phonetic courses for it was done through podcasts. (Fernandez, Simo and Sallan (2009), surveyed the reaction of the participants towards podcast-based learning. Their findings showed that although the learners stated that podcast was in no way of a replacement of traditional learning system, however they recognised the podcast-based learning approach and it also improve their motivation to learn the language. Chan, Chi, Chin and Lin (2011) compared the
effect of two podcasts course on a Chinese and Korean language learners. They had found that the group that supplemented their language learning through podcasts, had obvious positive attitudes towards their language learning, and also towards podcasting.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants for this research is the students that undertook the module MPU 1811 Communicative English for the academic session of November 2017, which is a compulsory subject for all of the students taking certificate level in community college. There were 100 respondents participated in this study. The respondent are from various Technical programs offered in Kolej Komuniti Pasir Salak.

3.2 Podcast Design

For the purpose of this study, podcast was a mean to supplement students’ language learning and each podcast episode was given for learners’ revision upon the completion of a learning area or a topic. The podcast was an audio file, and recorded using few local talents. The decision not to highlight native speakers in the podcast was not to alienate the L2 learners, who might not be able to understand native speakers’ accent and high range of vocabulary.

In order to match the material to the topic content and also the learner’s language proficiency level; mostly lower intermediate or CEFR’s A2 level, the content of the podcast was not adapted freely from any podcast platform available readily on the internet. Instead, the audio text and its materials were thoroughly planned and developed to be tailor-made to cater to students’ proficiency level and language needs. The topic chosen for the communicative situation presented on the dialogue was also selected from real-life situation that the learners can relate to, and also from daily situation that the learners encountered.

Apart from that, the podcast content’s was design to compliment the syllabus component of the module MPU 1181 Communicative English. Each series of the podcast highlighted the language content and context of each topics in the syllabus. For example, podcast series 1 highlighted the language content of Topic 1 of the syllabus, which is on greetings and introduction. The podcast content was about the communicative exchange dialogue that revolves around making small talk. In that podcast series, vocabulary tips, grammar aspects and pronunciation were embedded in the recorded audio. Handouts with instruction, audio text transcript and comprehension exercises were included to accompany the listening part of the podcast. This acted as a scaffolding for the learners to in their podcast based learning. Learners were expected to employ active listening, for them to be able to comprehend the podcast content, thus were able to complete the comprehension activities that follow. Table 1 provides the overview of the podcast content.
Table 1: An outline of the podcast content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Topics / Communicative Aspects / Language Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Topic: Greetings and Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicative exchange dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Listening (comprehension) exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Topic: Instructions and Directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicative exchange dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Listening (comprehension) exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Topic: Descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicative exchange dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Listening (comprehension) exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Topic: Telephone Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicative exchange dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Listening (comprehension) exercise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire employed in this research was adapted from a questionnaire developed by Chan et al. (2011), for their research in podcast design in language learning. The questionnaire consisted of two section; A and B, and the samples responded to the items and statements in the questionnaire mostly in Likert scale. The participants were asked to respond to each item as: 1) - Strongly Disagree, 2) - Disagree, 3) - Neutral, 4) - Agree, 5) - Strongly Agree.

Section A of the questionnaire gathered the respondents’ demographic background which involved gender, race, and program. In Section B, 13 questions adapted were designed to gather an insight into students’ perception in the usefulness of podcast in their language learning, and also to understand students’ attitudes towards podcast-based learning.

3.4 Procedure

This study lasted throughout the fourteen-week of study period during the November 2017 academic session. The module MPU 1181 Communicative English is a compulsory subject that must be completed by all of the students taking certificate level in community college. The syllabus covered 26 hours of guided learning time (GLT), which means students’ face-to-face conventional learning that took place in the classroom is restricted to two-hours weekly.

Each series of the podcast was uploaded onto the assigned Google Classroom’s group. Students were then notified by their lecturer to access their Google Classroom to review the podcast materials.
uploaded. Together with the podcast uploaded on the Google Classroom platform, handouts that comprised of comprehension exercise and vocabulary and grammar were also provided along with the audio file/podcast. Podcast and handouts uploaded in Google Classroom were created using Google Form. However, due to its feature, the audio file/podcast was uploaded in form of video file, as Google Form did not support audio file. The comprehension exercise that accompany the podcast was created in the question section. Upon listening to the podcast, students were able to complete the comprehension question that were provided. Their comprehension was either tested through short paragraph answers or multiple choice answers. This form of activity was also as a mean of formative assessment for the lecturer to measure students’ complete understanding of the content’s topic.

It was important to highlight that this learning activity using podcast; students were given the liberty to listen to the podcast at their own convenience, not necessarily during the lesson itself. Often, students were encourage to complete their podcasting activities at the convenience of their own leisure time, as they have to liberty to repeatedly listen to the podcast and complete the content exercises that followed.

This podcast-based learning went on for the entire semester until the syllabus completed. At the end of the fourteen week, the survey questionnaire was distributed among the students to gather their view and attitudes towards the use of podcasting in their language learning.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study aimed to ascertain students’ attitudes towards podcast-based learning in their ESL lesson. The participants for this research is the students that undertook the module MPU 1811 Communicative English for the academic session of November 2017. There were 100 respondents participated in this study. The respondent are from various Technical programs offered in Kolej Komuniti Pasir Salak. Based on the findings from the questionnaires, 58% of the respondents were female students while only 42% were male students.

This study consisted of respondents whom currently on the Certificate level in Kolej Komuniti Pasir Salak. 24% of the respondents were Sijil Pengendalian Acara (SPA), followed by students from the program of Sijil Teknologi Maklumat (STM) which consisted of 22% of the respondents, while 24% of the respondents were students of Sijil Servis Kenderaan Ringan (SKR) and the majority of the respondents were of a program Sijil Pemprosesan dan Kawalan Mutu Makanan (SPK) which consisted of 30% of the total respondents.

