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Imitating podcasts by providing audio content to support and enhance language learning

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Regular Paper

The provision of supplemental educational and instructional content in podcast form is becoming increasingly widespread in first language education. However, amongst second language students in Japan the lack of literature illustrates podcast use has been limited. Imitating podcasts, educational and instructional materials in audio form were delivered to Japanese university English language learners directly by email to encourage and reinforce learning and prepare them for upcoming class content and tasks. Investigation revealed students' receptiveness to these materials, the benefits that they brought to learning, and how teachers in similar circumstances can utilize this alternative delivery method.

Keywords: podcasts, audio content and instruction, supporting learning, email delivery

Introduction

As a language teacher it would be encouraging to think that students reviewed instructional content after leaving the classroom, and similarly previewed aims, activities and tasks in order to prepare, and be aware of what they will be required to do in subsequent lessons. One method to provide students with the opportunity to review, preview and prepare, whilst also influencing and increasing their relevant and meaningful exposure to classroom content and tasks outside of class is through audio and audiovisual means. Increasing numbers of universities and institutions in first language education are creating audio and audiovisual educational content, distributed and

synced to devices through podcasts, automated Really Simple Syndication (RSS), iTunes and iTunesU.

In their simplest form educational podcasts are audio files delivered from a source to students to support education. The literature will show there are benefits to providing these supplementary audio materials in first language education, though there is little mention of it in second language education in Japan.

In order to produce, provide, receive and use high quality audio and audio-visual podcasts, time-specific hardware, software and devices are required. Access to third party servers, Moodles, wikis or blogs may also be necessary in order to download the audio files, and compatible devices to receive and play podcasts are essential. These represent steps that may inhibit or deter the use of podcast materials.

Context

This research study investigated how, with minimal equipment and technical expertise, a simple method similar to creating and distributing a podcast could be employed in a communicative focused, project/task-based English language program at a Japanese university, and how students responded to it.

In each semester, students completed mini-projects, working through a cycle of weekly preparation activities before a final communicative task. These projects, activities and tasks were drawn from various resources so no textbook was prescribed, and project materials were distributed at the start of each cycle. These materials did not contain instructions for homework activities. After 10 lessons throughout one semester, three to five minute long digital MP3 audio files were made using a digital voice recorder or a smartphone application and delivered directly to students' email addresses. These audio files were not dissimilar to podcasts and had a high connection value with class content, and also a high instructional value by containing a brief review of the previous class, any homework instructions, or an example of an oral task that would be completed in the following lesson. The purpose of these audio files was to encourage and enable a review and preview, distribute instructions and increase students' exposure of language directly relevant to their lessons and projects. Students were not provided with details of the homework activities in class, and so it was necessary for them to listen to the audio files in order to receive these instructions. Despite the difference in format and delivery between podcasts and the audio content delivered to students in this study, taxonomies of podcasts illustrate that digital audio or audio-visual recordings can be used in education in several ways. They can also be termed coursecasts or lecture capture.

Literature review

Educational and instructional podcasts in first language education

Positive aspects. Learning experiences such as face-to-face lectures, discussion, and reading are augmented, enriched, and positively influenced by the use of educational podcasts (Kaplan-Leiserson, 2005; Lazzari, 2009; Walls *et al.*, 2010). Despite the assertion that these methods of learning will not be replaced solely by podcasts (Fernandez, Simo, & Sallan, 2009; Kaplan-Leiserson, 2005; McKinney, Dyck & Luber, 2009; Ogawa, 2009), as the number of online and distance learning educational programs increases this concept may be

challenged. Podcasts can provide substantial and repetitive audio lecture content, audio-visual slides and demonstrations, supplementary materials, or instructional guidelines (Carvalho, Aguiar & Maciel, 2009; McGarr, 2009; Walls *et al*., 2010).

