The Effect of Listening to Podcasts on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract— The   current study compared between listening to podcasts and the traditional classroom listening method and the effect these two modes have on incidental vocabulary acquisition. To this aim, a pretest and posttest experimental design was adopted. 34 Thai students from the Department of Nursing enrolled at the Centre of Foundation Studies Summer Program, at the International Islamic University Malaysia. The students were randomly assigned to two groups; 17 in the experimental group (listening to podcasts) and 17 in the control group (traditional classroom listening method). The data obtained was analyzed using SPSS package (T-test analysis), and it revealed that both the experimental and control group showed significant incidental vocabulary gains. However, the experimental group demonstrated higher progress in comparison to the traditional classroom listening method group. Therefore, Learners should be given the opportunity to use technology to enhance their language learning as it has proved to give them better results.

Keywords—Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition, Podcasts, Traditional Listening method.

I. INTRODUCTION

INNOVATION and progress is evident in most fields of education, and the field of Second Language learning is no exception. Many changes and developments have taken place in the way second language is presented and learned. Today, technology and computer assisted methods are used to ease and enhance the language learning process. As the current research reveals podcasting has become a trend in many university lectures all over the world. In the field of second language learning, its use has been on the rise since 2005.

Podcasts are usually in the form of audio or video files, and considered of importance in improving learners' listening skills. According to Bolliger, Suparakorm and Boggs (2010), " Podcasts are recoded audio files that can be integrated in educational and training settings in order to deliver personalized content to learners in a specific course during a given semester." [1] They further added that "These audio files are made available online so that students may download and listen to them in order to review instructional materials (e.g., lectures) outside of class at a time and place convenient to them." [1]Therefore, podcasts give the learners the choice

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to listen to the lecturer or the recorded material as many times as they see fit.

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental part of learning both L1 and L2. With a reservoir of words and knowledge of their correct use, learner will not be able to communicate fluently and effectively in the second language. Vocabulary learning is challenging aspect for many language learners. Ma (2009) states that "Experienced teachers, when asked what are the greatest obstacles confronting the language learner, will doubtless mention listening comprehension and vocabulary learning. They are probably the most time-consuming and difficult areas that have to be faced and paradoxically are the two that were the most neglected in the past in L2 acquisition research."[2]

Research in the field of vocabulary acquisition revealed that most vocabulary acquisition occurs incidentally whether in learners' L1 or L2 [3], [4]. In order to define incidental vocabulary acquisition, it is necessary to discuss incidental learning in general. The concept of incidental learning is the 'by-product knowledge' acquired by learners without the intention to actually learn it [3]. Therefore, incidental language learning refers to a situation or an incident were language learning takes places or happens, however, without the awareness of the learner or without a structured plan to learn , for example ; the aim of a lesson can the comprehension of a text but along the lesson , the learner acquires vocabulary not necessarily assigned for that particular lesson. Incidental Vocabulary acquisition is defined as " the learning of vocabulary as the by-product of any activity not explicitly geared to vocabulary learning with the intentional vocabulary learning referring to any activity aiming at committing lexical information to memory. " [4]

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many previous studies have investigated incidental vocabulary acquisition within the context of reading, while only a few studies have focused on whether listening as an input skill plays a role in incidental vocabulary acquisition [3], [6]. Recent developments in technology and the computer assisted language learning have produced many innovative methods which are used by teachers and learners to enhance language learning. Podcasting came into the arena of language learning by the year 2005. Podcasts are usually in the form of audio and video files, considered of importance in improving learners' listening skills.

Numerous studies have dealt with learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the implementation of podcasts [7],[8],[9],[10],[11].These studies are associated with the

present study but are actually general and more perceptional .Moreover, not many studies have dealt with the effects of podcasting on language learning, and specifically no research has dealt with the effect of podcasting on incidental vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, this study examined the effect of podcast listening on learners' incidental vocabulary acquisition; it looked at how listening to podcasts effects incidental vocabulary acquisition in comparison the traditional classroom listening methods.

