
Vodcasting tasks in online L2 classes: investigating the potentials and challenges in distance language learning

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Abstract: Video podcasting technology or ‘vodcasting’ has proven to be in the forefront of distance education in general and computer assisted language learning in particular. It has flourished by minimising the possible needs of learners’ physical presence in second language classes and removing their affective barriers. The purpose of this study was to investigate the major potentials and challenges of vodcasting technology in improving major language skills from EFL learners’ perspectives. In order to achieve this, 120 EFL students were selected to receive a long term treatment of collaborative online practice of different skills by using Telegram application. The participants received the video podcasting tasks and were assigned to do the tasks collaboratively. At the end of the treatment, they were interviewed about the experience. The results of the semi-structured interview yielded remarkable information about the capabilities of the experience and the challenges which need to be obviated for future studies.

Keywords: distance language learning; listening comprehension; online learning; podcasting; video podcasts; vodcasting.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, computer assisted language learning has changed the real essence of language learning pedagogy. Latest advances in the developments of online applications and the greater popularity of these devices have led students and educators to embrace the online classes more than the traditional ones. In the study of second and foreign language acquisition, the use of multimedia devices in developing different language skills has played a fundamental role and many researchers (e.g., Baltova, 1994; Kellerman, 1990, 1992; Progosh, 1996; Shin, 1998; Sueyoshi and Hardison, 2005; Wagner, 2010b) investigated the role of technology in language learning classes.

Online presentation of teaching materials has also been regarded as an innovative and a pioneering method for all majors in colleges and educational institutions. Furthermore, distance language learning program or in short “DLL” have gained a lot of consideration from these cutting-edge methods including the practice of using blogs for developing language skills (e.g., Dippold, 2010; Faramarzi, 2013; Mynard, 2007; Noytim, 2010); the practice of using wikis to improve reading and writing skills (e.g., McGarr, 2009); the use of Short Messaging Service (SMS) and multimedia messaging system (MMS) (e.g., Alemi et al., 2012); and the use of podcasts which is the major focus of this study.

As far as the language learning is concerned, in previous studies the major focus of attention was on developing different multimedia tests (Wagner, 2007, 2010a). The important issue was that most of the previous studies have been carried out in traditional language classes with traditional paper and pencil tests. Nevertheless, instructional technology in distance language learning programs had hugely changes the style of the presentation of materials which consequently reduced the affective filter and minimised the obligatory physical presence inside the classroom (Faramarzi and Bagheri, 2015). Likewise, among many devices used in e-learning programs, podcasting technology and its different versions like video podcasting or vodcasting for short, have attracted a lot of attention (Takeda, 2014).

In vodcasting technology, the learning materials in forms of multimedia files, macromedia files, and different presentation styles have been presented to learners in an online environment in order to have permanent access to the materials regardless of time and place. Additionally, this online device can have other major advantages namely: learners’ access to a collaborative environment, convenience in accessing the materials, the flexibility of reviewing the materials at any time, and moving towards independence in learning (Faramarzi et al., 2018).

Despite all of the advantages of vodasting technology in developing second language learning skills, there were a lot of challenges and controversies over implementing it as a part of second language curricula e.g., whether this technology is applicable in different

online language learning classes, whether students have a clear mindset about all the potentials of vodcasting, and whether all teachers are trained and briefed about how to incorporate it. Unlike previous studies which mostly aimed at finding the instructional values of podcasting and its different versions as an adjunct tool, this study sought to investigate the learner's attitudes towards its different aspects after being exposed to a long-term treatment of vodcasting tasks in developing integrated second language skills.

2 Background

2.1 Podcasting in traditional L2 classes

The effect of podcasting has been a subject of investigation by several researchers (e.g., Abdous et al., 2009; Berry, 2006; Chester et al., 2011; Copestake, 2006; Chan and Lee, 2005; Faramarzi et al., 2015a, 2015b; Hargis and Wilson, 2005; McGarr, 2009; O'Bryan and Hegelheimer, 2007; Wagner 2010a). In almost all of the previous studies, podcasting was considered as an adjunct tool or what McGarr (2009) repeatedly considered as "a substitutional" device which assisted the traditional language learning programs.