Distributed ahead of lessons, podcasts have been used to distribute and scaffold new or pre-class concepts (Acquaro & Fadjo, 2008; Zeiller, 2009), generate interest and prepare students for class discussion topics (Caralho *et al*., 2009). Following classes they have been utilized to supply supplemental and review content to reinforce learning (Acquaro & Fadjo, 2008; Belanger, 2005; Earp, Belanger, & O'Brien, 2006; McCarty, 2007; Zeiller, 2009), share announcements, and describe homework assignments (Gribbins, 2007; Pownell, 2006). This allows classroom time to be restructured, creating more time in class for conversation, discussion and learning (Acquaro & Fadjo, 2008; Lonn, & Teasley, 2009).

The use of audio files by teachers in the form of podcasts has been linked to positive affects in motivation for learning (Fernandez *et al*., 2009; Oliver, 2005). Kushnir, Berry, Wyman, and Salajan (2011) report that students in their study believed podcasts helped with their understanding of material covered in lessons and subsequently wanted them to be provided by other courses they were taking. Larkin (2010) explains this desire for podcasts in education by suggesting that information they can contain can support the transformative nature of real learning. He rationalizes that this ensures educational content is not just simply conveyed, but also transformed into workable knowledge, although he gives no support or further explanation for this. There are also claims that the auditory style of podcasts can benefit students due to their ability to listen repeatedly at their own pace (Diem, 2005; Fernandez et al., 2009; McCombs & Liu, 2007; Kushnir *et al*., 2011; Vajoczki, Watt, Marquis, & Holshausen, 2010). This can assist students with differing learning styles or disabilities to adapt and use the materials as needed.

Language learning. Language learning has been identified as one of the disciplines most likely to benefit from the integration and use of podcasts (Abdous, Camarena, & Facer, 2009; Walls *et al*., 2010). Provided to language learners either ahead of, or following classes they can be used to bring authentic materials and cultural experiences to students. These can be reviewed as many times as is necessary (Anzai, 2007; Chinnery, 2006; Evans, 2008; Holden & Westfall, 2010; Kaplan-Leiserson, 2005; Kemp, Myers, Campbell, & Pratt, 2010; Lazzari, 2009; Lonn & Teasley, 2009; McCarty, 2006; Vajoczki *et al*., 2010; Walls *et al*., 2010). For students who missed class through absence, or missed information in class through distraction or a lack of full understanding, listening to podcasts can also act as a method of review (McCarty, 2006; McCombs & Liu, 2007; Ogawa, 2009). To gain the maximum benefit from podcasted audio content McKinney, Dyck, and Luber (2009) and Lister (2006) specify that students should take notes and listen several times rather than just listening once, and materials of this type allow learning to be done at a student's own pace.

If podcasted materials can be recorded using the personable feature of the teacher's voice they can be described as a "high touch learning material" (Schlosser & Burmeister, 2006; Sloan, 2006). "High touch" may refer to the ability of the teacher's voice to provide familiarity. This can capture students' attention and make instruction more interesting. It can also increase feelings of contact and improve relationships between the students and teacher (Fernandez, Simo, & Sallan, 2009), as well as reduce possible feelings of isolation that some learners may experience. This can promote social presence and build students' sense of belonging to a learning community, and can be especially important within a distance education context (Chan & Lee, 2005; Lee & Chan, 2007; Salmon, Nie, & Edirisingha,

2007). If made by the teacher, the speed of speech and the language used in the recording can also be moderated to the students' level in order to reduce any chances of misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

Negative aspects of educational and instructional audio podcasts. Despite the positive aspects of the provision and use of audio educational and instructional content the benefits of podcasts are still in doubt. They have not been shown to have a significantly positive impact on learning in students in comparison to students who have not used podcasts (Kemp *et al.*, 2010; Lazzari, 2009; Kushnir *et al.* 2011; Schlosser & Burmeister (2006), Vajoczki *et al.*, 2010). Audio podcasts are only able to touch on the following three learning domains: auditory, cognitive and a weak physical domain (Lister, 2006). Not accessing the verbal or visual domains is highlighted as a weakness in instructional strategies that do not suit or meet all learning styles (Holden & Westfall, 2010). Time available to students will also affect their ability to listen to podcasts. Lister (2006) claims that there are no shortcuts to listening and students have to listen to whole podcasts, unable to identify and skip forward to the most important or relevant content. Students also viewed listening to podcasts as extra work that can contribute to cognitive overload (Walls *et al.*, 2010) and eat into their private time, when often they have other activities that cause them to forget to listen (Ogawa, 2009).

