Using podcasts in teaching oral expression to help improve students' fluency in English an innovative approach that complies with lmd requirement in departments of english in Algeria

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Abstract :

This article aims at facilitating the implementation of new technologies of information and communication, in the LMD system, in Algeria concerning the successful teaching methods of the English language through the use of Podcasts to improve mastery of language as well as fluency. The combination of the of latest mobile technologies with education offers the possibility of integrating a new form of instruction, known as edutainment, that combines entertainment and learning which can generate outstanding outcomes and considerable gain of time that favors learning in general, and fluency in English in particular.

الملخّـــــص:

هذا المقال يهدف إلى تفسير تطبيق التكنولوجيات الجديدة للمعلومات والاتصالات في نظام *LMD* في الجزائر لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال خيار استخدام "بودكاستس" لتحسين اتقان اللغة . استعمال هذه التكنولوجيا الحديثة يتيح إمكانية دمج شكل جديد من التدريس الذي يجمع بين الترفيه و التعلم مما يساعد على كسب الوقت من أجل معرفة لغوية أفضل.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The definition of learning and teaching changed after the new millennium. Concepts and theories of learning also shifted from the so called teacher-centered to learner-centered approach. The main factor that has played a huge role in this revolutionary binary, also called digital era, is the Information and computer technology (**Hilton III et al. 2010**).

The combination of this powerful pedagogical means can be harnessed and combined to the most relevant learning theories, can form an efficient cocktail that gathers a new way of learning through amusement, known as the term "edutainment", that associates two fields: education and entertainment (**Brust, Adriano, and Ricarte 2007**).

Most Universities in Algeria were, more or less, adopting the same techniques in teaching Oral Expression. It consisted on interaction, group discussions, debates that were among the best oral activities at that time, which complied with the European teaching style. The idea consisted in emphasizing the importance of oral expression throughout two phases; listening and speaking.

Our enthusiasm to bring up an innovative approach is to catch up with the evolution of theories of learning as well as the development of technology and its usefulness not only in our daily life the but also in learning environment.

II.   A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE TECHNIQUES AND METHODS OF TEACHING ORAL EXPRESSION IN ALGERIA

The commonly used teaching and learning approach after the independence in Algeria was, and still, the grammar-translation. It is thought to stimulate learners to adjust their understanding according to previous knowledge and create a link between what has been understood and what is going to be understood. The case here

concerns language acquisition in which learning is encouraged through the word-for-word translation with the use of general grammatical rules for the target language. The delivery of teaching materials was rather unidirectional-based and mostly involved the teacher in all activities and tasks. The listening sessions were often provided in classroom and laboratories.

Whereas in speaking sessions the aim is to encourage students to take part in discussions and, hence, practice their English in that particular learning environment, which according to researchers and scholars is a good option but, appears to offer the chance mainly to extroverts (**Miller 1991**) The technique already proved its usefulness in terms of large classes but gives little time to less-daring learners for the practice.

With the implementation of the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system in Algerian Universities, techniques of teaching and learning became more in favor of developing and stimulating learners to be more autonomous and learn how to learn. On the one hand, with the advent of internet and computing facilities across the majority of the faculties, teachers and students become more aware about the utility of the tool and are trying to adapt a new behavior towards knowledge and language acquisition (**Harris, Mishra, and Koehler 2009**). On the other hand, we noticed that despite the availability of computers and internet resource, few persons harness the means efficiently.

III.   CHOOSING THE RIGHT ICT SOLUTION TO HELP IMPROVE ENGLISH FLUENCY

The unstructured situation in Algeria towards the use of technology in learning and teaching is generated by a certain resistance concerning the integration of the E-solutions with the classical way of either learning or teaching under the motive and philosophy of "we never change a winning team", which is a fallacy in this particular case.