Though there were some contradictory studies about the positive impact of podcasting in second and foreign language classes, the majority of the studies contributed to the superiority of podcasting. For example, Chi and Chan (2011) and Abdous et al. (2009) considered podcasting as a positive device to be added in language curricula. On the other hand, Palalas (2009) found that podcasting will result in rote memorisation of words. However, as for the vocabulary building, Allan (2007) has a different viewpoint that podcasting could help the internalisation of words. Similarly, Chester et al. (2011) found that podcasting has a positive effect in developing learners' self-efficacy.

As for second language major skills and sub-skills, the effect of podcasting on developing vocabulary was previously investigated by several researchers (e.g., Elekaei, 2018; Ghobadi and Taki, 2018; Heidari Tabrizi and Onvani, 2018; Khodarahimi and Heidari-Shahreza, 2018; Ardestani, 2017). Likewise, its marvellous effect on grammar was studied by Nabati (2018). Moreover, its constructive effect on reading comprehension was studied by Azadi and Azad (2017). Faramarzi (2018) also investigated the integrated nature of vodcasting technology and its efficacy on developing integrated skills.

Besides investigating the role of podcasting in enhancing L2 major skills, Chan et al. (2011a) believed that podcasting technology can endorse cultural diversity. This positive feature was also discussed by Ducate and Lomicka (2009) that podcasting users performed much better than those who merely preferred the normal pace of instruction. Most of the previous studies focused on the use of vocal modality of podcasting which were ready made by the instructor. In a different study, however, Faramarzi et al. (2018) focused on the genuine performance of Iranian intermediate students who worked on podcasting tasks as part of a comprehensive E-learning program to promote their language learning skills. The results demonstrated the predominant positive support to the benefit of video podcasting tasks.

2.2 Attitudes towards podcasting

Attitudes towards video podcasting technology-which were predominantly positive in most cases- was the subject of many studies (e.g. Karimov and Kim, 2017; Faramarzi et al., 2018; Khoshsima et al., 2018).

There were some contrasting opinions concerning the use of podcasting as a supplementary tool in language programs. As an example, Chan et al. (2011b) explored the efficacy of podcasting in motivating students and found positive results about the motivating capacity of podcasting among Chinese and Korean students. The researchers confirmed their studies with statistically significant differences in the perceptions and attitudes of podcast users comparing to non-users related to motivation, expectations, and teacher encouragement. Podcasting also provided a sound model for teaching in immersion programs in a study by Martin and Beckman (2011). Alleviating the stressful situation that any new learning program might bring about, podcasting proved to be excellent in removing the affective filters of the learners. For instance, Chan and Lee (2005) claimed that podcasting can significantly reduce the level of anxiety. Likewise, William and Michael (2007) demonstrated that the majority of the students in their treatment process viewed podcasting as convenient. In other words, students are certain that by subscribing to the assigned podcasting channel, no session is missed. Therefore, the accessibility feature of podcasting was significantly demonstrated.

The contact between the instructor and the students has been made easier by having an easy online access. It also facilitated the peer connection (Bolliger et al., 2010). For example, Muppala and Kong (2007) stated that they received excellent feedback from learners regarding the areas that they had problems with. To put it more simply, it eliminated the artificial boundary lines among the peers.

As far as the beginning point of any ground-breaking approach can be threatening due to the lack of understanding about its potentials and capabilities, Read (2007) emphasised that the beginning point must be made easier by training students and giving them the required feedback. Accordingly, Muppala and Kong (2007) considered podcasting as a constructive tool in which particularly non-native students can accommodate themselves with the pace of instruction if they ever find it difficult at the beginning point.

In many of the previous studies, learners' opinions were positive e.g., Chester et al. (2011) found that podcast users demonstrated higher level of self-efficacy comparing to non-users. However, in order to fully understand the positive and negative features of podcasting, more critical analyses are needed.

2.3 Potentials and challenges

One of the best features of podcasting is the capacity to provide a link among learning materials. O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007) focused on the complementary nature of podcasting technology in an English class as a second language which prioritised learning the listening strategies. Podcasting were regarded as a 'bridge' between the current materials and the future resources. It received marvellous feedback by learners.

