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The impact of solo podcasting on the length of higher-level learners' speaking skills

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Article Info

Abstract
The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of using podcasts on the speaking skills of advanced English language students. The participants of this research are language learners of a reputable language school in Tabriz who participated in summer English language courses. There were 60 people in the sample who were divided in two groups, 30 students were in the control group and 30 students were in the experimental group. The research type was mixed method, with pre-test, post-test, and semi-structured interview method. According to the obtained results, it was found that using solo podcasts noticibaly increased the speech length of students and also made it more organized in content at advanced levels.

Introduction
The development of the literacy is one of the important goals in human societies. The invention of new technological devices recently has shed a light to the advancement of education, and this has caused the whole world to change its opinion about teaching and learning. As the demand for English proficiency continues to grow in Iran, educators are faced with the challenge of adapting traditional teaching methodologies to meet the evolving needs of learners in an increasingly digital world. In previous years, students were considered passive and teachers taught them using solo power. However with the advancement of technology and its entry into the field of education, they realized that students should get out of the passive state as soon as possible and prepare for learning in a complex and advanced environment today. One of the widely used methods today that was popular among many educational experts is the theory of constructionism in teaching and learning. According to recent studies, the use of modern technologies and encouraging students to be involved in the teaching and learning process makes them learn faster and perform better and also have a great sense of satisfaction with their learning.

Most of the advances that have occurred in the field of education in recent decades are related to communication technologies. Internet with its rapid progress has made new approaches for instructors to communicate with learners (Evans, 2008) [7]. Podcast is a recent technology that has been used in education in the recent years.

Podcasts can be considered as an educational aid in which learners can listen to it or see in an audio or video program form. They can Access to the programs through the Internet and they can also select the appropriate time and place for listening podcasts.

Solo Podcast
A solo podcast is a special kind of podcast that is usually hosted by a single person. it is the host who should take the responsibility for all steps of the podcast, such as making content, recording, editing, and publishing. This helps the host to surf deeply into their chosen topic, share experiences, insights, and experties with the audience.

Solo podcasts include variety of topics, like business, education, entertainment and personal development. Solo podcasts are mostly common among experts and professinals who are eager to share their knowledge with a wider audience. Although solo podcasts lack guest speakers, they can be highly engaging, informative, and offer the audience a deep dive into the host's perspective on their chosen topic.

Making solo podcasts demands well planning and preparation. First of all, we should decide on a topic for solo podcast that we want to creat. This could be topics from different fields such as business, health, lifestyle, or a personal hobby. when we have chosen a topic, second step is to plan its content. This means deciding on the format of solo podcast, the length, and how often it will be released new episodes. It should also be considered our target audience and what is interesting or valuable for them.

A solo podcast can offer many benefits. Firstly, it gives a complete creative control to the podcast maker. They can select the topics, the format, the length, and the frequency of the episodes according to their interests and preferences. They can be created with different styles and approaches and it is not necessary to think about the opinions or preferences of a guest and this can cause to a more authentic and personal connection with the audience, because the voice and perspective of the podcasters are the main focus of the show. Secondly, a solo podcast is easy to manage. The podcaster are not forced to coordinate schedules with a guest, that can be remarkably beneficial if they have a busy time-plan. podcasters can record podcsts whenever they have free time, and they have the flexibility to adjust the production timeline as needed. Moreover, a solo podcast can be cheaper to produce, as there are fewer people involved in the production process. so individuals who are new to podcasting or who have a limited budget can make their own podcasts wıth the least effort.

Literature Review
Nonny Basalama and Trynti Abdurrahman (2018) [2] investigated the impact of podcasts on students' listening comprehension in EFL classrooms, involving 60 high school students. Their findings indicated a significant improvement in post-test scores for the experimental group. Similarly, Mohammadreza Farhangi and Hassan Nejhad Ghanbar examined the effects of podcasting on EFL learners' speaking skills, with 60 Iranian upper-intermediate learners participating. The experimental group created and uploaded podcasts based on their discussions, resulting in enhanced speaking skills.