The findings from the questionnaire gathered participants’ perceptions that podcasts are indeed enjoyable for them to listen to, which go the highest mean score (M = 4.24). The respondents also reacted positively to item number 7, which implored on the usefulness of vocabulary information and exercises, that accompanies the podcast series (M = 4.21). The results revealed that the podcast’s technicality in terms of audio clarity appealed to them, and also podcasts helped to improved their motivation to learn English (M = 4.19). The participants also thought the listening exercises as beneficial to their English language learning (M = 4.14). The fifth highest mean score (M = 4.13), directed that the topics featured on the podcast is of the interest of the participants during their listening activity. In addition, participants responded well to the pronunciation tips and exercises that accompanied their podcast learning (M = 4.12). Participants also stated that their English proficiency improved, as a result of their podcast-based learning (M = 4.07). The aspect of grammar information and exercises that accompanied each podcast was deemed beneficial to the participants (M = 4.06). Most participants showed agreement that podcast’s
speaking exercises as beneficial to their language learning \( (M = 4.00) \). The participants showed moderate agreement that podcast’s topics are relevant and in line with their language learning \( (M = 3.98) \) and also moderately agreed that the accompanied handouts are useful and well designed \( (M = 3.95) \). Participants also reflected that the length of each unit of the podcast is sufficient enough for their attention span \( (M = 3.93) \).

Table (2) shows the participants’ response towards podcast-based learning in their ESL learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Survey items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I find the length of the podcast units to be appropriate.</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I enjoy listening to the podcast units.</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I find the listening exercises to be useful.</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>.792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I find the speaking exercises to be useful.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I find the pronunciation tips and exercises to be useful.</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I find the grammar information and exercises to be useful.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I find the vocabulary information and exercises to be useful.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I find the topics on the podcast to be relevant to my language learning.</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The topics of the podcast is interesting to me.</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I find the audio to be sufficiently clear.</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I find the handout to be useful and well-designed.</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Listening to the podcast this semester has made me more motivated to learn English</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I felt my English proficiency improved at the end of the course.</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>.868</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Discussion

Numerous studies have proved that podcast could be the next-best-thing in this world of Mobile Language Learning (MALL). Podcasts has the advantage over its accessibility and conveniences it offers to language learners, as learners are able to have access to review the language materials, at any given place or time, and also at their own pace. Feel free to hit the repeat button, if one may say so. This process is believed to help promoted students’ learning experience and enhanced it even further \( (\text{Alm, 2013; Chan et al., 2011; Heilesen, 2010; Lord, 2008}) \).

The questionnaire distributed for the purpose of this study gathered an insight of students’ perception towards the usage of podcast in their language learning. According to the results obtained, majority of the respondents showed very promising attitude towards podcast-based learning in the ESL lesson. Most agreed that through listening to podcast and exercise that accompanied the audio, they had managed to practice their language skills and able to find improvement in their confidence, pronunciation, learning enjoyment, memory and understanding, pronunciation and speaking skill of English language.

The podcast materials was design to suit the syllabus component of the module Communicative English. Each of the dialogue is organically prepared to also suit students of community college, who often at the lower intermediate level of English proficiency. Each of the dialogues created to match the study topics are created based on real-life situation and relatable to learners’ everyday life. The findings from the questionnaire found that, this aspect is appreciated by the learners, as showed by learners’ approval of the podcast lengths \( (\text{Item 1}) \) and also they stated that the topics presented in the podcast is of
their interest and relevant to their study topics (Item 2, Item 8 and 9). This is in line with (William & Mcminn, 2006) suggestion that language teachers should introduce a language materials that are relatable to the learners’ world view and life experience, to hook their interest and motivation in language classroom. Chan et al. (2011), also suggested that the length of a podcast should be no more than five minutes, typically the length of a song.

It was also found that the respondents highlighted that the language aspects incorporated in the podcast were useful for their language learning (Item 3-7). Language aspects of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation tips, speaking skill and listening skill were being integrated in the podcast’s material, and also in the handout provided. This helped learners to review their target language, in a subtle and more ease approach. This took the anxiety away from the learners in their language learning, as opined by (Savaşçı, 2014). Ushioda (2011), stated that by employing the right tool and approach in language teaching could keep learners motivated and enthusiastic throughout their learning process. This correlated to the respondents` response that through podcast-based learning, their motivation to learn English and also their English proficiency has seen improvement (Item 12-13). Similar effect was observed during the study in 2007, conducted by O’Bryan & Hegelheimer, where language teachers in that study observed learners’ motivation boosted from the implementation of podcast in language classroom.

5. Conclusion

This study provided some initial insights that community college students were receptive to the introduction of podcast-based learning in their language learning. Participating learners showed positive attitudes towards their experience with podcast-based learning, with many vouched that not only their language aspects such as grammar and vocabulary had improved, but also podcast had help them to improve their motivation in ESL learning.

ELT instructor should deliberate the advantages of podcast-based teaching and learning into their ESL teaching. Current studies has exhibited the advantages and the effectiveness of podcast as an effecting language teaching tool, that allow students to explore language learning materials that are not only authentic, but also provided them with authority of choosing their own learning time and pace (Lord, 2008; Nguyen, 2011; O’Brien & Hegelheimer, 2007).

Further study is needed to explore on how podcast is best to be deployed to teach specific language skill such as the teaching of writing skill and speaking skill. ESL instructors should also look into the best practice of integrating podcast-based learning into low-technology classroom, to provide more insight into the wonderful advantages of podcasts as a language teaching tool.

REFERENCES