This innovating method is not restricted to language learning. It gained popularity in K-12 system of education (Swan and Hofer, 2009). Not limited to language learning environments, Brown (2006) investigated the role of podcasting application in higher education by supporting the positive features such as accessibility and ease of instruction.

Because of these reasons, according to a report by the University of California at Berkeley, podcasting was worth studying and reflecting in higher education (Brown, 2006). Enhancing the pedagogical goals is another potential for podcasting. According to Hargis and Wilson (2005), “podcasting can promise a unique approach to improving foundational pedagogical approaches to information processing and conceptual learning” (p.6).

Having mentioned the great potentials of podcasting, it is equally important to point out the challenges. Like any other approach, it will be very difficult to make the best use of podcasting without training the students and instructors on how to engage in such assignments. Copestake (2006) provided some useful guidelines on how to use podcasting in language classes. Without proper supervision, it may not yield the desired results. As an example, Allan (2007) found that in a study concerning the use of personal computers on vocabulary development, the participants remained unwilling to contribute to the program due to the lack of proper supervision.

The foremost rationale behind this study was to receive relevant detailed feedback from learners about the potentials and problems of employing vodcasting technology in practicing online language lessons. The controversy over using different aspects of vodcasting, considering it as a major part of language curricula, and paying attention to its restrictions is a major challenge. Unlike previous experiences, this study attempted to retrieve the information from the learners’ point of view in form of semi-structured interviews. The analysis of why learners think positively or negatively about a particular feature of vodcasting has been left unanswered. All in all, the successful use of vodcasting necessitates a thorough recognition of its capabilities and shortcomings. Therefore, the current study aimed at investigating the following question:

Q: What are the major potentials and challenges of implementing VTs (vodcasting tasks) in a distance language learning program from participants’ viewpoints?

3 Method

3.1 Design, participants, and setting

The design of this study was a quantitative descriptive non-experimental survey. The attitudinal data in the current study was collected by asking different open-ended questions from participants who have been involved in an online project of practicing video podcasting tasks.

To operationalise the treatment step, 120 qualified learners out of 300 applicants were selected among graduate students of Translation Studies at Karaj Islamic Azad University in Iran. The participants were aged between 18 and 30 and spoke Persian as their mother tongue. After introducing the participants to a pre-planned channel in Telegram application, they started to receive video podcasting tasks and their assignments. As long as the instructional milieu was intended to be purely virtual, the selected participants were encouraged to get in touch by using a variety of different devices e.g. laptops, smart phones, PCs, etc. The participants were interacting with each other online and all the discussions were made in an online forum. They received weekly

vodcasts such as grammar videos, vocabulary videos, lecture videos and news videos; viewed them as much as they can and in their convenient time; interacted with each other in online discussions; used accessory in-built robots within the application; and did the assignments. The online class were introduced as a voluntary E-learning program to make sure that participants were displaying their real performance.

3.2 Instruments and materials

3.2.1 Vodcasting tasks

The concept of vodcasting task referred to the integration of the video model of podcasting which was integrated with some adjunct exercises and were presented to the learners in an online learning situation. During a 12-week treatment period, 50 Vodcasting Tasks (VTs) were selected and presented to the participants in the main forum of the channel. The VTs had been selected from five different genres namely: grammar learning videos, vocabulary building videos, news pods, lecture pods, and documentary pods. These vodcasting tasks were designed to develop major skills and sub-skills like listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar which were selected by the researcher mainly from British council's official website.

Based on a pre-planned weekly timetable, five different vodcasts were uploaded in the online discussion group to participants by the researcher who also acted as the online instructor during the treatment. The participants downloaded the vodcasts regularly; started working on them by interacting with other participants; and practiced a variety of different strategies such as Note-taking strategies and the negotiation of meaning. A variety of functions were embedded in the tasks such as the use of phrasal verbs, idioms, and collocations. Table 1 shows the frequency of the tasks in different weekdays. The participants were allowed to upload their own videos as well as long as they were related to the assignment of the day.