Podcasts have been praised as an anytime, anywhere educational tool (Abdous, Facer, & Yen, 2011; Anzai, 2007; Evans, 2008; Fernandez, *et al.*, 2009; Pownell, 2006). In order for this time/place flexibility to occur however, students need to be aware of podcasts, their purpose and the devices that are needed to play them. Before the arrival of the smartphone these devices were portable digital audio players – iPods or MP3 players. Several institutions made these available to students (Belanger, 2005; Earp, Belanger, & O'Brien, 2006; McCarty, 2005), but without this provision students may have been reluctant to purchase the hardware needed to listen to podcasts. Even nowadays, the smartphone is not universal and students may still own older mobile devices that are unable to play podcasts. In a number of studies, students were found to have preferred listening to audio material on their desktop or laptop computers rather than an iPod or MP3 player (Abdous *et al.*, 2009; Abdous *et al.*, 2012; Evans, 2008; Walls *et al.*, 2010) although these authors do not suggest reasons for this. It may be that the environment of a desktop or laptop allows students to multi-task while they listen, accessing other materials, information or applications. If this is accurate, in some cases sending audio directly to students via their email, circumventing the need to download from iTunesU, third party blogs or learning management systems may be a suitable method of delivery.

Educational and instructional podcasts in Japan

Specifically in Japan, the use of podcasts in second language education has been limited. Where they have been utilized students have held positive views towards their use to support lectures of a content-based EFL program using a third party podcasting blog to deliver the digital audio content (McCarty, 2007). Employing a third party podcasting blog meant that students did not need to purchase an expensive device such as an iPod or MP3 player and could access the podcast through an Internet website. Echoing previous mentioned advantages, these podcasts were found to have benefits for learners who had been absent,

wanted to review content, or had not understood parts of lectures clearly (McCarty, 2007). It is the intention of this research paper to expand on this research within Japan.

Having considered the literature, this study will investigate the following research question:

- How do Japanese university English language students respond to the use of educational and instructional digital audio files to support learning?

Methodology

Over a 16-week semester of a project/task-based English language program the class instructor made 10 three-to-five minute audio voice recordings from a prepared script, using either a digital voice recorder or a voice recorder application on a smartphone. These recordings were uploaded onto a personal computer and configured to MP3 format before being sent to students' university email addresses along with a short typed message. The message, written in English gave a short greeting, asked students about their week, instructed them to listen to the attached MP3 file, described the contents of the audio file, gave a short message of encouragement, and finally encouraged them to reply by email if they had any questions.

The MP3 audio files were sent directly to students' email addresses for the following reasons:

1. All students are issued with a university domain email address that they are required to check regularly for administrative and class notices.
2. Due to the instructional nature of the audio files it was important that students received the audio files directly, rather than relying on them to access a third party podcasting blog, wiki or learning management system independently.
3. In a cursory investigation carried out in the first week of the semester all students identified that they had access to personal computers, while large numbers identified that they either did not know what a podcast was, or did not know how to access and download podcasts. In addition, some learners did not have devices that were able to play podcasts.
4. Homework and preparation tasks that students were required to do had to be typed and printed before submission. Accessing audio files on a PC would allow students to listen to the audio while also completing these tasks.

The audio files commonly served three purposes. These were to provide:

1. An oral review of the main language points and/or activities/tasks that were covered in the previous lesson.
2. Instructions for homework/preparation tasks to be completed for the next class.
3. An example of the oral task students would be asked to complete in the next class.