Explored whether supplementing traditional lectures with podcast lectures would improve the writing skills of EFL learners. The study included 55 level-two students divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group, which received both podcast and traditional lectures, outperformed the control group in writing skills.

Researched the perceptions of EFL freshmen on the impact of creating pronunciation podcasts on their pronunciation skills. The study involved 80 freshmen in a Turkish university's English teacher education program. Data collected through interviews, dashboard activities, LMS tracking records, and peer feedback indicated that students viewed the creation of pronunciation podcasts positively. They appreciated the flexibility podcasting provided, allowing them to practice pronunciation beyond the classroom constraints.

Research questions
1. 1.Is solo podcasting effective in increasing the length of speech of EFL learners?
2. Is there a statistical difference in speaking achievement between the pre-test and post-test results of the experimental and control groups?
3. What are the attitudes of the students toward the use of solo podcast to increase the quality of their speaking skill?

Methodology
Study Design
The current research employed a pretest and post test design in which all the participants took part in the pretest and after employing the treatment they were asked to take the posttest. Both tests were recorded and were taken by the same teachers. As a final step 7 students from experimental group were interviewd in order to find out their opinion about the implemented treatment.

Participants
60 participants from a private foreign language institute took part in the current study. Their age was between 15-18 years old and all of them were studying english at the upper intermediate level. All of the learners had Access to smartphones to download the shared podcasts. To be sure about the similarity of language proficiency among participants a sample of the IELTS test was distributed to 90 students to determine their general English proficiency and finally. Learners whose scores were between the band of 6-7 were assigned to the control and experimental group by random selection.

Anfd İn the given test assigned into control and experimental gropu by random selection/ And Step 1
- The teacher introduces the topic of the unit (2 minutes
- The learners ask about the meaning of unknown vocabulary 2 minutes

Instrument
The Rob Auton Daily
Rob Auton is live daily, sharing his poetry with the audience.

Pre-test and post-test
In order to find out the impact of solo podcasts on increasing the length of speech among EFL learners, the researchers used a pre-test to measure the learners' performance in speaking skill before the treatment. Then a post-test was administered to both experimental and control groups. In both tests, participants were asked to speak about the same topic.

Procedures
Firstly, to select our sample group, a proficiency test was held considering IELTS band descriptor items. According to the results, 30 students were randomly put into the experimental group (The learners who listened to solo podcasts), and the rest in the control group (who received traditional brainstorming and discussion methods). The learners in the both groups were put in small pairs and asked to do various speaking activities designed by their teachers such as sharing ideas, asking, and answering questions.

Pre-test
All of the learners in both groups (control and experimental) took part in speaking test before being given any instruction. The test included questions that had been chosen from The Rob Auton Daily podcasts. Two Experienced EFL teachers took the test and they rate learners' performance according to the IELTS band descriptor (appendix 1). For each interview, there were 2 marks and the final marks were the average score of the 2 teachers.

A short online session to introduce the instruction
This session was special for the experimental group before starting the procedure. They were informed about the podcasts, and how to download and use them.

Treatment
The learners in both groups took part in eight 40-minute sessions. These sessions were held 3 days a week and the survey lasted almost 3 weeks. The focus of the sessions was on developing speaking skills and the sessions were called speaking clubs. The participants in the experimental group were asked to listen to the solo podcast shared by the teacher the day before the lesson and then discuss the topic in the lesson.

Post-test
The following session after the treatment was completed all the participants were tested on their speaking skills again. The test takers were the same instructors and the average score of both test takers was student's final mark. All the learners speaking test was recorded by the test takers in the case of further research.
Scoring criteria were based on the IELTS rubric and all the participants were explained about the criteria before the exam. A semi-structured interview was also conducted and 7 learners from the experimental group were asked to join the interview and share their ideas about the impact of solo podcasting on their speaking exam, the interview session were also recorded by the researchers.