Table 1 Different Vodcasting types during the treatment period

<i>Weekdays</i>	<i>Task type</i>	<i>Length in each week</i>	<i>Number of exercises</i>	<i>source</i>
Saturdays	Grammar vodcasts	10 minutes	20	British Council
Sundays	Vocabulary vodcasts	10 minutes	20	British Council
Tuesdays	Documentary vodcasts	20 Minutes	10	Australian network
Wednesdays	Lecture vodcasts	10 minutes	10	Lecture ready
Thursdays	News vodcasts	10 minutes	10	CNN and BBC

Figure 1 shows an example of Grammar tasks in the main forum of the channel. The vodcasting tasks were accompanied by a set of tests which could be done collaboratively by the participants. Appendix 2 shows some models of vodcasts and the interaction among participants.

Figure 1 Grammar video podcasts and tasks

The figure displays a WhatsApp chat interface on the left and a worksheet on the right. The chat is from a group named 'Let's Listen!' with 82 members. It contains several forwarded messages from 'Sajad Faramarzi'. The most prominent message is a video titled 'week1: Grammar show Present simple tense' from the 'Dr. S. Faramarzi podcasting group', with a duration of 01:01. Below it is a PDF file named 'present_simple_3.pdf' (187.9 KB). The worksheet on the right is titled 'LearnEnglish Teens Grammar videos: The present simple - exercises'. It includes instructions to watch a video and read a conversation between Sophie and Nisat. The exercises are divided into three sections: 1. True or False (8 items), 2. Multiple choice (6 items), and 3. Gap fill (2 items). The first section includes items like 'We use it for talking about permanent states or situations.' and 'We use it for things happening at the moment.' The second section includes items like 'Jack go / goes to a film club on Wednesdays.' and 'I love / loves reading in my free time.' The third section includes items like 'I always get up / gets up at 7 o'clock.' and 'What do / does you think of their new album?'.

3.2.2 *Semi-structured interview*

At the end of the treatment, a semi-structured interview which had been developed by the researcher conducted with all the individual participants in order to discover the strength and weaknesses of this experience. 80 students expressed their willingness to participate in the online interview. The interview process was conducted electronically that is, the participants were invited to talk about the experience in online individual conversations. An online one-to-one interview was conducted in separate chat boxes; the responses were recorded, and later transcribed for analysis. This section was of prime importance since there were many untapped potentials and challenges in every field of research. Students' full and open-ended responses provided the researcher with a detailed analysis of the intended purpose of the study. The electronic version of the interview allowed the participants to contemplate on the questions and come up with the most reliable responses. To put it more simply, after receiving every question, the participants could spend some time to think deeply and later upload their response in a recorded voice format. Then, based on the initial response of the every participants, some follow up questions were asked in order to get a thorough understanding of students' insights and visions. After a careful analysis of interview responses, they were categorised based on

shared features and the frequency of responses in each category was determined. The reliability of the interview was determined by measuring inter-rater reliability. Another colleague measured the responses and classified the points. The semi-structured type of interviews heavily depends on the initial responses of the participants and according to the beginning responses, more follow-up questions were later asked. Appendix 2 comprises a set of common questions asked in interviews.

3.3 Data collection procedure

The treatment period required students to work on different skills simultaneously and in a pure e-learning environment. After working on tasks for 12 weeks, the participants were invited to talk about the experience in a semi-structured interview. (See Appendix 1) They were requested to explain the major positive and negative points of the experience in detail. The responses were transcribed, sorted out based on different categories, and classified according to different criteria. The interview started with a fixed open-ended question for all participants and based on the initial responses, some follow-up questions were asked afterwards. Most of the questions were intended to get the participants' views on positive and negative points of the experience.

The responses drawn from follow up questions targeted different issues including the effect of the treatment on the development of different skills, the preference of one genre of vodcasts over others, the amount of satisfaction, the willingness to continue the program, the presentation style of materials, the treatment's potentials to make participants independent, the appropriateness of time, and the convenience in using the vodcasting files. Finally, it was critically important not only to report the important comments, but also to organise the sporadic points into similar categories. It was highly anticipated that participants' positive and negative comments would have common grounds.

4 Results

In the semi-structured interview, the participants were invited to openly express themselves by talking about the whole experience and particularly the things which could make the experiment more functional. 80 participants accepted to take part in the interview. The electronic version of the interview made it easy for interviewees to receive the questions in the chat boxes, contemplate on them, and leave their recorded voice messages afterwards. Based on the initial responses, some follow up questions were asked. After some follow-up questions, the participants were asked to propose new and creative thoughts about the future approaches. By the time the interview section was finished, the responses were transcribed and sorted out in different categories according to the major criterion of the questionnaire. Some selected exemplary quotes are also mentioned below. Table 2 demonstrates the frequency and type of responses in each category.