Using Information and Computer Technology (ICT) appropriately can open-up new possibilities in terms of getting information quickly, regardless to location, and helps a lot in gaining time (**Van Bruggen**

2005), teaching quality assurance and understanding the most up-to-date concepts and skills. Among the solutions of this great means of communication and broadcasting we have the "PODCAST" (c.f. further away the explanation of the term)

Nowadays most of the definitions related to technology and learning become polymorphous. The reason is the continuous development and advance in IT research. Using podcasts for instance allow for learners and teachers have the opportunity to use the features of this powerful tool not only in classrooms but also on-the-go which boosts and motivates tremendously **(Attwell 2007)**. Time for learning extended and contents became various and available which please students through the diversity of subjects and topics that meet their taste in learning field and center of interest.

What does the term Podcast stand for?

For Oxford dictionary 'Podcast' is:

Podcast \□päd-□kast

[The podcast is a multimedia digital file made available on the Internet for downloading to a portable media player, computer, etc…]

(Oxford Dictionary 2013)

A podcast can be an audio or video file that is generally free of charge and that can be either followed online or downloaded from the internet for further use. The difference between a podcast and other support is the periodicity of the upload of the file. For example listening to someone speaking English is helpful when learning English **(Bannan-Ritland 2003)**. The speaker or the conversation can be recorded and broadcasted under an mp3 audio format. Podcasting procedures are not different from the latter, in terms of recording, but the little upgrade that makes it reliable is the source or origin of the material and the possibility to listening or watching without interruption, since most podcasts are built on serial basis with chronology that respects the learners' needs, since the person or team responsible for the broadcasting take into consideration the users thoughts and concerns throughout their emails, questions and suggestions. Its successfulness came with this wonderful interaction. The concept of learning simply

shifted from a unidirectional and conventional strategy to a learner or user-friendly centered that is mostly described as tailored learning.

From our perspective, our choice to include this new innovative support was motivated by the democratization of communication in Algeria, as well as the increasing number of mobile users who became attracted to phone-based programs such as smartphones and tablets applications around the world **(Ally et al. 2005)**. Also the affordable cost of these devices, compared to computers and laptops that are slightly expensive can prevent some persons to take advantage of the usefulness of podcasts.

In the past, students used to rely on dictionaries and chromatic tapes to learn English. Now the possibility to combine two ways of acquiring a foreign language in a single place is, indeed, a great chance **(Tynan and Colbran 2006)**.

OBJECTIVE OF THE TESTED-MODEL

This tested model is designed to build-up and enriching learners' vocabulary as a top priority as well as a facilitating method that will help for enhancing listening and speaking skills for a better fluency **(Evans 2008).** The first order to start with is a listening activity rather than speaking, because as teachers of English as a foreign language, we have to ensure that our students have the minimum knowledge and appreciation of the target language.

Using the cutting-edge technology to follow-up with the most up-to-date teaching methods that succeeded in leading Universities **(Jham et al. 2008)** can be of a great support to achieve in the good delivery of materials through the gain of time, since all Algerian Universities shifted their educational system from the classic one that necessitated four academic years to the newly implemented LMD system which relies on successfully cumulating the required credits during the three years. For learners, it is seen as an important curriculum update but for teacher of English, supplementary timing for course delivery is a necessity since learning a foreign language needs more than what currently is being allocated. In the present research, we propose a tested model of integrating PODCASTS in Learning Oral Expression

has been conducted as an innovative learning approach **(Harris, Mishra, and Koehler 2009)** through the following framework. Now the question is: How can we use it efficiently to help improve our learners' English fluency?

IV.   METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The currently used teaching materials concerning the module of Oral Expression are mostly obsolete and need to be reviewed and updated. As part of our comparative description, we took the liberty to conduct a quite contrasted overview that shows the teaching technique for improving the listening skill which was used in the past **(Griffin 2005)** with the one that is adopted now in the top ranked Universities where English is taught as a foreign (EFL) Language, and as a second foreign language (ESFL), because learners have different attitudes when learning a foreign language **(Broughton 1993).**

The findings of these researches clearly demonstrate that PODCASTS play a great role in reinforcing teachers' scaffolding **(Harris, Mishra, and Koehler 2009)** as well as students' optimal language acquisition process, as far as learning is concerned.

