**EFL STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS USING AND CREATING LEARNER PODCASTS TO DEVELOP THEIR SPEAKING SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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| ***Abstract:***  *It is difficult for EFL learners to improve their speaking skills. Thus, In addition to traditional speaking activities used in English language teaching, creating learner podcasts can be integrated into EFL classroom as a new instructional tool to improve students’ speaking skills. Therefore, this paper investigates students’ attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to develop their English speaking skills. The study was conducted with 56 EFL students studying in the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University. The students were at three different proficiency levels: B1, B1+ and B2.During the six-week study, after the students were introduced what a podcast is and how to create learner podcasts, they created five different podcasts and published them to the class podcast page. During this process, the learner podcasts were created individually and in pairs. After students created their podcasts in pairs, they were asked to listen to another podcast created by another pair, to record their comments as another podcast and send it to the class podcast page. The data were gathered through a student questionnaire and semi-structured interviews conducted by 10 students. The data gathered from the study were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results indicated that students perceived podcasts to be beneficial for development of their speaking skills. In this sense, getting information about students’ attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts can provide EFL teachers with information about whether learner podcasts can be used as a practical device to help students develop their speaking skills.*  ***Keywords:*** *[Podcasts, Attitudes, EFL Learners, Speaking, Skills]* |

**1. Introduction**

*1.1 Introduce the Problem*

With the recent developments in technology, podcasts have been increasingly used in a variety of fields such as “tourism, entertainment, library research and education” (Lakhal, Khechine and Pascot, 2007 as cited in Hew, 2009, p.333). Podcasts can include audio, video and image items. In recent years, the most commonly used form of podcasts in education contexts are audio podcasts (Rossell-Aguilar, 2007). The frequency and content of podcasts can be varied, “from hourly 3-min newscasts, through daily 20-min commentaries, to weekly one-hour in-depth discussions” (Bell, Cockburn, Wingkvist and Green, 2007 as cited in Hew, 2009, p.334).

After the first RSS (Really Simple Syndication) audio feeds appeared in July 2003 (Doyle, 2005), podcasting has appeared as a new phenomenon. In addition, by mid-2005, the number of different podcasts on various topics was nearly 10.000 (Bell, Cockburn, Wingkvist and Green, 2007). The word “podcasting” was selected as the word of the year by The New Oxford American Dictionary in 2005 and in 2006, it was present in the dictionary (Bell, Cockburn, Wingkvist and Green, 2007; Lane, 2006).

With regard to the use of podcasting in education, it is believed that podcasting can provide learners with educational benefits (Hew, 2009). Podcasting can be classified into two main groups: creating own podcasts (teacher-created or student-created) and using existing podcasts (Rossell-Aguilar, 2007). Teacher created podcasts includes lecture podcasts and podcasts of supplementary learning materials. Supplementary podcasts are audio recordings that help learners to enhance their learning by providing support. Student-created podcasts, on the other hand, requires students to present their own projects via podcasts. In this respect, considering the various uses of podcasts in teaching, this study will investigate students’ attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to develop their English speaking skills.

In foreign language education, it is obvious that the level of speaking skills in the target language is regarded as the measure of learning that language by both teachers and students. Unfortunately, many language learners have difficulty in speaking fluently in the target language. It is difficult for these learners to express themselves well during a conversation. Thus, they need to improve their ability to speak clearly and effectively. In this sense, creating learner podcasts can be integrated into EFL classroom as a new instructional tool to improve students’ speaking skills. Getting information about students’ attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts can provide EFL teachers with information about whether learner podcasts can be used as a practical device to help students develop their speaking skills.

*1.2 Literature Review*

All around the world, people learn to speak English for different purposes. Some people need to learn English for a Specific Purpose (ESP). For instance, business English is a very popular part of ESP. Most of the students prefer to learn English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to attend an English-speaking university or collage. In addition, these students need English in order to study Enlish-language academic texts (Harmer, 2007). Although the reasons for learning English can differ greatly, the main aim of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate successfully in the target language and in that target-language community.

Teachers try to have students speak in the classroom for three main reasons. First of all, speaking activities enable students “to practice real-life speaking in the safety of the classroom” (Harmer, 2007, p.123). Secondly, speaking tasks used in the class give feedback to both teachers and students about students’learning. These speaking activities enable teachers to see students’strenghts and weaknesses in speaking (e.g.the level of their success, the language problems they encounter etc.). Finally, the more students have chances to practice speaking in class, the more autonomous language users they become.Thus, teachers should pay much more attention to develop students’speaking skills in foreign language instruction.They should use good speaking activities that provide rehearsal opportunities for students and enable them to produce language automatically.