III. RELATED LITERATURE ON PODCASTING

A study titled " How to improve Listening Skills for Technical Students" , was implemented at the department of 'Youth policy and Social Technologies'. The participants were 180 first –year students enrolled in the course ' General English'. Podcasts were used with the aim of encouraging students to become autonomous, self-directed learners. It was also a method that aimed to expose students to the latest technological innovations. Thirdly, the General English course consists of 10 credit hours, 4 of which are classroom time, and the remaining 6 were supposed to be for self-study thus they were filled with podcast lessons. The podcast adapted for the course were taken from the educational site www.eslpod.com. The students were expected to listen to the assigned podcast and complete the obligatory task. Pre- and post-tests were conducted to investigate if there was any improvement in the learner's listening comprehension. The results indicated that the podcasts were beneficial as learners 'test scores indicated improvement in their listening comprehension [9].

Besides that the students were also given questionnaire to get their views on the podcasts. Most of the responses were positive, many enjoyed podcasts, as they are able to listen to them anywhere and at any time suitable for them. Therefore, according to Artyushina et al (2011) ," Podcasting as a new technology has huge potential in enhancing student's listening skills. The ease for downloading podcasts with authentic materials means that now our students can be engaged in plenty of listening practice."[9] It was also suggested that teachers should become more acquainted with mobile technologies in order to motive English language learning.

Another research conducted by Edirisingha, Rizzi , Nie, and Rothwell (2007) investigated the benefits of integrating podcast into the first year undergraduate course 'English Language and Communication 'at Kingston University, UK [12].Podcast, in this research, were made with the aim to improve learners' learning experience as well as provide advice on portfolio development and presentation skills. The 'English Language and Communication' module is delivered via face-to-face lectures and seminars with supplementary resources on Blackboard VLE and is assessed by portfolio tasks. The students taking this course were 65 altogether. Six podcast were developed, as an integral part of student support activities, the duration of each one was around 10 minutes. The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain data. Qualitative data were collected from two focus groups with eight students and interview with six students. Quantitative data from the students' performance showed that students clearly benefited from podcasts. It was revealed that podcasts were successful in supporting students'

preparation for assessed work, providing significant advice on portfolio and presentations.[12]

A similar research investigated the role of podcasting in an ESL listening course; this was done in the Academic English as a Second Langugae (ESL) course. The course has both graduate and undergraduate students from various specialties; the learners were mostly from East Asian origin (Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese). The research can be regarded as action research, as the one of the researches was the instructor in this course. The course was fifteen weeks altogether, the learners had to listen to fourteen podcast designed especially for the listening course. All of the podcasts were hosted on a course weblog, and students had the choice to listen to or view the podcasts on a computer without downloading the file, download the podcasts to their computer or download the podcasts to their MP3 players.[7]

The results of this research claim that the students viewed podcasts very positively, and there were only a few technical problems during the implementation. One of the main advantages that the researcher reported was the podcasts had allowed her to extend class time, so students spent additional time outside class working on concepts taught in class. In addition, podcasts exposed learners to a variety of spoken English. It was also suggested that additional curricular integration research using qualitative and quantitative data could give insights on podcasts and their effectiveness.[7]

IV. RELATED LITERATURE ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

There is no doubt that acquiring vocabulary is a fundamental part of language learning. In his book, Singleton (1999) states that "the major challenge of learning and using a language, whether as L1 or as L2, lies not in the area of broad syntactic principles but in the `nitty-gritty´ of the lexicon" [4]. Research in the field of vocabulary acquisition revealed that most vocabulary acquisition occurs incidentally whether in learners' L1 or L 2 [3],[4]. Incidental Vocabulary acquisition is defined by Robinson (2001) as " the learning of vocabulary as the by-product of any activity not explicitly geared to vocabulary learning with the intentional vocabulary learning referring to any activity aiming at committing lexical information to memory. "[4]

In an investigation by Paribakht and Wesche (1996), participating learners were given a reading passage and then it was followed by questions that investigated their vocabulary knowledge. The results showed that after the reading, participants had better knowledge of vocabulary words in comparison to the learners that were only given immediate vocabulary questions [5] .In another study, by these researchers vocabulary knowledge was investigated; however this time they explored the strategies used by language learners in order to learn new words. Some of the strategies of learner included inferencing, the critical use of grammatical rules, and the use of dictionaries.[5]

In addition, a related research was conducted by Gu and Johnson (1996), the researchers examined the effectiveness of various different vocabulary-learning strategies of Chinese language learners. The main strategy explored was guessing meaning from the context; that is to say guessing the meaning

of new words from the surrounding words and sentences. Interestingly, students with lower proficiency levels and who a relatively small vocabulary bank relied on visual, and written repetition of the form and meaning of words more than the learners with higher proficiency levels. In other words, the not so proficient learners take better advantage of glosses and online dictionaries in comparison to the learners with higher proficiency levels. This concluded that for the latter learners, vocabulary-learning strategies that need a "bottom-up" processing may be of more benefit [15].These aforementioned investigations have explored various aspects of both incidental and explicit vocabulary learning [5],[14].