Our target population is the first year LMD students of English in Batna University, a University which agreed on the fact of having a certain feeling of frustration and boredom during their oral expression sessions that are seen as obstacles and difficulties when listening to English speakers, especially to natives **(Ellis 1999)**. This observation has been our first priority in this paper to design a model of teaching destined to help teachers explore a novel way to deliver their material using an appealing method with a technological support **(Bannan-Ritland 2003).**

This tested-model is part of a work in progress, based on a randomly selected sample of two hundred students out of the whole population with the size of five hundred and ten, totalizing the first year LMD students, Department of English, Batna University, Algeria. We found it difficult, in terms of feasibility of the research, to include the whole population (Academic year 2011-2012), that is why we selected our sample randomly because "each individual in the population must

have an equal chance of being selected" **(Brown, 2001)**. Working on reduced group also excludes the effect of bias and improves objectivity. This is a proposal for teachers to use Podcast for an efficient practice of English as a foreign language.

V.   PROCEDURES AND STEPS

Our aim to present a precise and concise description of using podcasts is to help improve students' English fluency during and after oral expression sessions, with the coming steps that will explain the technique to be adopted when doing tasks that involve listening and speaking. We organized the instructions according to their order of priorities as following:

1st step: Make sure to have a portable device e.g.: Mobile, mp3 reader, tablet, laptop or simply a regular desktop computer.

2nd step: Download a podcast reader software that is compatible with the device (VLC, Winamp…etc.) and subscribe to the podcast. The subscription is quite easy but the choice of the podcast has to be precise because every user either teacher or student must know exactly what content to download according to the desired searching criteria like: topic, theme, subject, idea that is going to meet their needs and expectations in terms of information, relevance and accuracy.

3rd step: Reviewing carefully the downloaded podcast and select the keywords of the text, speech, conversation or discussion to help the user identify the words that are going to be learnt;

4th step: Defining the term podcast and explain the usefulness of this new support to learners;

5th step: Print text material and distribute the papers and ask students to underline the misunderstood, difficult or new words;

6th step: Using dictionaries either paper-based or electronic ones to understand the meaning of the underlined words;

7th step: Ask students to write five examples with the newly learnt words;

8th step: Form peer groups and start a speaking activity using the same words.

9th step: Replay the same podcast and check if students had a better understanding of the listening activity to enhance internalization and data recall process.

10th step: Prepare students for the next series of podcast by playing the next material once and see if they understood the context of what is being said.

11th step: Select the homework which consists of listening or watch a different podcast where English is the primary language.

*The above steps have to be done on a repetitive basis starting from the third step all-along the academic year.

VI.   ASSESSMENT AND PROGRESSION MEASUREMENT

Assessment is very important when it comes to checking the level of understanding of our students after the use of technological aid (**Means et al. 2009**). It can be difficult in some situations to have precise results since evaluating someone's level of understanding is challenging especially in fields that mainly include arts and literature (**Warschauer 2007**). There are some constraints to foresee how students are going to react and behave with the integration of a new unusual element or aid. For instance, learners have different preferences when learning. The personality factor can have a strong impact on how they will learn. Extroverts and introverts have different attitudes towards the adoption of new method (**Tongchai 2010**). However, since we seek to reach the most optimal result that benefits the majority we can adapt our assessment procedures for a satisfactory overall measurement.

We suggest that the measurement has to be done on an ongoing basis which will necessitate a close monitoring and a thorough observation with note-taking and observation grid that will denote the learners' level and progression. Depending on the teaching style, the assessment can be graded in order to motivate students to be more committed and interested to what is being taught (**Black and Wiliam 2009**).

VII.   POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF USING PODCASTS

We have to precise that every method has its strengths and weaknesses, since learners have different learning attitudes and might use different strategies to learn and understand better **(Bandura 1977)**. Hence, we summarized positive and negative aspects of using the method into the following table that highlights the most important and common aspects of adopting ICT in teaching and the integration of Podcast particularly **(Corlett et al. 2005)**.