It is important to note that students were not provided with detailed instructions for homework/preparation tasks during regular class time. This was done so as to encourage them to listen to the audio files, and if necessary to seek ways to resolve any difficulties themselves, and to maximize the use of time for learning and classroom tasks.

The participants in this study (n = 69) were 21–22 year-old, second year students at a Japanese public university. They were spread between three classes, each studying in an oral English project/task based program with the same curriculum and syllabus. They are not English language majors and are in mixed level English ability classes.

Methodology

The approach used to investigate the opinions and experiences of the students is a short term, qualitative descriptive/exploratory study following the case study method as described by Creswell (2007), Nunan and Bailey (2009), Robson (2002), Simons (2009), and Yin (2009). Though not relying on lengthy periods in the field of ethnography or participant observation, Simons (2009) describes the strengths of a case study as flexible and not constrained by time or method and as a "process of conducting systematic, critical inquiry into a phenomenon of choice and generating understanding to contribute to cumulative public knowledge of the topic" (Simons, 2009, p.18). This approach was selected over others in order to examine in detail a contemporary phenomenon embedded within its real-life context (Yin, 2009).

The data collection process occurred in two phases using two different methods. The method at each phase was preceded by a pilot study using students not included in the total number of participants in this study but also studying in the same program. Each pilot study assessed the method of data collection against the research objectives, and subsequently any adaptations took place before the methods were used.

Phase one: Interviews

In week nine of the semester after receiving seven digital audio files, 18 students, spread equally between each of the three classes were given seven open-ended qualitative questions (Appendix A). Questions asked for opinions and attitudes towards the audio files and the content in audio form. These students were selected on the basis of information-orientated sampling (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and their perceived higher English language ability and capability to answer the questions verbally in English and respond to follow-up questions. In weeks 10 and 11, after time to think about and prepare their ideas, focused/structured interviews (Gray, 2009) with these students took place at a mutually agreed time and place. Interviews followed the pre-provided question format and included follow-up inquiry when needed. Interviews were ethically approved, took approximately 15 to 20 minutes each, were digitally recorded and transcribed. Participants were provided with interview transcriptions to approve, to reduce problems of bias or inaccurate articulation. According to Neuman (2014), "member checks" are an important part of a study because they ensure that the researcher has captured the participants' actual perspectives (p. 84). A thematic analysis using the web-based qualitative analysis tool Dedoose followed to categorize and label the interview responses into the groups that will be illustrated in the results. It is noted that the participants' responses to the researchers' questions may contain bias towards what participants think the researchers want to hear.

Results of the interviews

Besides revealing the students' attitudes and opinions towards receiving audio content and instruction, initial interviews also uncovered views towards the email delivery method. These perceptions were followed up in later interviews with three questions added to the initial seven (Appendix A). Although the email method of delivery is not covered in the literature review it does reflect an important aspect of the use of audio content and instruction in this context, and so the results will also be illustrated.

Phase two: Survey

Following the interviews, in week 13, an anonymous, closed response, online survey in English was sent by email to all students ($n = 69$). The survey mirrored the questions asked in the interviews. The closed response options contained answer categories discovered in the interviews and the literature and asked students to choose a response, or add their own. Three questions also addressed the topic of the email delivery method that was uncovered in the interviews. This survey method was used to corroborate, elaborate, complement or contradict the responses from the phase one interviews (Morgan, 1998, as cited in Brannan, 2005), or to offer new interpretations of the socially constructed accounts and meanings these students have developed towards the provision of digital audio educational and instructional content by email attachment delivery.

Results

The data from the interviews and the surveys in relation to the initial research question will first be illustrated side-by-side against the themes present in this research. Following this, the data recovered, concerning the email delivery method and the instructor's messages included in the email will also be illustrated. The data will be presented in the form of number of interviewees ($n = 18$) and percentage (%) of students who took part in the survey. It is noted as a limitation of this study that deeper, more significant use of statistical analysis is not used to analyze the survey data. However, the presentation of the results in this manner allows them to be compared directly side-by-side with the data retrieved in the interviews.