Results
The aim of current research was to discover if using solo podcasts has any impact on speaking performance learners. In table 1 descriptive analyis and paired sample t-test were conducted to examine the effect of solo podcasting on control and experimental groups speech quality.

Table 1: T-test result for control group|s pre-post test

Group	Test	No	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	T Value
Experimental group	Pre	30	2.3120	1.31197	0.790	0.252
	Post	30	2.4080	2.08104		

As table 1 indicates although the control group was taught by a traditional method they had perfomed better in post test.

Table 2: T-test results for the experimental group

Group	Test	No	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig	T Value
Experimental group	Pre-test	30	2.3506	1.16387	0.001	3.840
	Post-test	30	3.6175	0.37680		

According to table 2 there is a great differnce in experimental groups performance in pre-test and post test and their speaking Results have improved noticibly.

Table 3: The result of independent sample T-test for post -tests of both groups

Group	No	M	Std. D	Sig. (2-tailed)	T Value
Experimental	26	3.64	1.934	0.036	2.224
Control	26	2.39	2.081		

According to Table 1, the number of participants is equal in both the control and experimental groups. As the means shows the pretests results of both traditionally taught group

and solo-podcast based group are are really close to eachother13.80 and it shows that all the participants were homogenous with regard to this skill in the pretest stage.
Moreover, table 1 shows the means of post-test results which shows a considerable difference between the scores of two groups, the mean for control group is 14 and the mean for treatment group is 17 and this shows that the students in experimenatal group who were asked to listen solo podcasts outperformed the control group who were taught by traditinal methods. Also a Descriptive analysis and paired sample T-test were conducted to find out the impact of the solo podcasts on experimental groups' speaking skill and also to discover if the two groups had an improvment in their speaking after the treatment.

Semi-Structured Interviews
Semi-structured interviews with language learners from experimental group who used individual podcasts to improve their speaking skills revealed a mix of positive and negative experiences. Some of the students believed that they enjoyed the freedom and self-expression that solo podcasts provided, allowing them to choose topics of personal interest and practice them individually. They credited the use of podcasts with increasing confidence. However, some paeticipants faced technical challenges and felt isolated due to the lack of enough interaction in podcasting structured sessions. Generally, while some learners found the solo podcasting effective, Others were less satisfied and, believe that using traditional methods to enhance the the speaking skill could be more beneficial. Incorporating these suggestions can improve the effectiveness and satisfaction of using solo podcasts for English language practice.

Results
According to the analysis of data achieved by data analysis the use of solo podcasts has an obvious impact on the development of the speaking skills among higher-level students. The mean standard deviation and also learners' scores for both tests are shown in Table 1.

Discussion and Implications
Output is an Important component of SLA and also stated that a strategy that can help to increase students' language output is utilizing podcasts. Stockwell (2010) [14] believes that although podcasting can be one of the powerful tools in order to provide audiovisual material, it doesnt integrate interaction which is an important element of learning language. (Rosell-Aguilar, 2013) [13] believed that listening to podcasts and creating them are valuable methods for developing speaking skills.
In this study researcher tried to broaden student-centered learning in both groups by pairing and doing interactive tasks additionally at the same time, they urged the experimental group to use the solo podcasts as a tool to develop their speaking skill in various aspects specifically the length/and as the result shows the experimental grout had a better performance in post-test in compare with the control group. And not only their speech quality was increased bt also there was anotable raise in their speech duration. Most probably the result of this research can be in line with Facer et al.'s (2009) [3] study which showed the positive impact of podcasting on learners speaking skills. Study had also the close result and they found that supplementary podcasts have a positive effect on language learning than podcasts as the main teaching

tools. According to Morrison, online podcasts are not appropriate tool for foreign language learners and a podcast which lacks a learning goal will hardly affect learning. The results of the current study suggest that implementing solo podcasts as a learning tool in speaking clubs can have greate benefits on this skill. Overall besides the pros of using solo podcasts in education, their use has some backsides too. Firstly this tool was new for the students in the case of learning languages and all the selected participants showed a high degree of anxiety to take part in the study all the learners were selected from the same language institute which may put limitations to the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