Table 2 The frequency of responses in each response category

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Proportion</i>	<i>Potentials</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
Skill development	59	73%	√ Great technique to develop integrated skills	× Good for some particular skills
Expressing satisfaction	56	70%	√ Great approach to prepare for proficiency tests √ Good for vocabulary development and grammar checking	× The resources can be more various × The discussion groups must be controlled more
Willingness to continue	70	87%	√ Feeling more confident in working with peers	× Make sure to use more file formats
Presentation style of materials	40	50%	√ Complementary files were so helpful	× Students should be provided with more training about the capabilities.
Making learners independent	77	96%	√ It is a great tool to learn on my own √ vodcasting tasks helps me understand other cultures more	× The use of both languages should be allowed.
Convenience of experience	47	58%	√ Learning English was made possible all the time even when we were commuting	× Avoid using the voluminous files. × The internet speed restricted having access to some particular files
Appropriateness of time	72	90%	√ The time was appropriate.	× Vodcasting topics should be selected based on learners' interests

4.1 Skill development

59 participants expressed their opinions about the program's potential to develop different major skills in general and integrated skills in particular. One of the participants mentioned the superiority of this approach in enhancing different skills:

Video podcasts were great I followed them up to the final week even though I was busy. I like the podcasts especially those related to news and documentary were great since we learnt many interesting facts and we could enhance our knowledge. Lecture podcasts were so informative as well because they were gathered by some professors. Phrasal verb videos were so easy and the grammar videos were so informative even though they contain some very trivial points. (Participant #24)

Some other participants, however, had a different point of view and added: "I think this process is very good for listening but I think it didn't have a good effect [for] my speaking". Some others mentioned the complexity of evaluating this program:

Honestly I really can't judge how much of my progress have been resulted from vodcasting program, and I presume that there had been one, was due to this program though I am sure that it had played a role in the overall outcome. All in all it was a fun and enjoyable experiment. Obviously I had fun watching and re-watching some of the clips, like those Audio-Comic strips, for lack of a better word, from British council whilst I had force myself to re-watch some others. (Participant #10)

4.2 Expressing satisfaction

The participants expressed their satisfaction towards the organisation of the experience. 70% of participants (56 participants) were satisfied with the whole experience as one of them highlighted the experience with the TOEFL test:

for instance we become familiar with some test of TOFEL, and we can improve our listening ability. and absolutely we can test our listening. And this exercise [made] just for listening, maybe if we have had same method for our writing, reading and speaking it could be beneficial too, because this kind of exercise can improve our proficiency. (Participant #72)

Participant #89, another participant expressed her satisfaction in improving her vocabulary knowledge and remarked: "The Podcasts were good enough to teach us lots of new vocabulary and, grammar especially the British council ones." The popularity of British council movies was a focal point among many other participants, as Participant#12, the other participants mentioned the great style of characters and stated:

I think it was a really good process. I have never had such an amassing experience. I feel it [improves] my listening skill because I could understand the sentences better which we had in oral translation course. Among them, I like British Council Grammar videos more. I like Daisy [character]. In my eyes British Council phrases were a little bit difficult to understand, but most of their episodes were funny.

several others confirmed that the way grammar and vocabulary was contextualised was pioneering as Participant #52 stated, "The experience was really helpful cause I had studied grammar by written texts through different sentences till now, so it taught me a new way of studying and teaching grammar."

The majority of members were unanimous about the appropriateness of the video podcasts with their level as one of the participants described the materials as 'appropriate' and 'challenging'. Another participant, #80, mentions the interaction among the learners as a great motivating factor to pursue the process, "I really liked the procedure because we could ask other members if we faced any problem. Beside listening practice, we had the opportunity to discuss the new files."

4.3 Willingness to continue the program

The participants expressed their willingness and enthusiasm to continue the experience to improve different language skills. 70 participants spoke out clearly in favour of continuing the treatment program for other skills and in particular, Participant #103, one of the participants specified "I really like the group to be expanded on speaking skills too because I really like to think in English. For example, I am learning how American people live in order to understand their way of life."