Instructor's digital audio recording

The speed and difficulty of the English language recorded in the audio was not a problem for 16 of the interviewees. Four said that they would prefer the speed to be faster and a large majority of the 69 survey respondents agreed with this. Only 10% of the total said that the speed was too fast, and 11% of the total that it was too difficult. This implies that 89% of students had no difficulty in understanding the audio content and the speed and language does not need to be graded to lower English language ability levels.

The biggest advantage that the audio provided students was the exposure and listening practice opportunity that it offered outside the classroom. Seventeen interviewees provided comments such as "*I think I can get a better ability of listening so it is really good for me,*" "*I think it's a good idea. This way we can hear native speaker speak and it will be good practice,*" and "*I can listen and improve my English so it is like an English class.*" Seventy-six percent of survey respondents also agreed that it offered greater opportunity to improve their listening ability.

Audio as a method of review

Asked about the review of lessons contained in the audio recording, six interviewees identified them as valuable. They identified the audio as being able to confirm or clarify the contents of the lessons for students present or absent, and gave comments similar to "*I can review the last class. Some student and sometimes me can't perfectly understand what you said in class, so review by audio file is useful.*" Elaborating on this, 68% of survey respondents identified that the reviews were a good summary of the last lesson and helped them remember

what had been done. This review also helped 39% of respondents connect the previous and following lessons. Two interviewees and 8% of respondents said that the review was unnecessary. Interviewees reasoned this by saying they had been present and so knew the content, "*But about the review, I cannot agree, because I already know what we have done so it is a waste of time to hear last class review.*" If these responses can be attributed to the interviewees' perceived higher English language abilities then it may be that students with the higher proficiency need the audio review less than others. This would correlate with the literature identifying that second language students benefit from listening to audio reviews by catching information they missed in class through lack of full understanding.

Audio as a method of instructional delivery and task preview

As a preview and instructional tool, the audio helped 16 interviewees and 61% of survey respondents make a connection between the previous and the following lesson, and helped them to understand what they were to do. Two comments clarified this view "*It is helpful to listen to what we will do because then I can prepare my ideas,*" "*If I know what we are going to do I can have more time to think.*" Two interviewees identified instructions as being too fast and 24% of survey respondents said that they would prefer not to receive task instructions by audio. This identifies that 76% of students did not show direct opposition to an audio preview and instructional delivery. Disagreement was shown due to the difficulty students had fully understanding the instructions easily, and was illustrated by the following comments: "*If I can't understand the contents I don't know what to do or how to prepare for class*" and "*If I can't hear all the information I can't do the homework completely.*" In these cases, the students asked their classmates to clarify the contents of the audio to enable them to prepare. These learners did not identify return email as a method to ask the instructor questions or clarify instructions.

Eight interviewees and 47% of respondents indicated that although the audio was good listening practice they would also like some textual support to the audio. Two interviewees explained this with the following comments: "*There are no negative points but if you put a brief text description of what is in the audio file then it would help,*" "*Before opening the file I never know what is the homework so it is something mysterious so it is tough to listen. So I am never willing to open the audio file and so it is an obstacle and decline my motivation to do homework. If I have some audio and written file it will help because then the audio file is not so mysterious.*" The notion that students feel that textual support/scaffolding for the audio instructions would be beneficial challenges the use of a purely audio instructional delivery in this EFL context.

How the audio files assisted surveyed students in other ways related to language learning received only slight recognition. The highest rated response at 34% was that it assisted in learning English pronunciation. Learning useful vocabulary and expressions (11%), and practicing pronunciation and shadowing followed, all under 10%.

The e-mail delivery system and instructor's email message

Despite these themes not featuring in the literature review, they were identified in initial interviews and were considered to be of important enough relevance to be included in the results of the investigation.