Language researchers have been mainly interested in conversation as it is regarded as a worldwide language “genre” which requires all members of a society to regulary participate in this speech activity. Conversation analysis is a practical instructional tool used for teaching spoken English to EFL learners (Tian & Qui, 2010). It analyzes natural conversation of every day speech to find out the linguistic characteristics of conversation (Tian & Qui, 2010). Conversation analysis provides an in-depth analysis of such topics as “turn-taking, topic change and conversational structure” and conversation rules directing the opening and closing of conversations (Johnson &Johnson, 1998, p. 89 as cited in Tian & Qui, 2010). In the ELT class, a variety of activities are used to enable students to practice real-life conversation in Engish (discussions, information-gap activities, student presentations, moral dilemmas, etc.). However, speaking English is regarded as a big problem by many language learners. Therefore, new engaging speaking activities should be integrated into foreign language curriculum.

In recent year years, technology and the Internet have been playing an important role in English Language Teaching. Especially, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools such as wikis, blogs and podcasts heve been increasingly used in the ELT classroom. The use of ICT tools can foster learners’motivation (Harmer, 2007). Therefore, using and creating learner podcasts, one of the important examples of social software, can be integrated into English language instruction as a new way of helping students to develop their English speking skills.

*1.2.1. Podcasts in Language Teaching*

One of the social software tools used in foreign language teaching is podcasts. Harmer (2007) states that:

“A podcast is an audio and / or video file that is ‘broadcast’ via the Internet and can be downloaded to a computer or a mobile device such as an MP3 player for listening / viewing (p.86).

Podcasts can be made about any topics and they can include both music and video. Video podcasts are also called as Vodcasts or PodClips. A podcasts can include a series of short audio files lasting from a few minutes to an hour or more. Podcasts can be either authentic (e.g. BBC radio shows) or they can be created by students (Harmer, 2007).

Podcasts can be integrated into teaching in two main ways. The first way refers to listening to podcasts created by other people. The second way addresses to make their own podcasts. Creating podcasts is being commonly used in tertiary education. For instance, the lectures are recorded by professors as podcasts and they can be downloaded on computers or mobile devices by students who miss the class. In addition, in teacher training, audio and video podcasts can be produced to teach trainees methodology (Harmer, 2007).

The learners can use the podcasts available on the Internet (authentic podcasts or the ones found at the English caster directory) to study on their own or these podcasts can be used in class for listening by means of a computer. There are a wide range of EFL /ESL podcasts for all level of learners. Moreover, they are made on a variety of topics (discussions, songs, jokes etc.) (Harmer, 2007).

Students can be encouraged to subscribe authentic podcasts such as the BBC news and listen the podcasts regularly. Alternatively, students can be required to create their own podcasts and make them available on the Internet (Harmer, 2007).

*1.2.2.How to create learner podcasts*

Learner podcasts contains short audio files produced by individual learners. They can last from 10-20 seconds to several minutes. Longer podcasts can be created by small groups. For example, podcasting projects require students to make podcasts about personal information (e.g. name, ages, likes &dislikes), views on different topics or telling jokes / anecdotes. The features of the podcast (the length of each podcast, individual / small group recordings, one-off / series of podcasts) can be decided according to the language level of the students.

Harmer (2007) states that a sample class podcast project can consist of various steps:

Step 1: Setting up a podcast page (approximately 30 minutes)

Step 2: Creating Learner podcasts (approximately 45-60 minutes)

Step 3: Listening to Learner podcasts (approximately 45-60 minutes)

Step 4: Follow-up (3-4 subsequent lessons) (p.100).

In the first step, the teacher prepares a podcast page for the class podcast project via a free podcast site like **podOmatic** (www. Podomatic.com). Students can post their podcasts using this web page. Moreover, a short text description of the project and example podcasts with photos can be presented on the podcast site by the teacher. In the second step, students make their own podcasts and post them to the class podcast page. The podcast page enables learners to record and listen to their podcasts and make them available on the Internet. In the third step, learner podcasts are listened in the class as a whole class activity and students can be required to take notes about their friends ‘podcasts. In the last step, students know how to create learner podcast and publish it to the main podcast page. Thus, it is time for the students to practice preparing podcast texts. With more practice, they will be more self-confident and they will produce more ‘natural’ recordings (Harmer, 2007).