Vidal (2003) nvestigated the extent that lecture comprehension affected vocabulary acquisition. The participants were 116 university students; they listened to three 14-15 minutes lectures. The experiment consisted of pre-, post-, and delayed tests of 36 vocabulary items during a period of 4 weeks. The results revealed that listening to these lectures had a positive impact on the students' vocabulary knowledge; that is to say, listening to lectures resulted in vocabulary acquisition ($M = 30.41$) and some retention ($M = 16.14$). In addition, a connection between vocabulary acquisition and students' proficiency levels was noticed. It was concluded that even though students' proficiency level is important for vocabulary acquisition and retention, vocabulary information must be processed more deeply in order to enable stored in long-term memory.[15]

Another study also conducted by Vidal (2010) compares the effects of reading and listening on incidental vocabulary acquisition and more specifically retention of vocabulary. According to Vidal (2010) [16]"it is undeniable that academic reading and listening play an essential role in the development of high-proficiency learners' vocabulary knowledge." However, the issue was which of these was more effective. In her study Vidal explored whether (reading) using the course book material gives more time for processing new words in comparison to listening to speech. The effectiveness of academic listening and reading for L2 incidental vocabulary acquisition and retention was explored and compared. [16]

The research included 230 participants who were divided into three groups. They either (a) read three academic texts, (b) watched three lectures, or (c) received no input at all and just completed the vocabulary measures. This study compared the relationship between acquiring vocabulary through each of these various methods and the following elements: frequency of occurrence, type of word, type of elaboration, and predictability of word form and parts. The participant that read for all four levels of proficiency analyzed made the results revealed that greater vocabulary acquisition. However, it was noticed that in the regards of retention of incidentally acquired vocabulary, the results of the present study seem to suggest that for higher levels of proficiency, listening might lead to somewhat higher retention rates than reading.[16]

V. METHODS

The participants were 34 Thai Nursing students at the pre-intermediate level enrolled at the Self-Development Summer Program offered by the Centre of Foundation Studies, at the International Islamic University, Malaysia. The Learners were at a similar English proficiency level (pre-intermediate) due to the placement test that assigned them to their levels. The learners were assigned randomly to the podcast listening (experimental) and traditional classroom listening method (control) groups. Each group had 17 students each, they had the same teacher and were taught from the same book; Cambridge Interchange 2 (Pre-intermediate).

The research design was an experimental design with a pre-test and post-test group. The learners were assigned to the groups randomly. The first group was the experimental group who listened to podcasts during class time, while the second group was the control group; these students listened using the traditional classroom method. The participants of both groups were taught three lessons from the Cambridge Interchange 2 (third Edition), the only difference was the use of podcasts in the experimental groups in comparison to the use of cd player in the control group (the learners listened up to three times with their teachers, while the learners using podcast controlled the number of times they listened to the recording). Both groups of students took pre and posttests.

VI. FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data revealed that students' scores on the vocabulary per-tests for both the control and experimental groups were somewhat similar, with no significant difference, as the majority of the students are pre-intermediate learners as placed by the placement test. As Table I shows, the mean for the Control group (M=9), while the mean for Experimental group (M=10). The t test analysis between the experimental and control groups on the pretests taken show that the $p = 0.32$, this high P value indicates that the difference of the results for the control group and the experimental group is not statistically significant ($p > .05$). This reveals that students in both group had somewhat similar grasp of vocabulary before the treatment.

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF (MEAN /STANDARD DEVIATION) FROM THE PRE-TEST SCORES (BOTH EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUP)

	Number of Students	Mean	Standard Deviation	P
Experimental Group	17	10	3.02	0.326
Control Group	17	9	2.82	

Table II, depicts, the mean and standard deviation of the posttest scores for both the podcast listening group (experimental) and the traditional classroom listening method (control) group. From the scores of both groups, it is noticed that learners acquire vocabulary incidentally in both methods, there is improvement for both the control and experimental group. However; the mean for the control group was (M = 22.8) and (M=25.70) for the experimental group. The standard deviation is (3.70) for the control group and (3.58) for the experimental group. $p = 0.03$. This low P value indicates that there is a difference in the results as ($p > .05$), this shows that the experimental group outperformed the control group but only slightly.