Feeling confident about understanding a variety of different accents was another issue mentioned by many of the participants. As long as the British accent has not been practiced by many students in Iran for many different reasons, the go-togetherness of many different accents was noteworthy:

It was a great experience for me to be in this group. It made me [to] develop my listening skill. Moreover, I got familiar with British accent and now I enjoy it a lot. Now I feel more comfortable about listening, of course I still have some problems in understanding of some cases. I think that I'm better at formal language podcasts like lectures and grammars. (Participant #69)

4.4 Presentation style of vodcasts

Half of the subjects stated their opinions over the style of presenting the vodcasting tasks, their exercises and the amount of activity during the treatment. The video podcasting materials were accompanied by some complementary pdf-format files which gave some insight on the way the materials were presented. One of the participants described the supplementary materials as great advantages:

In my opinion, the available pdf files were a big Plus with a capital B. Also the variety of the offered materials were interesting, so there was something interesting for anybody. On the other hand the first couple of clips were too easy. Of course I am not a pedagogue so I don't know if I should regard it as a negative point or a pedagogic method but for me going through that easy stuff more than once, was rather boring. (Participant #48)

Other than the complementary files including the pdf files containing the explanations, some other members were in favour of videos with subtitles as, another contributor commented,

“.....some of the videos have subtitle in my opinion this way is the best way because sometimes I can't hear some words correctly because they perform specially by native speaker and this way [help] me a lot to understand the spoken language.” (Participant #14)

4.5 Potentials to make learners independent

Almost all participants (77) commented on the role the podcasting has in making the learners independent. Video podcasts have shown to be great in making participants independent but some group members yearned for more activities to make them even more independent as Participant #36, one of the participants remarked:

but it seems to me that it's better that student be provided with some schemata or some idea about what they're going to listen for next week or next time and maybe clarifying a clear purpose for them about why they're listening to these podcasts or video tasks giving some very limited critical words or technical words about the files below the listening files could help students and make them feel better.

Some other members in this treatment stated that the program was not only about practicing listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but it also gave some cross-cultural sensitivity in understanding how different people interact with each other.

The gradual process of learning and strengthening the listening materials was another point of discussion which was understood by many learners as they pointed out that their listening proficiency has really improved through time which is a great sign of independence and making students rely on their own:

Bit by bit, I could strongly feel that my listening and speaking skills are getting more powerful and I appreciate your brilliant idea. The advantage of being a member of this group is that now by practicing these files, I have a better understanding and confidence in understanding words in music and movies, the things I really didn't know at the beginning and I had many problems for the first podcasts. Secondly, the subjects of the podcasts were the subjects that you face in your everyday life. (Participant #73)

4.6 The convenience of the experience

Forty-seven participants remarked on the ease of instruction and the systematic convenience of the program structure in pursuing the educational purposes. The video podcasting experience was regarded as a 'smooth' procedure to follow the learning materials as many member called it 'active and dynamic.' Even one of the members stated, '.....as they were podcasts, I could watch them easily while I was commuting.' Some other participants mentioned the easiness in downloading and using the vodcast files. Participant #21, another active learner commented that the whole experience was absolutely different and amassing. Participant #76, another active member in this treatment period, considered this approach as stress free and without any obligation:

I had no previous experience for podcasting and this was a positive experience for me. The point is I was not under the obligation to do the task. So if there is no obligation and no stress, I can listen to it every time I want without any pressure. Another point is that the process was consisting of 12 weeks without interruption.

4.7 Appropriateness of the time

90% of participants commented on the appropriateness of the allotted time to be spent on each part of the program. They had different views concerning the suitability of the allotted time for different activities of the whole treatment program as one of the members stated:

It was totally a good experience for me, I enjoyed it a lot, but one disadvantage of different procedures was, maybe we don't have enough time to focus on each activity, because the time of questions have been managed and measured to be answered in a short period of time. (Participant #5)

4.8 Major challenges

The participants were further asked about their concerns about the future of the program. To put it more simply, they were asked to raise the challenges and problems and recommend some suggestions if they had been the admin user of such a group. The critical sense of creativity was targeted and they were encouraged to talk about changes. 24 members expressed their willingness to systematise the group by imposing certain limitations on group participations in order to make it more productive.