*1.3 Aim of the Study*

With the recent developments in educational technology, the use of social software has become an important part of foreign language instruction. One of the ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) tools used in the ELT classroom is podcasts. Many studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of using podcasts as an instructional tool (Anusiene & Kavaliauskiene, 2009; Chan & Lee, 2005; Muppala & Kong, 2007; Walsh, 2004). However, there is a lack of research in the field of foreign language instruction concerning students ‘attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to develop their speaking skills;therefore, this this study investigates EFL students ‘attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to improve their speaking skills

The EFL students in the preparatory school at Hacettepe University attend English courses for a year to enhance their language skills and to get prepared for their subsequent four year education. These students have the instruction in their own department in English (% 30, % 50 or % 100).Therefore; they need English not only for operating successfully in the target language but also for learning English for a Specific Purpose (ESP) or for Academic Purposes (EAP). Therefore, for their career, they need to improve their English speaking skills. In this sense, in order to help students to enhance their speaking skills, in addition to traditional speaking activities used in English language teaching, new ones can be integrated into our EFL classes. Therefore, an investigation into students’ attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to develop their speaking skills will give EFL teachers information about whether learner podcasts can be used as an instructional tool to help students develop their speaking skills.

*1.3.1. Research Questions*

1. What are the EFL students’ attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to develop their speaking skills?
2. **Method**

The study was conducted with a group of EFL students studying in the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University during 2014-2015 school year in the last quarter of the second semester to get information about students’perception of using podcasts to improve their English speaking skills.It was carried out for six weeks.

*2.2 Participant (Subject) Characteristics*

The participant were 56 EFL students (24 male &32 female) studying in the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University. The students were at three different proficiency levels: at B1, B1+ and B2 level. The EFL students in the preparatory school at Hacettepe University attend English courses for a year to enhance their language skills and to get prepared for their subsequent four year education. These students have the instruction in their own department in English (% 30, % 50 or % 100).

* 1. *Sampling Procedures*

The participants have been chosen for this study as they have not experienced making learner podcasts before in the ELT classroom. In addition, in the selection of participants, students’ language proficiency was taken into consideration. These students were chosen randomly out of other students who were at the same proficieny level.

2.3.2 Instruments / Scales

he data for this research was collected via a questionnaire for students and semi-structured interviews that were conducted with some students. In addition, a podcast page for the class podcast project was set up by using a free podcast site ‘**podOmatic’** (www. Podomatic.com).

A questionnaire was prepared for students to gather data for this research. The questionnaire was designed to get information about students ‘opinions on creating and using learner podcasts to develop their speaking skills. It was prepared in Turkish in order to enable students to completely understand the questions and express themselves well. To get feedback about the questions in the questionnaire and to ensure that the questionnaire were reliable, before the questionnaire was administered, they were checked by five English instructors working in the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University. The questionnaire includes only one section which contained 13 questions eliciting responses on 5 points Likert scales.

Interviews were conducted with ten students to be able to get in-depth responses and get detailed information about students ‘attitudes towards creating learner podcasts to improve their speaking skills. After the end of the study (after the implementations of the tasks), students were interviewed about their opinions on using learner podcasts. The interviews were conducted in Turkish in order to enable students to express themselves well.

2.3.3 Research Design

The study was conducted as a within-subject design.It was carried out for six weeks.In the first week of the study, the teacher set up a class podcast page using a free podcast site ‘**podOmatic**’(www.podomatic.com). She also made a sample podcast giving a short description of the study and published it to the class podcast page. In the class, the students were informed about the study and shown the class podcast page for the project. During the study, after the students were introduced what a podcast was, how to create learner podcasts and make them available on the Internet, they created different podcasts and published them to the class podcast page. During this process, the learner podcasts were created individually, in pairs and in groups. With regard to the podcasts which were created in pairs, after students created their podcasts, they were asked to listen to another podcast created by another pair, to record their comments as another podcast and send it to the class podcast page. In these podcasts, students were required to make comments on their friends ‘opinions (not on their friends speaking performance in the podcasts).The length of the audio files in the podcasts were between 5 and 10 minutes. Some of the students’ podcasts were listened in the class and students discussed about these podcasts as a whole class. Students were given approximately a week to do each task and the podcasts were made by the students out of the class.

**3. Results**

The data gathered from all instruments were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The data gathered from the student questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using Statistical Packages in Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. The answers to Likert type questions were analysed quantitatively using percentages and frequencies. The interviews with students were analyzed through the categorization and coding of the responses.