Ten interviewees and 69% of survey respondents automatically received email alerts on their mobile devices when they received the instructor's email and then knew to check

their PC to listen to the audio files. The remaining students checked their email on their PC two or three times a week. However, three interviewees highlighted that they had only started doing this because they were receiving instructor's emails signifying a change to previous habits.

Prevalent attitudes across all interviewees were that checking PC-based email was troublesome and time-consuming, supporting the convenience of students' mobile devices for textual communication. Comments in interviews identifying this included: "*I usually don't use a computer. I always use my mobile phone so it is troublesome turning on, logging in and using email*" and "*I need to start up the PC and check my email and I feel it is troublesome*". One student summed up six other students' opinions by saying "*We don't have this service in other classes so we are not used to using computers and checking email for study, so it is troublesome.*" Sixty one percent of survey respondents supported this view, despite the students having to use a PC for homework preparation.

All students confirmed that they could not open and listen to the audio files on their mobile devices. The comments that PCs are troublesome to use could suggest mobile devices would be the preferred method for listening to the audio attachments if this was technically possible. However, students contradict this inference when asked how they would prefer to receive and listen to the audio files. Only one interviewee and 19% of survey respondents identified the mobile phone as their preference. The remaining students identified their home PCs as the best way to receive and listen to the audio files, even though it was troublesome to use. Students identified reasons for this as being that when they wanted to do their homework they were more likely to be in their homes where they could access the audio files on their computers and work in a quiet environment. It could also be suggested that this enabled students to separate their mobile device based social communications from their studies. In support of the use of PC email as a delivery system of audio files if they were to be continued, 13 interviewees and 85% of survey respondents identified PC email as the most convenient method to receive the audio. Another four interviewees and 11% of survey respondents identified a third party Internet website, such as a weblog or Wiki as the best way to receive audio, but could not specify a reason why. None of the interviewees and only one survey respondent identified the RSS podcast delivery system as a preference. When asked specifically about a podcast delivery system, only two interviewees said they regularly listened to podcasts, three interviewees could not listen to podcasts on their mobile device, and seven interviewees said that they didn't know how to retrieve podcasts from the Internet. The remaining numbers did not know what a podcast was.

Instructor's email textual message

Despite the short length of the textual messages sent in the emails to students, they were seen as beneficial to improving reading skills according to ten interviewees and 77% of survey respondents, and for increasing motivation for learning through greater contact with English (eight interviewees and 42% of survey respondents). Small numbers of survey respondents identified the messages as enabling them to learn how to write an English email (27%) and as giving the opportunity to practice writing to the instructor (26%). None of the interviewees suggested these ideas. While the literature review identified audio as able to strengthen personal connections between instructors and students, the textual messages in this study produced a similar feeling in only two interviewees and 23% of respondents. This is identified through the comment "*I feel happier when you sent us email*

and we can see you care about us more than just giving us things in class, then it is easy to ask you questions."

Do these students want the provision of audio educational and instructional audio content to continue?

This investigation has uncovered students' responses and attitudes toward the provision of audio content. Despite the varied views towards the different functions of the content, 15 of the 18 interviewees and 76% of survey respondents identified they would like to continue to receive audio files in the next semester. Some of the qualitative comments given to support this were, "*Usually I have no opportunity to listen to native English so I want to use this to practice listening*" as well as "*It's good study and I can listen to the audio file again and again if I forgot what the teacher said in class.*" The following comment illustrates a characteristic reaction by many of the students in these classes towards receiving the audio and using a PC to listen to it: "*It's good study, but to be honest, a pain in the neck.*"

Should the provision of audio educational and instructional content to these students continue? The majority of students agreed that it should. If it does, in the reflective action research process cycle (Burns, 2009; Gray, 2009; Nunan & Bailey, 2009) issues that have arisen in the course of this investigation should be addressed and considered. How methods will be changed has at this stage not been decided, but the available options and thoughts behind these options will now be illustrated.

