Chapter 10

A Case Study of Using Podcasts in ESL Modules for Hong Kong Pre-Service Teachers and its Impact on their Attitudes toward Podcasting

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), language educators around the world are finding ways to integrate technology into teaching in the hope of improving the quality of teaching and learning (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). In the past few years, as Web 2.0 applications have become so much more user-friendly, academic podcasting in English as a Second Language (ESL) is now widely used by college educators. In particular, many ESL teachers have also started to exploit this technology to help learners acquire better listening skills in English.

As English is fast becoming the world’s lingua franca, the ownership of the language is no longer exclusive to those of English speaking countries (Crystal, 2003; Hu, 2004; Seidlhofer, 2001). While conventional ESL listening materials have a tendency to be Anglocentric, podcasts allow both teachers and students to create content that is more suitable to the local context, which empowers learners to take charge of their own learning.

This chapter reports on a project situated in the theoretical context of the pedagogical value of podcasting in language learning (Facer, Abdous, & Camarena, 2009; King & Gura, 2009) and teacher education (Hockly & Dudeney, 2007), with particular reference to Hong Kong pre-service teachers.

The first part of the chapter describes the way in which podcasts are used for instructional, informational, and developmental purposes in two different English language modules for pre-service teachers. The second part of the chapter analyzes a survey conducted at the end of these modules and examines the

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quantitative and qualitative feedback collected. The third part of the chapter provides an insight into the attitudes of these prospective teachers toward podcasting in education and its future use in schools. As a result of this project, this chapter concludes that podcasts have a lot of potential, not only as an integrative and supplementary learning tool, but also as a powerful generator of knowledge, which encourages active learning – a view shared by Sturgis (2008).

INTRODUCTION

Academic podcasting is now widely used as an educational tool by many universities around the world. As the software for producing podcasts has become increasingly user-friendly, teachers need not be experts in educational technology in order to produce audio podcast files. All that podcasting requires is a computer, a microphone, sound editing software, and space on a server to host the podcasts (King & Gura, 2009). In language education, it is widely accepted that podcasting has enormous benefits. Many studies, such as those by Chinnery (2006) and Stanley (2006), have affirmed its usefulness.

King and Gura (2009) pointed out that ESL professionals are, in fact, the first group of educators to make use of podcasting, as there is “a natural need to consume content that is rich in listening to spoken language and instructional programs designed for them require constant acquisition of new content to satisfy that need” (p. 147). The most obvious use of podcasting in a language module is for listening comprehension. It is a great resource for global listening, as the materials are relevant and authentic (Constantine, 2007). Facer, Abdous, and Camarena (2009) noted that they firmly believe that foreign language learners, especially lower-performing students, can benefit from podcasts that serve as revision materials for oral and aural practice, and that podcasts can enable teachers to make better use of class time for other language learning tasks.

Various studies on the use of podcasting in foreign language courses have shown promise. Chan, Chen, and Döpel (2008) reported positive feedback about a podcasting project in which podcasts were used systematically in foreign language courses. The survey results show that podcasting is popular with students learning foreign languages, as podcasting offers language learning opportunities outside the classroom in the form of supplementary materials. Lord (2008) and Ducate and Lomicka (2009) also revealed the positive impact that podcasts had on pronunciation in foreign language classes (Spanish, French, and German). In both cases, students’ attitudes toward the importance of pronunciation in second language learning became more positive through the process of recording podcasts themselves and receiving feedback from peers and teachers alike. Furthermore, the former study also recorded improvement in pronunciation.

In terms of application, podcasting is not limited to providing pronunciation and listening resources for second language learners. Chaka (2009) exemplified many different uses of podcasts in language learning. Apart from conventional uses such as for listening to songs, poems, and news, podcasts can also be used for recording audio journals, creating verbal quizzes, and providing oral feedback to students. Sze (2006) recommended that podcasts be used for speaking tasks such as reading aloud, creating oral diaries, storytelling, giving advice, radio drama, jazz chants, and ELT rap. In addition, O’Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007) proposed that:

“[I]nstructors can invite guests to speak to their students at any time. The delivery of interviews and tips from guests in a podcast format enables students to easily download the audio or video file,