TABLE II
COMPARISON OF (MEAN /STANDARD DEVIATION) FROM THE POST-TEST
SCORES (BOTH EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUP)

	Number of Students	Mean	Standard Deviation	P
Experimental Group	17	25.70	3.58	0.0309
Control Group	17	22.88	3.70	

In Table III, the analysis of the data shows the mean and standard deviation of students' scores on the vocabulary pertests and posttests in the experimental group. The table reveals a significant difference, the mean for the pretests was (M=10), while the mean for posttests group (M=25.70). The t test analysis between the experimental and control groups on the pretests taken show that the p = 0.32, this is a low *P* value indicates that the difference of the results for the pretests and the posttest is statistically significant (p < .05). This indicates students' incidental vocabulary acquisition improved significantly .

TABLE III
COMPARISON OF (MEAN /STANDARD DEVIATION) FROM THE PRE-TEST/
POST-TEST SCORES FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP)

	Number of students	Mean	Standard Deviation	P
Pretest	17	10	3.02	0.0309
Post test	17	25.70	3.58	

Table IV, below, reveals the standard deviation and mean for the pre and post vocabulary tests in the control group ; the traditional classroom listening method group. The analysis shows significant difference in the mean and standard deviation, the mean for the pretests was (M=9), while the mean for posttests group (M=22.88). The t test analysis between the experimental and control groups on the pretests taken show that the p = 0.32, this is a low *P* value indicates that the difference of the results for the pretests and the posttest is statistically significant (p > .05). That is to say, learner improved greatly in regards to incidental vocabulary acquisition.

TABLE IV
COMPARISON OF (MEAN /STANDARD DEVIATION) FROM THE PRE-TEST/
POST-TEST SCORES FOR THE CONTROL GROUP)

	Number of students	Mean	Standard Deviation	P
Pretest	17	9	2.82	0.0309
Post test	17	22.88	3.70	

These findings suggest that podcast listening instruction facilitates incidental vocabulary acquisition. Learners progressed significantly from pretest to posttest. This is because when podcasts are used, learners are given the full control over the times and the way they listen to them. The results also revealed that learners in the traditional classroom listening method also improved from the pretest to posttest.

Therefore, both methods used affected incidental vocabulary acquisition in a positive way. Even though both groups showed incidental vocabulary acquisition, the experimental group (podcast listening group) had more gains, which were statistically significant (experimental group; M= 25.70 , control group; M = 22.88).It can be concluded that listening in general results in incidental vocabulary learning , however, listening to podcast revealed more gains in incidental vocabulary acquisition.

As aforementioned both groups improved significantly, the vocabulary pretest results did not demonstrate high level of vocabulary gains in both groups. This may be due to the fact that learners were not told prior about the test, thus they were not prepared for it. In addition the significant gains in the later posttest can also attributed to the fact that the posttests were divided according to the three treatment lessons, and that learners by the third treatment were aware that they will be given a test, even though it was not mentioned by the researcher. It is well known vocabulary acquisition is a progress whether it is intentional or incidental; the three treatment lessons were not enough to test a thorough and objective vocabulary acquisition.

VII. CONCLUSION

Learners were new to this form of learning, as they seemed less autonomous and would rather be guided by the teacher than to actually take the listening activities into their own hands, this can also explain the slight difference in incidental vocabulary acquisition in the podcast listening group. The experiment supports the notion that incidental vocabulary acquisition can be learned from listening . Therefore, teachers and educators should be encouraged to use listening methods in incidental vocabulary acquisition, and particularly innovative technology such as podcasting to enhance and improve learners' vocabulary acquisition. It can be concluded that this study views listening as an important factor in incidental vocabulary acquisition; whether it be through the traditional classroom methods of listening; using CD-ROMs and tape recorders, or using the current technologically advanced methods such as podcasting and so on. As the results revealed that the learners improved significantly in their vocabulary acquisition after listening using the podcasts. Learners should be given the opportunity to use technology to enhance their language learning as it has proved to give them better results and progress, as well as autonomy.

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