Discussion and implications

The students in this study agreed, as Kaplan-Leiserson (2005), Walls, *et al.* (2010) and Lazzari, (2009) noted, that the use of audio files were able to augment face-to-face teaching, enrich learning experiences and have a positive impact. From comments provided, it is apparent that students rely on their mobile devices for email communication much more than their PCs, and that asking them to use their PCs caused some inconvenience. Despite this, distributing audio files through email attachment was identified as the most popular available method. It enabled the instructor to record and distribute the content easily with readily available tools. Likewise, all the students were also able to download and listen to audio files from their PCs equally without any additional cost incurred and without having to sign up to a third party website. Due to these factors it may not be necessary to find another delivery method until further investigation identifies that one is needed. Online services such as Voicethread can similarly provide audio files with additional support of pictures, text and other non-audio files. Requiring students to become members to log in and listen, this particular service also allows students to respond with their own voice threads and non-audio files, forming an on-going discussion or conversation. In this case, at this time, students have identified they would prefer not to use a third-party website, and the additional features of Voicethread are not necessary in the required tasks. However, these additional elements may create a valuable aspect to some activities and also cater to students with visual or verbal learning skills (see Holden & Westfall, 2010).

For the majority of students, the files provided an opportunity for additional exposure to the target language, recreating a lesson-like experience that they could enjoy in the comfort of their homes. The provision of an element of review in the audio enabled them to re-live activities from the previous lesson and so clarify and reinforce learning, as was highlighted

in the literature, although this was suggested as unnecessary by several students who had understood lesson content. Providing a timeline of the audio recording would enable these individuals to skip over the review feature and go straight to the instructional content, if they felt it was unnecessary.

As proposed in the literature, the audio files containing pre-class concepts and examples of activities assisted learners in scaffolding and preparation for class activities. This was clearly seen by students as a benefit to their learning experience.

As a method of providing instructions however, nearly half of all students expressed a desire for some textual support to assist in their clarification. How can this textual support be provided without losing the benefits of the audio? It is a distinct possibility that if detailed written instructions are provided in emails students will disregard the audio files and not listen to them. There are several possible solutions to this. First, reduce the speed of the instructor's speech in the audio, which would reduce the authenticity of natural speech. Second, to provide two alternatively worded explanations of the same instructions, but this would increase the length of the audio and could negatively affect students' attention and motivation. Or third, to provide a written glossary of key terms used in the audio within the email message. This use of a glossary of key terms may also positively affect students' recognition of the emails and audio as a language or vocabulary learning device as well as a review and instructional tool. The utilization of any of these methods would also mean that students would still be required to listen to the audio.

Revealed through the research findings it would also be beneficial to assist students in recognizing that emails are a method of communication that can be used with their instructor when they have a question, or are unsure about the contents of the audio. Although it is desirable for students to assist each other with their questions and comprehension, they should know that the option to ask their instructor is available and not be discouraged to use it. To stimulate a dialogue between instructor and student and open up this channel of communication, questions could be posed either in the textual message or in the audio that would require students to respond by email.

Conclusion

From this study, students have identified that the provision of audio files following and preceding an English language class can have beneficial results. It has also been shown that this audio content can be provided by simple and easy means other than a podcast or third party website. This makes sending audio files a method accessible to a larger number of instructors wishing to add to their students' learning experience.

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Appendix A

Interview questions about audio files

1. What are the benefits of receiving the audio files from your teacher?
2. What are the negative points of receiving the audio files from your teacher?
3. What do you think about using audio files to give students a review of the last class, and instructions for homework and preparation?
4. What do you think of the level and speed of the English used in the audio files that you receive?
5. What do you do if you can't understand the content of the audio files that you receive?
6. Would you prefer to receive the audio files by email, or for them to be put onto an Internet website or blog of class information to download?
7. Do you have any other information that you would like to give me about receiving emails or audio files?

Additional questions about email delivery system added as a result of information uncovered in initial interviews

1. What do you think about having to check your email every week to find out what your homework/preparation is?
2. What are the benefits of receiving emails from your teacher?
3. What are the negative points of receiving emails from your teacher?