Strengths	Challenges
Using electronic devices is affordable in public places such as libraries and cybercafés	Using the technology can be expensive, either the price of the device itself or that some Podcasts that are copyrighted do not have free Licence
Internet access is available and free in the majority of Algerian Universities	Internet is not that fast in some Algerian cities
Using podcasts is a great option to learn everywhere	Using programs and application might seem complex at first sight for beginners
Mobiles and computers help gaining time which helps to learn other materials	Can make learners lose time since social media platform are also integrated to most devices.
Nowadays ICT's are endowed with better interface that give a certain ease of use	Some teachers and instructors find it challenging to integrate ICT in their daily life

As the table indicates, the list is not exhaustive and might be extended, but we have to mention that the pros are more than the cons since the

most important challenges we highlighted above concern behavioral adaptation, technical issues and budgetary and copyrights matters.

Pros:

❖ Gain of time;
❖ Ease of use;
❖ Sharing capabilities with less cost;
❖ Appealing way of learning;
❖ Helps users: teachers and students;
❖ Possibility of integration on other platforms such as social media, emails and websites;
❖ Portability and mobility;
❖ Uses techniques that rely on means that stimulates sense of sight and hearing

Cons:

❖ Easiness of use can develop laziness for some users and learners;
❖ Technical issues may happen: No electricity, bugs or file-corruption;
❖ Prerequisite IT knowledge and computing basics are necessary for a minimal use.
❖ Some podcasts, programs and E-solutions are not free of charge.

VIII.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Frankly speaking, electronic devices and internet are offering a wide range of solutions with lot of features that fit our learners' needs, but we should not neglect the prerequisite condition prior to the of teaching with Podcasts, which implies the mastery of certain notions in computing. It is greatly suggested to understand the basics and the fundamentals of the use of computer and programs that run the application. Our recommendations are ordered as follows:

1. Ask your students to create an email account if they do not have one (For the moment Google is offering the best messaging service with its amazing features);
2. Create an Excel sheet to store the emails of students under a database;

3. Send an email blast using the emails you collected and stored in your Excel sheet to share URL[1] and feeds with students for podcast subscription (using social media is of a great help since it has a tremendous sharing capabilities;

4. Ask learners to join your dedicated forum or Facebook page to submit their questions and concerns trough posts and comments which can help for the selection of the appropriate podcast;

5. Compare learners' progression and vocabulary with regular assessment that can be stored in an observation to build an overall insight with MS[2] office;

6. Share results with colleagues and teachers for a better cooperation to help overcome obstacles that could arise for others

IX.   CONCLUSION

ICT's proved (c.f. the cited references) their excellence and quality assurance in terms of data spreading, sharing and broadcasting. The particularity of Podcasts in helping learners be more fluent in English is, indeed, a great way-out and a supportive didactic solution to teachers.

The upgrade of the Algerian telephony network to the third generation, commonly called 3G, is opening new possibilities to learners in terms of having a fast and reliable internet access on-the-go regardless to places and locations, as long as the signal is available. Playing Podcasts on mobiles will be part of the so-called edutainment which will change the behavior of our students, and make them even more motivated to learn English with fun and improve their level as well as their fluency. However, using these cutting-edge information and communication technologies needs a certain mastery of the most fundamental and basic notions of the former either in hardware or software.

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[1] URL stands for Uniform Resource Locator
[2] MS stands for Microsoft Office

The nature of the subject, theme of Podcast, is decisive and has to be chosen carefully since we can sink in the huge list of files we ought to download and use which are numerous and diverse.

To conclude, we might say that using Podcasts to improve English fluency is an innovative approach that can be used in Algeria by teachers of oral expression module in English departments, since it proved its efficiency in some leading Universities throughout the world, as part of a successful teaching method that complies with the LMD system.

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