Innovation in communication has lead to main changes in our lives. The Internet, which is a modern tool for communication nowadays, has a great effect on human life. Using inovative methods and educational technologies in making an appropriate environment for learning Education has an effective role. Podcasting is one of the latest cutting on the edge technologies for making and publishing content on the Internet. Podcasting is one the popular teaching tool in this era, language teachers by using this technology can provide, lectures for their students without time limitation. The current study was done to investigate the use of solo podcasts on students' speaking skill. The results showed that the use of solo podcasts has a positive effect on students' speaking quality and lenghth.

According to the results, using podcasts in education has many effective sides and teachers can use podcasts as a learning tool in their classes. Using podcasts in education demands to be familiar with it in order to provide a suitable plan and strategy for using it in education and also to provide an appropriate software and hardware infrastructure. To this end, training courses should hold in the field of podcast familiarization. Podcasting has a great impact on improving the quality of education and enhance learning. With regard to high potential of podcasting, it is suggested that the language schools increase the culture of using this technology. Podcasting can simply archive teaching sessions and make them available for broadcasting and distribution, So, supplementary materials can be prepared for students and other parties. students can also be required to creat and present their own solo podcasts as homework. preparing content for the podcast difficult and time-consuming, that includes design, audio-visual recording, and editing of their dense digital contents. In brief using podcasts by language teachers has become very common and It helps to raise the educational efficiency.

Appendix
IELTS Exam Speaking Band Descriptor

Band	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
9	• speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar • speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features • develops topics fully and appropriately	• uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics • uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately	• uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately • produces consistently accurate structures apart from 'slips' characteristic of native speaker speech	• uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety • sustains flexible use of features throughout • is effortless to understand
8	• speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction; hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language • develops topics coherently and appropriately	• uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning • uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies • uses paraphrase effectively as required	• uses a wide range of structures flexibly • produces a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inappropriacies or basic/non-systematic errors	• uses a wide range of pronunciation features • sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses • is easy to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility
7	• speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence • may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction • uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility	• uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics • uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices • uses paraphrase effectively	• uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility • frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist	• shows all the positive features of Band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 8
6	• is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation • uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately	• has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriacies • generally paraphrases successfully	• uses a mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility • may make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems	• uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control • shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained • can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times
5	• usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going • may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers • produces simple speech fluently, but more complex communication causes fluency problems	• manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility • attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success	• produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy • uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems	• shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6
4	• cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction • links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence	• is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice • rarely attempts paraphrase	• produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences but subordinate structures are rare • errors are frequent and may lead to misunderstanding	• uses a limited range of pronunciation features • attempts to control features but lapses are frequent • mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener
3	• speaks with long pauses • has limited ability to link simple sentences • gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic message	• uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information • has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics	• attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances • makes numerous errors except in memorised expressions	• shows some of the features of Band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 4
2	• pauses lengthily before most words • little communication possible	• only produces isolated words or memorised utterances	• cannot produce basic sentence forms	• speech is often unintelligible
1	• no communication possible • no rateable language			
0	• does not attend			

Table 1: The result of pre and post test

		N	Mean Score	SD
Pre-test	Control Group	20	13.4000	1.75919
	Traditional teaching	20	13.8000	1.98945
	Solo podcasts	20	13.9000	2.19809
	Total	60	13.7000	1.96839
Post-test	Control Group	20	15.0000	1.86378
	traditinal	20	17.0500	1.27630
	solo podcasts	20	15.7000	1.30182
	Total	60	15.9167	1.71030

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