The idea of setting some strict regulations for the group activities was also mentioned in one of the active members' comments as more supervision is necessary:

Everything is great but it seems that sometimes students spam the group with some unnecessary congratulatory messages e.g. by saying "thanks you" for every post that you have shared. The increased numbers of notifications were really frustrating and I guess all students should be reminded about it in the first place. I guess it is somehow impossible to tell everybody about it. (Participant #44)

Interestingly some other members advocated the use of both first and second language in the main forum of discussion and supported the idea of having the translated version of key phrases in each vodcasting task. Participant #29, another group member mentioned, "the podcasting task was very interesting but I think listening to music and seeing its text is very helpful for hearing. I like this way of learning. I think students really like this to be engaged more." Likewise, another participant required the admin user to encourage students to form creative voice messages.

12 students complained about the volume of some particular video files since the internet is limited in Iran and its connection cost is measured based on the amount of data that one can use. Another challenge arose from the homogeneity of the files as one of the members mentioned that even though diversity can be interesting but too much of everything alongside each other is 'boring'.

Much of the disagreement about whether the vodcasting tasks were appropriate and to the point was stemmed from their level of familiarity with different accents and of course, it is a matter of personal preference. The presentation of materials does not seem to satisfy different students from different backgrounds. Participant #78, an active member highlighted the importance of more supervision, better time scheduling, and motivating students to pursue the activities by asking and involving students with interpretation tasks.

Another participant considered the use of more supplementary materials related to every video podcasts like a list of vocabulary items as motivating and time provoking: "I think that everything is good in the program .But I think it's very good if you can list some difficult words for some difficult podcasts for example about the news or talk shows."

Care must be taken to include topics which attract the target population the most and is in accordance with their needs and interests. Obviously including files about the old-fashioned style of living does not suit young learners at all as one of the members commented: "All of video files are useful and important; however, I am really interested in current affairs so news help me to stay informed about it." It is a reminder to choose a homogenous audience, analyse their exact needs, and develop assign pertinent video tasks for them.

5 Discussion

One of the points which was frequently discussed in this study was the program's capacity to develop major skills in an integrated manner. Formerly, several researchers (e.g., Elekaei, 2018; Heidari Tabrizi and Onvani, 2018; Khoshsima et al, 2018; Ardestani, 2017; Nabati, 2018) investigated the role of podcasting technology in developing discrete skills like vocabulary, grammar, and writing. However, it was noted that it was important to have more tasks to develop different skills and sub skills at the

same time. Acquiring different techniques in doing proficiency test types during the treatment period was the subject of other discussions among participants. Moreover, many others expressed their satisfaction with the style of presenting the materials. These opinions clearly agree with the findings of the study done by Chi and Chan (2011) that underscored the accessibility and functionality features of podcasting technology. Therefore, the vodcasting technology has a capability of developing integrated skills rather than checking discrete and sporadic points.

Another distinctive feature which was discovered among subjects' comments was the authenticity of materials. Most of the participants believed that the assignments helped them get to know the everyday conversations in a more comprehensive way. This issue is in contrast with McGarr (2009) who regarded podcasting as a substitutional and supplementary device. Podcasting can be implemented in a pure online environment. Brown (2006) also regarded podcasting as a method with accessibility and ease of instruction. As a result, it is vitally important to choose the authentic materials if they are to be used in a pure online program.

Another important issue was the consistency in implementing the tasks. Many of the participants were unanimous about the fact that achieving the ultimate goals of the vodcasting technology requires time and consistency. In other words, more time should be allotted to fulfil the required purposes. Those goals can be achieved if learners are allowed to be engaged in more peer collaborative activities. Furthermore, what made this study distinct was the opportunity to have more collaborative learning. Through collaboration and getting assistance from other members, the learners could understand how to stand on their own feet, solve their problems themselves, and regard their instructors as a counsellor rather than a person to rely on all the time. This point was also mentioned by Harris and Park (2008) that pedagogical devices can increase the amount of interaction among peers.

