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Podcast: Enhancing Listening and Speaking Skills

Sonali Rajpal, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. and V. Anitha Devi, M.A., Ph.D.

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Abstract

The inclusion of technology in education and research has completely transformed the Education system. Development in computers, Communication and Multimedia has changed the Classrooms into Smart rooms. Teachers have become Techno-Teachers. Especially, English learning styles have emerged into a new technological phase of learning by breaking the walls of traditional language rules. The paper aims at to discuss podcast as technology, revolutionizing English learning process and to show how is it useful for teachers and students in enhancing their knowledge as well as listening and speaking skills.

Introduction

Podcast is a new technological approach to enhance learner's skills. It has brought the learning process to come out from the school, colleges and classrooms to the learner's hand and pocket. It is a method of spreading information in audio or video form, according to the convenience of user's time, place and medium.

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Podcast : a knowledge file in Pocket

Podcast is a standard digital audio and video broadcast that can be downloaded and played in mobile devices, iPhones and iPods. The term “*podcast*” was derived from two technologies used in media player, ‘iPod’, and “Broadcast”. Traditionally, Broadcast means getting information from Radio or Television. The two united terms identify a new technology called ‘*Podcast*’. It is same as radio but there is a thin line between radio and podcast. Through Podcast listener can select his favorite programme according to his convenience and listen to it. It is a user choice technology. It was initially developed around the year 2005.

The main idea behind it was to create an educational digital media that can reach the user or audience at their convenience and promote an educational product or to express a message in a comprehensive manner in their own voice. Voice is the most influential tool that relates to the audience very quickly. Thus, podcast is a series of sound files that consist of educational information in a comprehensive manner to make the user an advanced learner.

Three Stages

People create podcast for number of purposes. Some create it for branding their product and some for educational purpose. Three main stages that are included in creating a Podcast. These are *Recording, Publishing and Publicizing*. On technological basis it is created by the combination of (*audio file+ web+ XML*).

- Audio file is the collection of audios (listening files) in computer.
- Web is the collection of internet sites that offer text and graphics.
- XML (Extensible Markup Language) is the Programming language; it creates the ability for software to automatically extract information from web documents and use it.

When a web user browses Internet, browsing supports HTML. HTML and XML both are programming languages and similar enough in their actual format. HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language), primarily used for files that are posted on internet and viewed by web browser, provides information on the screen. On the other hand, XML (Extensible Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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Markup Language) renders what things are needed by the user. It is *extensible*, means authors can create their own elements. This allows an individual to choose which aspects of the content he wants. This is the reason to use XML programming language to create Podcast.

Podcast: Revolutionizing the English Learning Process

Podcasting is an opportunity for teachers to explore new teaching styles and transform themselves into Techno-Teachers and their classrooms into Smart rooms. This digital knowledge file is revolutionizing the learning process. Apart from the technicality, technology (Podcast) is created by two important communicative skills: *Listening skills* and *Speaking skills*. This has broadened the circumference of education and an educator. English, though a second language has attained the position of a global language. It has also become a principal language of learned class. In olden days, English language teaching used to be grammar-oriented. Its scope was limited to words and much stress was not given to phonology. But the changing scenario of professional world clearly says that there is a great difference between language learning and language acquisition. Native language is acquired whereas English as a foreign language has to be learnt with proper vocabulary and pronunciation. Those who have the hunger to learn English as a communicative language or a professional language need to know its practical usage with right accent.

In one of the research studies related to different skills, an analysis has been found that in the different aspects of communication a person does in his daily routine are as follows:

According to Rivers and Ternerley (1978):

Listening skills – 45%

Speaking skills - 30%

Writing skills - 16%

Reading skills - 9%

Among all these communicative skills, listening and speaking skills play a very important role. But Listening Skill still shows the greatest share in communication. Mobile, iPhone,

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MP3/MP4 players, etc., are the great sources of communication directly focusing on these skills, more on listening and to some extent on speaking. A highly educated professional or an illiterate person, a businessman or if we talk about a youngster, everyone starts their day with a mobile or iPhone in their hand or in pocket through which they get latest information, communicate at any part of world and also entertain them by listening and speaking according to their convenience. Now, one can also get classroom education on mobile, like lectures can be downloaded, latest research details. Those who are keen to learn the English language for improving their communication, they can download files where they can listen to speeches, debates, audio books and other audio clips. By this the user can enhance his listening and speaking skills.

Podcast in Academics

In academics, podcast has opened a new pathway for spreading knowledge worldwide among the laureates and budding learners.

Teachers Podcast: Teachers podcast are created to facilitate students with latest and innovative lectures in the episode forms. Each episode is created in order to keep the students engage with latest information with creativity. A teacher either from school or college can create his own podcast in different academic disciplines like Literature, Philosophy, History, Science, Religion and Spirituality, Social Sciences, etc. They can also create audio books in their own voice.

This technology has also opened an opportunity for students to download and listen, his professor's lecture in his digital media. So, now a student will not miss any lecture and can download the latest lecture at any time and place according to his convenience and come prepared in the class. Keeping this in mind, teacher's podcasts are created. Some of the teachers' podcasts are as follows:

- PETRE JASZI : Talks about transformativeness on –“Teachers Teaching Teachers podcast”

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- Dr. KATHY KING & MARK GURA : The Teacher’s Podcast (School and Colleges)
- TOM GRISSOM : TechTalk4Teachers – A podcast for Teachers about teaching, learning and technology.

Students Podcast: Podcast is a kind of digital lectures through which students get new dimension for their subjects and branch. It has enabled their thought process to develop in different perspectives to create their own podcast in their own voice. As voice is important for creating a podcast, one can enhance their vocabulary, public speaking skills, oral presentation skills, like Audio books, Podcast Novel (podiobook) and Self development lectures. When a student creates his own podcast or listens to it with a purpose, three different but interrelated objectives are catered to simultaneously.

First, the student learns and practices right phonetic tone to speak. As voice and accent is an integral part. It covers different aspects of language like pronunciation, intonation and stress patterns. Voice is created by sounds and sound can be common in two languages but there is thin difference between the two sounds in each language which only a phonetician can explain. For example /z/ and /dʒ/ should be clearly distinguished in order to avoid confusion between words like ‘rays’ and ‘rage’, ‘reason’ and ‘region’ etc. Thus, specialization in phonetics with proper method leads to systematic approach.

Second, as each country has its own form of speech and accents. So, one who wants to create a podcast in his own voice needs to study and practice proper Slang as slang is an important part of colloquial English.

Third, an important aspect to be taken care while creating a podcast is the difference in the rate in which the words are uttered by different speakers of English as a foreign or second language and their listening abilities. An Indian speaks at a rate of about 180 words per minute, while Americans speak at a rate of about 120 words per minute (Salonee Priya, March 2009). So, a person who is creating a podcast at professional level should have a good listening as well as speaking skills.

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Conclusion

Blend of technology and language learning has given a new foundation in the educational world to transform it into Tech-edu. A recent study, published in an article “**E-books may spur more kids to read: Survey**” conducted by the educational and media company, Scholastic and Harrison Group, a marketing and research consulting firm, found that as students spend more time on mobile technology it can encourage a child to read through e-books. Francie Alexander, the chief academic officer of Scholastic, said that e-books can have an important educational role (The Times of India, 2010) Thus, innovative mobile technologies like podcast can encourage learners to appreciate literature. This would benefit a learner in his over all development thereby establishing the emergence of a new era in the learning process.

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