*3.1 Statistics and Data Analysis*

*3.1.2. The Results of the Student Questionnaire*

The results concerning students’ attitudes’ towards creating learner podcasts are presented in Table 1 respectively. These questions required responses on 5-point Likert scales (ranging from “strongly disagree=1” to “strongly agree=5”). In the table, the responses “agree” and “strongly agree” are combined “A/SA”; “disagree” and “strongly disagree” are combined “D/SD”.

Table 1. Students’ attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to develop their speaking skills



The mean scores of responses to the questions about students’ opinions on creating learner podcasts (except the 8th question) were between 3.55 and 4.28, indicating that students think that creating learner podcasts is beneficial to improving their English speaking skills. With regard to the benefits of creating learner podcasts, the results indicate that creating learner podcasts enables students to learn to use appropriate speaking expressions in a particular context (91.1 %). As regards the students’ feelings about creating learner podcasts to develop their speaking skills, the results show that most of the students found creating learner podcasts interesting (57.1 %) and enjoyable (62.5). Moreover, 64.3 % of the students stated that they liked creating learner podcasts. As Table 1 shows, the overall mean scores of the items indicate that students have positive attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to improve their English speaking skills.

*3.1.3. The Results of the Interviews*

The data gathered from the interviews were analyzed qualitatively after they were recorded and transcribed. During the interviews, all of the students (10 students) stated that creating learner podcasts is beneficial to developing their speaking skills and poscasts should be used in English courses. In addition, most of the students (8 students) have stated that creating learner podcasts helps students to improve their English vocabulary:

*“We are learning new words while creating learner podcasts”*

*“We are searching the words on the given topic”*

Moreover, some of the students (3 students) have stated that creating learner podcasts help them to develop their ability to think in English:

*“While creating learning podcats, we think in English, so our speaking skills develops as well”*

Some of the students (4 students) think that creating podcasts enables students to develop their pronunciation:

*“You hear your voice and how you pronounce the words while listening to the podcasts you created. For example, I realized that I made too many pronunciation mistakes during the speech”*

Some of the students (5 students) also think that creating podcasts enables students to speak fluently:

*“After creating podcasts, I’ve started to speak more fluently”*

It is noteworthy that five students have mentioned that creating podcasts enables them to speak in a relaxed atmosphere out of the class and gives shy students opportunities to improve their speaking skills:

*“I am a shy student so I generally have difficulty in speaking in the class. Podcasts enabled me to get rid of my shyness”*

In this study, it is seen that the data gathered from the student questionnaire are parallel with the data obtained from the interviews with students. The results show that the participants perceive creating learner podcasts to be beneficial for the development of their speaking skills.

**4. Discussion**

The results of this study indicated that students have positive attitudes towards using and creating learner podcasts to develop their English speaking skills. These findings parallel those in the literature. Many researchers have stated that students are satisfied with using podcasts as a learning tool (Bull et al. 2007; Gribbins 2007; Plankis & Weatherly 2008). A majority of the students who took part in this study think that creating learner podcasts provides learners with many opportunities to enhance their speaking skills. Most of the students think that creating learner podcasts enables them to develop their English pronunciation as they try to pronounce the words correctly during the whole speech in the podcasts. It seems that since students know that their podcasts will be listened by their teacher and their friends they pay more attention to pronunciation and the use of stress and intonation in podcasts. Moreover, the data gathered from both student questionnaire and interviews indicate that students learn how to use appropriate speaking expressions in a particular context (e.g. giving opinions, agreeing & disagreeing, discussing on particular topics etc.) through creating learner podcasts. This confirms previous research, as reviewed by Anzai (2007), which has indicated that many learners believe that using supplementary podcasts can enhance their learning of English.

With regard to the students’ feelings about creating learner podcasts, a majority of the students think that producing podcasts is both enjoyable and interesting. The previous studies in the literature also shows that students enjoy using podcasts (Hew, 2009).

Considering students’ positive feelings on creating podcasts, learner podcasts can be integrated into foreign language instruction and learner podcasts can be used as an instructional tool for improving students’ speaking skillsCreating learner podcasts provides students with many opportunities to improve their speaking skills. Thus, it can be used as an alternative and supplementary instructional tool for the development of students’ speaking skills. Moreover, this kind of podcast projects can be used with students of different levels. Therefore, the results of this study might supply teachers with planning information about how learner podcasts might best be integrated into English language curriculum to develop their speaking skills.

*4.1 Recommendations for Further Studies*

Further research investigating different types of learner podcasts tasks need to be carried out. This kind of a study can provide more information about how to integrate learner podcasts in language classes effectively.

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1. *(This study is taken from the pilot study of the PhD. thesis which is conducted by Arzu Koçak and supervised by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arif Sarıçoban.)* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)