Nevertheless, some important challenges and consideration were also mentioned by the participants. Like any other activity, the process of constructing groups and the delivery of video podcasts should be more systematised. It is a reminder that learners should be well trained and briefed about the required assignments and preliminary expectations. As a result, some predetermined principles and regulations are compulsory if positive results are anticipated in future studies. Nonetheless, some other participants were against having too much restrictions over doing some activities. Thus, careful analysis of students' needs is needed before starting the vodcasting program in any online project.

Overall, it is rather difficult for any new device or technique to meet all expectations. Therefore, having enough information about the type of selected materials is crucially demanding. It is vitally important to attract students' attention by tempting them with various different kinds of materials. In other words, diversity is fundamentally important.

6 Conclusions and implications

The present study revealed constructing information about the use of vodcasting tasks, their potentials and challenges from learners' perspective. First, the integrated nature of vodcasting tasks made the presentation style of materials distinct. Moreover, the use of vodcasting materials can be implemented in a pure online milieu rather than presenting them as an adjunct device. Therefore, this model provides an opportunity to have easy

and permanent access to learning materials. Additionally, different accessory features within the online environment such as different kinds of robots to practice note-taking, user-friendly forum for discussion, and the possibility of supporting all file formats made this device convenient for learners. Similarly, the vodcasting technology stimulated the cultural sensitivity and reinforced the communicative nature of discussions. This device is a suitable tool to endorse peer connection and therefore, learners can remove the mask of shyness and communicate easier with each other.

However, the process of working with podcasting technology in online environments is a time consuming experience and it requires persistence. It should be accentuated that instructors must be totally competent in working with vodcasting tasks and they have to be readily available to eliminate any potential problems. As far as the role of policy makers is concerned, they need to facilitate having access to broadband internet connections. Also, curriculum designer should be very meticulous in choosing the most appropriate kinds of tasks for the learners. The tasks must be motivating, challenging, logical and meaningful. In other words, the mere selection of podcasting tasks is not enough to yield positive results. To sum up, regarding the great potentials of this device, curriculum designers could implement this technology as a major venue to present materials in online language learning programs.

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Appendix 1: The semi-structured interview

Hello dear

You have been involved in the online language learning class for nearly 12 weeks.

Q1: How did you see the overall process? What are the major advantages and disadvantages of the experience?

Could you please provide us with some examples?

Please feel free to express your opinion in detail.

Q2: Thanks indeed for your comments. If you were the admin user of the group, what sorts of features you would have considered to be added?

What kind of creativity you would like to be included to improve the quality of the program?

How can we involve learners in interactive discussions?

Q3: Were you satisfied with the presentation style of the program?

Q4: What do you think about the allotted time for doing each task?

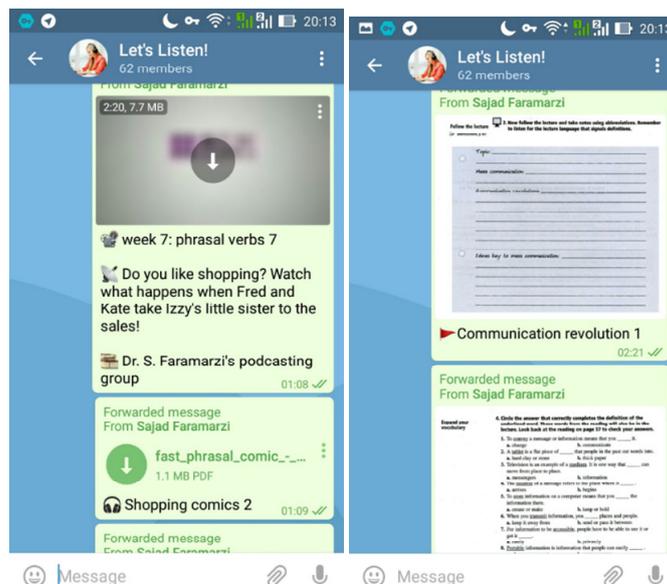
Q5: in your opinion, which skills have been improved more?

Q6: Are you willing to continue the program?

Q7: What was/were the biggest problems?

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix 2: Models of vodcasts and the interaction among participants



Appendix 2: Models of vodcasts and the interaction among participants (cont.)

